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*Soulless Matter,
Seats of Energy*

Metals, Gems and Minerals in
South Asian Traditions

Edited by
Fabrizio M. Ferrari and Thomas W.P. Dähnhardt

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Section Two
Science and Health

Chapter 4

Mineral Healing: Gemstone Remedies in Astrological and Medical Traditions

ANTHONY CERULLI AND CATERINA GUENZI¹

From pre-modern times to the present day, in written treatises and oral traditions, gemstones have played varied and significant roles in treating physical, emotional and social ailments in South Asia. Known in Sanskrit and a number of north Indian vernaculars as *ratna* and *maṇi*, precious stones (which we refer to in what follows synonymously as gems and gemstones) have a long history as powerful remedies. In the Sanskrit literature of the classical knowledge systems of Jyotiṣa ('astral science') and Āyurveda ('knowledge for longevity'), as well as the allied field of Rasāśāstra ('alchemy'), for example, *ratna* and *maṇi* are described as valid therapies to prevent and remedy an array of personal miseries, difficulties and diseases. In this chapter, we reflect on some of the chief characteristics of gemstones as healing remedies in India, drawing on Sanskrit literature from the astral sciences, classical Āyurveda, and Ratnaśāstra ('the science of gemstones'). We also occasionally complement the literature with contemporary observations of gemstone healing among astrologers and their patients in the north Indian city of Banaras.²

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² The fieldwork in Banaras that is referenced in this chapter was conducted by C. Guenzi at different times between 1999 and 2008.

Among our primary considerations are the following points: applications of gemstones in the healing process; ritual preparations of gemstones for healing usages; associations of certain gemstones with the planets; potential good and bad consequences of using gemstones to heal or prevent misfortune and illness; the significance of visibility when using gemstone remedies to heal; and the relationship of a gemstone's preciousness – including costliness – to its therapeutic capacities. These qualities, we suggest, differentiate the use of precious stones from other healing remedies, such as devotional practices and tantric amulets containing sacred formulas or diagrams.

HEALING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN: WEARING, INGESTING AND PREPARING GEMS

Whereas astrologers base the prescription of gems on a person's birth chart and calculation of the planetary conjunctions (*yoga*) and periods (*daśā*) impacting a person's life, Āyurvedic physicians typically direct a patient to obtain gemstones, or the powders or oxides derived from gems, according to an assessment of a patient's humoral makeup. Āyurveda holds that the properties of certain gems have the capacity to affect positively the body's three humors (*tridoṣa*): wind, bile and phlegm (*vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha* or *śleṣman*). The activity, balance and location of the humors in the body determine a person's wellbeing or ill health.

A curative prescription of gemstones may take a number of forms. In therapeutic use in astrological and medical contexts, gemstones, gems pulverized into powders, and liquids that have been infused with gem essence are often prescribed either to be worn or ingested. The 'wearing of gemstones' (*ratnadhāraṇa*) is a basic practice of 'gemstone therapy' (*ratnacikitsā*). Such a prescription might require a patient to wear a precious stone for a period of time as short as a few days or as long as a few years. In some cases, a patient might be asked to don a gem somewhere on his or her body permanently. As we discuss below, a variety of benefits await the person who wears precious stones. The following aphorism in the *Carakasamhitā* (c. 100 BCE–100 CE), one of the principal texts of Āyurveda's classical Sanskrit literature, sums up the general value of gemstones for healing:

Wearing gems and ornaments bestows prosperity, auspiciousness, long life, radiance, and impedes deterioration. Delightful and desirable, it [i.e., wearing gems] brings vitality.³

The wearing of gems is also recommended in more specific and pressing circumstances. So, for example, the *Carakasamhitā* suggests that wearing diamonds, emeralds, rubies, lapis lazuli, pearls, a collection of other semi-precious minerals and an herbal talisman protect one from snake poisons.⁴

Apart from the wearing of gems, in the medical context an Āyurvedic doctor might also require a patient to consume gemstone powder (*cūrṇa* or *piṣṭa*) or ashes (*bhasma*) in a mixture of milk and honey. A patient might be asked to imbibe water or alcohol in which soaking precious stones have ionized the liquids over a period of time (usually at least twelve hours). The rationale for ingesting gemstone powder or ashes or drinking liquids ionized by precious stones is based on a belief that gems are made up of the very same minerals that comprise the human body. Whenever gems are to be consumed internally as remedies, the essence of a gemstone must be extracted for medicinal use. Particular preparations to extract the healing capacities of gemstones include *svedana-yantra*, an 'apparatus for steam fomentation' (Dash 1986: 215) and *kṣāra-drāva*, 'a liquid preparation with alkalis and salts' (Ray 1991: 141).

