

names. I read a lot of books on gems. And going to all these shows, you talk to other jewellers and you learn. I pick up things with time. Wherever I can find a jewellery book, I buy it to learn about the qualities of the stones. While I do admit that I copy designs as well, I design some of the pieces myself. I copy old *kundan* designs, if I see very good ones, because I'm not very good with those. I'm better with designing contemporary jewellery.

The *karigars* are finally beginning to understand the intricacies of design and I keep telling them, 'Don't just come to work with

My shop Taneez was initially doing silver-plated decorative household items. But when we started silver jewellery with semi-precious gems of very good quality, there were many interested buyers. I used semi-precious stones because precious ones are quite expensive, which makes the jewellery a lot more costly.

I started out by holding exhibitions in Karachi and Lahore, which is how we introduced our pieces to the customers. The response was excellent. The sales at that time were one-tenth of what they are now. But now, we have four shops, two in Lahore, two in Karachi, and one opening in Islamabad. I think we sell the most jewellery in the country because we have the largest stores. I don't know of anyone who really sells on that scale. But most of the others don't use real stones and I'm afraid some of them do try to trick the customers. People generally come to us because we're reliable and we guarantee the silver as well as the stones.

Sets are expensive, so we sell fewer of those. We sell more of the individual items, like earrings, bracelets, rings and cufflinks. This also helps people who don't want to spend too much money. The prices of the jewellery at the store start at Rs.600 and goes up to Rs.25,000. We change designs every month – we have at least 10 new ones each month.

I haven't studied gemology. But I'm very proud to say that I can recognise a stone better than some of the gemologists. In fact, my jewellers are often surprised that I know all the



your hands, come with your brains as well.' I keep grumbling about the finish because quality is a great problem in Pakistan. So I have to constantly show them samples and compare those to the mess they've made. Now they bring designs to me and ask me to try this or that, or they show me what they can do.

Defining the design philosophy for Taneez and compartmentalising it is very difficult. Lahore, for example, was very much into contemporary design, but now they've all gone back to *polkis* and *kundans*, particularly during the wedding season. And Karachi, which was also quite partial towards more contemporary jewellery, is also asking for ethnic jewellery in silver, so we're trying to do a mix of the ethnic and the modern. But I would like to do totally modern and contemporary jewellery because the ethnic kind is available all over. At the moment, however, the market demands it, so we do it. So, there is no philosophy at the moment.

Zeenat Saeed Ahmed