Gemstones used prophylactically against planetary influence are usually set in golden or silver rings to be worn on the hands. An early-medieval work on alchemy (*rasaśāstra*), medicine and gemology, the *Rasaratnasamuccaya*, explains that when wearing gems in rings (*mudrādhṛtam*), if the gems are positioned according to their corresponding planets, alliances with those planets form.⁵

In contemporary practice observed in Banaras, to ensure a patient obtains the correct stone(s) for his or her ailment, a practitioner will write a prescription indicating the kind of gemstone(s) needed and the type of metal in which it (they) should be set; the number of carats desired for optimal effect; propitious times (*muhūrta*) to buy and to wear the stone(s); locations on the body the stone(s) should be worn; and any other relevant details. Gems set in rings are said to absorb and filter planetary rays

3 CaS, *Sūtrasthāna*, v.97: *dhanyaṃ maṅgalyamāyusyaṃ śrīmadvyayasanasūdanam/ harṣaṇaṃ kāmīyamojasyaṃ ratnabharaṇadhāraṇam*. See also CaS, *Sūtrasthāna*, v.110, 'wearing gems' (*ratnadhāraṇe*) and vi.31, 'decorated with pearls and gemstones' (*muktāmaṇivibhūṣitaḥ*).

4 CaS, *Cikitsāsthāna* xxiii.252–53.

5 RS iv.7.

and transmit them to the body in a balanced dose. Jewelers selling gemstones are therefore asked to cut the stones in a conic shape to facilitate the absorption of planetary rays: according to local explanations, while the upper surface serves as a plateau for capturing the rays, the point of the cone that touches the skin transmits the appropriate amount of planetary rays. Although rings are generally the favorite vessel for brandishing the stones because of their consistent exposure to sunlight, gemstones used for healing may in some cases be worn on necklaces, bands placed around the arm, or belts wrapped around the waist. Instances in which precious stones might not be worn openly on the body often involve children, who may hurt themselves if the stones are sharp and easily handled or swallowed, and women and teenagers who might not be willing to display their 'planetary problems'.⁶ Contrariwise, it is frequently the case that men, and especially 'householders' (*grhasthas*) from middle and upper classes – such as businessmen, civil servants, politicians, academics, actors, doctors, lawyers and so on – proudly display their expensive gemstones that, on their fingers, are seen as symbols of their professional and familial responsibilities.

OF GEMS AND PLANETS: NAVARATNA AND NAVAGRAHA

In the astral and medical sciences, precious stones – including, in some cases, semi-precious stones and minerals – that are used as remedies and their affiliated planets and celestial bodies generally align according to table 4.1.

In astral science (*jyotiḥśāstra*), *ratnaparīkṣā*, the formal 'examination of precious stones,' appears as a subject beginning around the sixth century CE when Varāhamihira composed the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. An authoritative treatise on divination, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* has four chapters (LXXIX–LXXXII) devoted to the inspection of precious stones, in particular, diamonds, pearls, rubies and emeralds. Varāhamihira explains that the physical characteristics of precious stones reveal whether they are auspicious or inauspicious (*śubha* or *aśubha*) and whether they portend desired or undesired (*iṣṭa* or *aniṣṭa*) events, such as wealth or loss, pleasure or pain, health or disease, fertility or sterility, and the like. The destiny of the ever-important pillar of classical

⁶ According to some astrologers in Banaras, when a gemstone is worn under clothing its power should be compensated by increasing the stone's number of carats. Thus, for a nine-carat stone worn as a ring, an astrologer should prescribe a twelve-carat stone to be worn around the waist.

Table 4.1. Planets (*grahas*) and associated gems.

Planet	Gemstone
1. Sun (Sūrya)	ruby (<i>padmarāga</i> , <i>māṇikyā</i>)
2. Moon (Candra)	pearl (<i>mauktika</i> , <i>muktā</i>)
3. Venus (Śukra)	diamond (<i>vajra</i> , <i>hīraka</i>)
4. Mars (Maṅgala)	coral (<i>pravāla</i>)
5. Mercury (Budha)	emerald (<i>marakata</i> , <i>gārutmata</i> , <i>tārṅśya</i>)
6. Jupiter (Bṛhaspati)	topaz (<i>pītāśmā</i> , <i>puṣparāga</i> , <i>puṣyarāga</i>)
7. Saturn (Śani)	blue sapphire (<i>nīla</i> , <i>indranīla</i>)
8. Rāhu	zircon (<i>gomeda</i>)
9. Ketu	cat's eye, beryl or lapis lazuli (<i>vaiḍūrya</i>) ⁷

Indian society, the king, Varāhamihira says, is 'dependent on gems' (*ratnāśrita*).⁸ Even more, Wojtilla has observed that the term *ratna* itself is 'an attribute of *cakravartin*,' the universal ruler, who in ancient India was often described as *ratnin* (1973: 215), a person 'possessing precious things.' This descriptive plays with the idea that the king is at once wealthy and powerful because of the treasures he possesses as well as healthy and successful because of the powers and influence his precious trove affords him.

During Varāhamihira's time, however, the connection between gemstones and planets was not yet established. In the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, different types of stones – catalogued according to size, shape and color – are linked to Vedic deities such as Indra, Yama, Viṣṇu, Varuṇa, Agni and Vāyu.⁹ But planetary deities are not mentioned. The absence of such a connection is also seen in Varāhamihira's *Bṛhajjātaka*, where planets (*graha*) are linked to many sets of cosmological elements, including colors, directions, qualities, body parts, seasons and metals. But no mention is made of gemstones.¹⁰ What's more, Varāhamihira mentions twenty-two gemstones (three of which are sub-varieties), and he does not seem to be aware of the concept of 'nine gems' (*navaratna*) that becomes important later. We can therefore say that prior to the sixth century an astrologer was supposed to be well-versed in gemology, since precious stones were seen as important wonders

⁷ About the ambiguity concerning the gems designated as *vaiḍūrya* and, more generally, about the difficulties in identifying which stone corresponds to a gemological term, see Finot (in AM: pp. XLV–XLVII); Sarma (in RaPa: pp. 67–68); Winder (1990); and Biswas (1994).

⁸ BS LXXIX.1.

⁹ BS LXXIX.8–10.

¹⁰ See, for example, BJ II.

endowed with natural powers. Yet the use of gems as prophylactics against planetary influences according to a person's horoscope had not yet been established before that time.¹¹ Absent in the *Sārāvalī* of Kalyāṇavarman (800 CE) as well, the nine planetary gems are only mentioned in later horoscopic treatises, such as the *Jātakapārijāta* of Vaidyanātha – a south Indian text that is largely based on the *Bṛhajjātaka* and the *Sārāvalī* (and composed probably at some point between the twelfth and the mid-fifteenth centuries),¹² the *Phaladīpika* of Mantreśvara, and the *Muhūrtacintāmaṇī* (1600 CE) – a treatise on 'auspicious moments' (*muhūrta*).¹³

This raises some important questions. How, where and when did the connection between 'nine gems' – *navaratna* – and 'nine planets' – *navagraha* – develop? To answer this series of imbricated questions, we propose the following three aspects require attention: First, the origin of the concept *navaratna* and its uses must be established. When did nine become a standard number for gemstones, a question pointed out by Sircar (1972), and for what purposes?¹⁴ Next, the meaning of *navaratna* must be elaborated. Did this concept designate a fixed set of gemstones, or could these specific stones vary from one context to the next? Finally, what is the relationship between the idea of *navaratna* and astrological practices? Did this idea originate in astrological contexts in order to 'fit' the number of planetary deities? Or, are the astrological applications of *navaratna* a later development? These questions lead to a vast area for philological research into the astrological and gemological literature, indeed crossing other fields besides, including ritual studies, medical history and religious studies.¹⁵ As we are commissioned in this chapter merely to sketch out the basic uses and understandings of gemological healing, these bigger questions

11 In the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, the auspiciousness of gemstones is nevertheless 'context-sensitive': according to their colors, the varieties of gemstones are said to be more or less auspicious for different social classes (*varṇa*). See, for example, the passage about diamonds at BS LXXIX.11.

12 See Pingree (1981: 89–90).

13 In horoscopic literature, the nine gemstones are enumerated in the second chapter, dealing with the characteristics and qualities of the planets, *grahas-varūpaṅga* (JP II.21; PhDi II.29; MC IV.9–11).

14 See Sircar (1972).

15 In this regard, we would like to thank Christèle Barois and Dominic Goodall for their generous suggestions – through correspondence and informal exchanges – pointing out different sources (manuscripts, inscriptions, objects) and ritual domains (planets' worship, placing of consecration deposit in temples, installation of images or *liṅgas*, preparation of jewel-water, etc.) from where the history of the *navaratnas* could be unveiled.

are well beyond the scope of our work. That said, we shall try to identify just a smattering of the landmarks in this massive and underexplored sea of research.

In gemological literature as well, the idea of *navaratna* appears somewhat late. Lacking in ancient lapidaries, such as Buddhahatta's *Ratnaparīkṣā*, the concept of *navaratna* is attested in the *Agastimata*, a later south Indian lapidary whose period of composition is still uncertain.¹⁶ The *Agastimata* seems to be the oldest lapidary known to us that presents a system of correspondences between nine precious stones – ruby, pearl, coral, emerald, topaz, diamond, sapphire, zircon and cat's eye – and a group of the nine planetary deities in a fashion that became standardized later on and that is followed even today in most regions of India (see table 4.1). It should be noted, however, that the connection between the gemstones and the nine planetary deities in the *Agastimata* is mentioned only in the last two verses of the treatise.¹⁷ Furthermore, these verses refer to gemstones that are not described in the treatise and subvert the conventional order of gemstones used in most lapidaries (including the *Agastimata*), which is: diamond, pearl, ruby, sapphire, emerald and crystal. The association between planets and gems established in the last two verses of the *Agastimata* may therefore be an addition or an innovation that the author(s), or later redactors, interpolated into the standard content of ancient gemological literature.

Ṭhakkura Pherū, a Svetāmbara Jain scholar serving at the sultan's court in Delhi at the beginning of the fourteenth century, states in his *Rayanaparikkhā* that gemstones have an apotropaic power and that they protect those who wear them against planetary influence.¹⁸ This statement is not surprising, since it comes from an author familiar with all branches of the astral sciences. Planetary considerations are well integrated into the *Rayanaparikkhā*, for example, appearing early in the introduction and linked to the origin myth of gemstones found in most lapidaries.¹⁹ According to the *Rayanaparikkhā* version of the myth, twelve gemstones were formed from Bali's body and nine were seized by the planets (*grahas*, lit. 'seizers'). Each gem was picked up by the planet that matched it in color. Besides this mythical etiology, planetary deities are also evoked

16 The *Agastimata*'s terminus post quem is the sixth century (Finot in AM: p.xi) and its terminus ante quem is the beginning of the fourteenth century, when Ṭhakkura Pherū composed his *Rayanaparikkhā*, a Prakrit text on gemology that contains passages closely following *Agastimata* (Sarma in RaPa: p.15).

17 AM vi. 343–44.

18 RaPa 0.3.16.

19 RaPa 0.2.9–11.

in other passages of the *Rayanaparikkhā* that deal with the prophylactic qualities of sapphire and topaz.

The myth of the origin of gemstones in the *Garuḍapurāṇa* is perhaps the most well-known version of the story, where numerous precious stones (*ratnāni*) and semi-precious stones (*uparatnāni*) spring from the body of the mighty demon Bala. The story states that, although he had previously conquered Indra and driven the gods out of heaven, Bala had magnanimously agreed to support any sacrifices (*yajñas*) the gods would perform in the future. In an effort to regain their seats of privilege in heaven, the gods planned an elaborate sacrifice and, remembering Bala's earlier agreement to assist a future sacrifice, they approached Bala and jestingly asked him to offer his body as the sacrificial oblation. Bound by his earlier promise, Bala acquiesced. The gods in fact meant business, and they seized the opportunity to kill Bala. Dismembering him for the sacrifice, each piece of Bala's body became a 'seed of a gemstone' (*ratnabīja*), and as the Yakṣas, Siddhas, and others raced to collect the precious gem-seeds, a cohort of gods swooped in on their *vimānas* to snatch them up. A mid-air scuffle ensued, and some of the gem-seeds fell to the ground.²⁰ They fell into oceans and rivers, onto the Himalayan mountains, and throughout India's dense wildernesses. Wherever Bala's body parts landed, in those locations mines of precious stones formed. Gems that grew in the earth in these locations, the *Garuḍapurāṇa* explains, were endowed with healing powers of all sorts, both prophylactic and remedial, and they contained powers to cure physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses. From Bala's body diamonds, pearls, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, cat's eyes, topazes and other precious and semi-precious stones arose. His bones materialized as diamonds. From his teeth came pearls, and from his blood rubies appeared. His bile turned into emeralds. His eyes generated sapphires and his skin made topaz. The great cries Bala bellowed just before he died turned into cat's eyes, while his semen produced zircon, and his intestines became coral. The fat from his sacrificed body dripped to earth, creating quartz, and the remnants of his form turned into agate.²¹

20 GP LXVIII.4-6: *tasya sattvavaśuddhasya viśuddhena ca karmaṇā / kāyasyāvayavāḥ sarve ratnabījatvamāyayuh // 4 // devānāmatha yakṣāṇāṃ siddhānāṃ pavanāśīnām / ratnabījamayaṃ grāhaṃ mumahānabhavattadā // 5 // teṣāṃ tu patatāṃ vegādvimānena vihāyasā / yadyatyapāta ratnānāṃ bījaṃ kvacana kiñcana // 6 //*

21 The details of the 'Bala sacrifice' that created precious and semi-precious stones, including details about the inspection of *ratnāni* to ascertain their power and value to health and longevity, are spread across chapters 68-80 of GP.

The *navaratna* and their association with the *navagraha* are attested in the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* as well. Attributed to someone named Vāgbhaṭa, the text is a medieval alchemical and iatro-chemical compendium. No consensus has been reached regarding the precise date of the work. Murthy (1991: 156) places it as early as the ninth century, for example, whereas Biswas (1987: 29) considers the work a product of the thirteenth century. In the introduction to his edition of the text, Satpute (RS xi) locates it even later in time, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Meulenbeld has argued that the text was produced after the fifteenth century and most likely in the sixteenth century. His position is the most persuasive in the extant secondary literature, grounded as it is on extensive references in the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* in coeval and earlier works. Meulenbeld suggests that scholars who defend an earlier date for the text tend to sacrifice philological evidence, such as intertextual references that suggest an obvious awareness of other texts and authors which points 'to a period posterior to the first half of the fifteenth century,' in an effort to associate the work's author, Vāgbhaṭa, son of Siṃhagupta, with the author(s) of the same name and pedigree who ostensibly wrote one (or both) of the Āyurvedic classics, the *Aṣṭāṅgaḥṛdayasaṃhitā* and *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* (Meulenbeld 2000, IIA: 670). For his part, Satpute firmly states that the Vāgbhaṭa of the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* is not the same person as the author(s) of the medical works (RS xiv).

Not an original work per se, the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* is a compilation of earlier Rasaśāstric treatises from whose authors Vāgbhaṭa claims to have borrowed freely.²² While the text is an important benchmark in Indian alchemical literature for its sophisticated cataloging and standardizing of earlier and often scattered works on *rasaśāstra*, for our purposes its fourth chapter, titled *ratnāni*, is especially illuminating. Of the *navaratna*, the text declares diamond, ruby, sapphire, emerald and topaz to be the five superior healing gems known as the *pañcamahāratna*.²³ The text also presents the same correspondences between the nine gemstones and nine planets found elsewhere in Sanskrit literature.²⁴ Particularly significant is the *Rasaratnasamuccaya*'s articulation of the positive and negative effects and

22 RS 1.2-10. Meulenbeld provides an exhaustive list of the works and authors to which the author of the RS refers (2000, IIA: 667-68).

23 RS IV.5: *padmarāgendraṇilākhyau tathā marakatottamaḥ / puṣparāga savajrākhyau pañcaratnavarāḥ smṛtāḥ*.

24 RS 1.6: *māṇikyamuktāphalavidrumāṇi tārksyaṇca puṣpaṃ bhiduraṇca nīlam / gome-dakañcātha vidūraṇca krameṇa ratnāni navagrahāṇām*.

uses of both precious and semi-precious gems in the treatment of illness and misfortune, which we discuss in the next section.

Introduced later in astrological, gemological and alchemical literature, the idea of *navaratna* may have originated in ritual contexts. Take, for example, the domestic rituals described in texts like the *Mayamata* (circa ninth–twelfth centuries) and *Kāśyapaśilpa* (circa eleventh–twelfth centuries), where nine gemstones are placed in the so-called consecration deposit (*garbhanyāsa*) to ensure the prosperity of people residing in a building.²⁵ The list of gems given in the *Mayamata* is almost identical to the list of gems assigned for prophylactic use against planetary influence, but there is no discussion of planetary deities.²⁶ As described in both the *Mayamata* and the *Kāśyapaśilpa*, a ruby should be placed in the centermost compartment of the consecration deposit, with eight other compartments that correspond to the eight cardinal directions surrounding it. As the precious stone of the Sun, the ruby is also usually placed in the center of *navaratna* rings prescribed against planetary influence.²⁷ Although it is difficult to imagine that the perfect matching between the set of nine gemstones used for the consecration deposit and the nine planetary gemstones is a matter of coincidence, further research needs to be done to understand how knowledge was transmitted from one field of expertise to the other.

BENEFICIAL AND DANGEROUS EFFECTS

When using gemstones as a remedy against planetary influences, astrologers and their clients refer to a complex set of principles and rules that aim to identify the properties of a stone and its effects (*phala*) on the person who will wear it. These principles may be based on both Sanskrit gemological literature, works of *Rasaśāstra* like the *Rasaratnasamuccaya*, and

25 On the *Mayamata* see Dagens (in M: pp. 142–43 and 200–01); on the *Kāśyapaśilpa* see Ślaczka (2007: 99–101).

26 The only difference is the mention of sapphire (*mahānila*) instead of zircon (*gomedā*). The list given in the *Kāśyapaśilpa* presents more important variations, since it includes items such as a crystal (*sphaṭika*), a conch (*śaṅkha*) and a sun-stone (*sūryakānta*) instead of coral, emerald and zircon (Ślaczka 2007: 263). Nevertheless, from the point of view of the directions corresponding to the gems, the *Kāśyapaśilpa* is closer to astrological traditions: the rule of placing ruby in the center, diamond in the East and pearl in the Southeast correspond to the instructions for the *navagraha* ring, as described in MC IV.9.

27 See e.g. MC IV.9.

local lore. They are also sometimes described in popular and devotional literature (in vernacular languages) regarding the propitiation of planetary deities.

In Banaras, astrologers prescribe gemstones as a remedy (*H. upāy*) either to increase (*baṛhānā*) positive planetary influence (*grahaprabhāv*) or to reduce (*ghaṭānā*) negative planetary effects.²⁸ A person may thus wear a stone to strengthen the planet that is in a favorable position in her horoscope, or she may use a gemstone as an antidote against a malefic planet (*krūr graha*, *pāp graha*). In both cases, however, precious stones are supposed to modify planetary influence, and astrologers as well as clients typically agree that because of their power, gemstones can be dangerous (*khataṛnāk*). That is why before purchasing a gemstone from a jeweler, clients ask astrologers to check its quality. Practitioners have to check not only whether or not the stone is authentic (*sahī*, *asī*), but they also must determine whether or not it presents any faults (*doṣ*). Clients are asked to watch carefully the ‘behavior’ of the stone they wear, since any change is regarded as an omen (*śakun*) that may indicate a change in the stone’s efficacy.

In the *Rasaratnasamuccaya*, before he launches into a detailed explanation of the beneficial and dangerous effects of both precious and semi-precious stones, their applications and their properties, Vāgbhaṭa states in no uncertain terms:

It’s said that wherever gemstones are used in the preparation of quicksilver (*rasa[karman]*), rejuvenation therapy (*rasāyana*), as gifts, for wearing, or for worshipping the gods, always use well preserved, well produced, and splendid gemstones.²⁹

The exercise undertaken to determine whether or not gemstones are defective and their potential negative effects is described in Sanskrit treatises dealing with *ratnaparīkṣā*, ‘examination of precious stones.’ In *ratnaparīkṣa* literature a distinction is made between the ‘quality’ (*guṇa*) and ‘fault’ (*doṣa*) of gemstones, as well as a distinction between ‘auspicious’ (*śubha*) and ‘inauspicious’ (*aśubha*) gemstones. While jewels endowed with good characteristics are said to bring health, good luck, wealth, glory and sons, gemstones bearing defective characteristics may lead to pain, sorrows, disasters, poison, poverty and death.

28 For a discussion about these two ways of dealing with planetary influence, see Jindal (1997: 11).

29 RS I.8: *rase rasāyane dāne dhāraṇe devatārcane / surakṣyāṇi sujātīni ratnānyuktāni siddhaye*.

According to Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, precious stones that are glossy (*snigdha*), illuminated with rays (*prabhānulepin*), transparent (*svaccha*), shining (*arciṣmat*), heavy (*guru*), well-shaped (*susaṃsthāna*), gleaming from inside (*antaḥprabhā*) and intensely colored (*atirāga*) are seen as endowed with good qualities.³⁰ Those that are turbid (*kaluṣa*), with a dull luster (*mandadyuti*), scratched (*lekhākīrṇa*), mixed with mineral substances (*sadhātu*), broken (*khaṇḍa*), badly perforated (*durviddha*), not beautiful (*na manoḥjāna*) or mixed with gravel (*saśarkara*) are seen as defective.³¹ Similarly, astrologers in Banaras say that stones lacking brilliance (*camak*), or containing a spot (*dāg*), a mark (*chīṃṭ*), a filament (*reśā*) or a 'net' (*jāl*) are defective and may bring undesired effects. Commenting on the ubiquity of defects in precious stones, the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* states that in all gemstones sharpness, asymmetry, spottiness, scratches and water bubbles are the five most common defects.³² Nevertheless, in some cases these faults may also be seen as a sign of the authenticity of the stone, since synthetic stones have no irregularities, and on occasion astrologers may ask a client to wear a stone even though it's defective.

Medicinally, in chapter four of *Rasaratnasamuccaya* a series of verses (or *ślokas*) outlines the particular effects of the *navaratna* when they are ingested in the form of ashes. Some of the text's account of the specific curative effects of these gems includes the following. Ingestion of the ash of diamond (*vajra*) gives the body strength by regulating the body's three humors. Diamond ash cures impotence and increases the volume of a man's semen. It is effective in strengthening a weak heart and removes lung diseases. When taken in conjunction with other medications, diamond is said to intensify the curative powers of those drugs.³³ The ashes of ruby (*māṇikyā*) are beneficial for digestion, increasing semen and sexual vigor (*vṛṣya*); it is especially effective against diseases caused by the wind (*vāta*) and phlegm (*kapha*) humors.³⁴ Ingestion of the ashes of emerald (*marakata*) is effective against fever, vomiting, indigestion and anemia.³⁵ The ashes of topaz (*puṣparāga*) target poisoning and diseases caused by the wind and phlegm humors; topaz ash alleviates desiccation of the body and removes

30 BS LXXXI.3.

31 BS LXXXI.3.

32 RS IV.33: *grāsastrāsaśca binduśca rekha ca jalagarbhatā / sarvaratneṣvamī pañca doṣāḥ sādharmaṇā matāḥ*.

33 RS IV.32.

34 RS IV.12.

35 RS IV.22.

impurities in the blood.³⁶ The ash of blue sapphire (*nīla*) works especially well for breathing (*śvāsa*) problems and increases sexual productivity; sapphire ash targets ailments caused by all three humors.³⁷ The ingestion of zircon (*gomeda*) ash rectifies diseases originating from the phlegm humor, anemia and skin diseases; zircon is also said to increase intelligence (*buddhiprabodhanam*).³⁸ The ash of cat's eye (*vaidūrya*) targets blood impurities and indigestion; it is an overall bodily cleansing substance that promotes longevity.³⁹ Ashes of pearl (*muktā*) are effective at improving digestion, skin complexion and strength; pearl ash has expansive healing capacities that reach illnesses caused by all three humors, heart diseases, urinary disorders, severe cough and brittle bones.⁴⁰ The ash from coral (*pravāla*) is used to treat severe desiccation, blood disorders, cough and eye diseases.⁴¹

During astrological counseling in Banaras, several criteria are taken into consideration to make sure that a particular stone and any accompanying stones chosen to support it suit the person who will wear them. An inauspicious gemstone is thought to produce effects opposite to the outcomes desired. If, for example, a pearl (the Moon's gemstone) is worn as protection against a cold and headache – disorders that are usually attributed to the influence of the Moon – an inauspicious or low quality pearl may increase the risk of getting such ailments (according to the *Rasaratnasamuccaya*, a low quality pearl displays a rough surface, darkened or reddish color, is riddled with holes and is not perfectly round).⁴² Some gemstones are considered to be more dangerous than others, and their powers need to be managed more carefully both by the professional prescribing it and the patient wearing it. This is the situation with coral (Mars), sapphire (Saturn), and diamond (Venus). Dangers associated with these stones are linked to the perceived malefic powers of Mars and Saturn, and the potentially precarious association of Venus's gem (diamond) with unbridled sexuality.

When gemstones are used in a healing context, they are generally observed for a few days before they are activated and worn. Although positive effects of precious stones are said to manifest very slowly, in some cases taking months to appear, negative effects are often said to

36 RS IV.25.

37 RS IV.53.

38 RS IV.56.

39 RS IV.59.

40 RS IV.14.

41 RS IV.19.

42 RS IV.16.

be immediately noticeable. Before committing themselves to wearing a stone for an extended period, people often test the stone's likelihood to produce positive or negative effects by placing it underneath their pillow for a night. After a full night's sleep, by evaluating their dreams from the night before they can determine whether or not the stone will be helpful or harmful in the future. In other cases, such as inauspicious coral and sapphires, which are thought to increase the risks of traveling (typically road accidents), people wear these stones only at home initially; in a relatively controlled domestic environment, the potential hazards of wearing coral and sapphire are augured by small domestic injuries and out of the ordinary family disputes. If such incidents are observed to occur during the testing period, the stones are discarded.

In most cases of gemstone therapies, astrologers also consider the kinds of thoughts a person has while wearing a stone for the first few days to be an important signal about the stone's potential efficacy or risk. In addition to their effects on physical wellbeing, as we saw in remarks from the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* about the efficacy of zircon, gemstones are used for their strong influence on the human mind (*buddhi*) and for bolstering psychic strength (*manobala*). After wearing an inauspicious gemstone, a person's thoughts might get misled or muddled. As one client of an astrologer in Banaras reported about the effects of a bad sapphire, 'a sapphire that does not suit you means that you will take a snake for a rope and a rope for a snake.' In the case of diamond, a person may have impure, sexual and uncontrollable thoughts that may lead to indecency (*H. caritr hīnatā*, lit. 'lack of character').

Bad effects of gemstones do not affect only the person who wears the stone; they can also harm the wearer's family and people closely associated with him or her. This principle is stated in the classical literature, and astrologers and patients in contemporary India also frequently note it. So, for instance, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* says that a diamond endowed with inauspicious signs (*aniṣṭalakṣaṇa*) brings the destruction of a person's kinsmen (*svajana*, BS LXXIX:18). Similarly, the *Navagraha Upāsanā*, a devotional pamphlet about the worship of the nine planetary deities, declares that:

a ruby without glitter (*camak*), [signals] a brother's suffering (*dukh*); a ruby with the color of milk, [signals] the death of cattle (*paśunāś*); a bicolored ruby, [signals] the suffering (*dukh*) of the wearer's father or the wearer him or herself; a ruby with a spot (*chīṃṭ*) or a filament (*jāl*), [augurs] disputes [...] (Shastri n.d.: 18).

In Banaras today people often attribute their kinsmen's problems to the negative effects of gemstones. A professor in the History Department at Kashi Vidyapith elaborated this belief by explaining that the day he started wearing a forty-carat gemstone, his wife lost a sari she had brought to the dry cleaners, and he experienced unusual disputes with his colleagues. These incidents were for him visible signs of a gemstone that was too powerful and thus inappropriate for therapeutic use. Similarly, it is common to see parents wearing gemstones in the hopes of securing success or health for their children, as well as wives wearing coral in order to protect their husbands from Mars's damaging influence.

To prevent people from wearing defective, 'wrong' (*H. galat*) or 'inappropriate' (*anucit*) gemstones, astrologers not only have to check the physical properties of the stone, but they also must ascertain the compatibility between the gemstone and the zodiacal signs (*rāśi*, lunar sign, or *lagna*, ascendant sign) of the person seeking help. This correlation is vital, since, according to a person's planetary affiliations, gemstones are not equally compatible with all horoscopic signs. Astrologers should also determine if a person is simultaneously wearing gemstones that correspond to planets that are inimical to one another: because Sun and Saturn are enemies, for instance, one should not wear ruby and sapphire at the same time.⁴³

A stone's 'dosage' or power (the English term is used in Hindi), which corresponds to the number of carats to be worn, is also an important characteristic that may cause unfavorable effects. While a gemstone that is too light may be ineffective, one that is too heavy may produce undesired effects.⁴⁴ To be auspicious, a gemstone should also be bought, manufactured and worn at the proper 'moment' (*muhūrta*). For some astrologers, an auspicious moment is defined according to the different sections of the twenty-seven lunar mansions (*nakṣatras*): in the case of a ruby, for instance, buying of the stone should happen during the first division of *maghā nakṣatra*, its manufacturing in the second, its wearing in the third.⁴⁵

43 *Navaratna* rings are an exception, since these rings are supposed to balance all planetary influences. Nevertheless, astrologers very rarely prescribe *navaratna* rings, which most people buy and use independently from astrological consultations.

44 According to a jeweler working in a very popular shop in the center of Banaras and having experience from other cities, astrologers in Banaras rarely prescribe planetary gemstones under seven carats, while in other cities, lighter gemstones are commonly prescribed.

45 For a complete list of the *nakṣatras* corresponding to the different gemstones, see Joshi (n.d.: 193–204) and Jha (2006).

To further ensure the achievement of the desired outcomes of a gemstone remedy, most astrologers indicate a favorable day (H. *abhīṣṭa dīn*) of the week when the gemstone should be worn for the first time (Monday for pearl, Tuesday for coral, and so on), and the appropriate finger on which it should be worn.

Before wearing a gemstone, a consecration ritual commonly performed for divine images in temples called *prāṇa pratiṣṭhā* should be performed. This ritual is meant to invoke the planetary deity associated with the stone. In Banaras, the *prāṇa pratiṣṭhā* may be performed by the astrologer who prescribes the stone or by the person who will wear it. While submerging the finger on which a gemstone is worn in milk mixed with water from the Ganges (Ganga) River – or in a *pañcāmṛta* mixture of ‘the five nectars’: Ganges water, milk, curd, honey and clarified butter – the person seeking aid from the stone should recite to him- or herself the *bīja mantra* (‘seed-mantra’) that corresponds to the planetary deity affiliated with the stone. While wearing topaz for its connection to Jupiter (Bṛhaspati), for example, one should pronounce *auṃ hrīṃ klīm hūṃ bṛhaspataye namaḥ*. The materials used in the ritual preparation of gemstones are thought to act like antennas or radar by ‘picking up’ or capturing the radiation and waves emitted from the stone. This metaphor is common in contemporary gemological literature: ‘If you wear it at the right moment and perform the ritual, then the gemstone will become active (*sakriya*) and will spread cosmic radiations (*ākāśīya vikirāṇa*) just like an antenna (*eṇṭinā*).’ (Joshi n.d.: 195) Another account corroborates this sentiment: ‘According to my own research, I found out that gemstones work just like radars (*rāḍār*). Just like a radar that, after receiving the signal, makes visible an aircraft moving in the sky, in the same way precious stones establish a contact (*sampark*) with planets moving in the solar system.’ (Jaiswal 2006: 137)

Described both as icons inhabited by deities and mechanical devices, gemstones should always be carefully examined during their therapeutic activity. Any change observed or perceived is seen as a sign of altered efficacy. Thus, clients regularly ask astrologers the meaning of a gemstone that moves (H. *hiltā hai*), becomes scuffed (*ghistā jā rahā hai*), breaks (*ṭūṭ jatā hai*) or is lost (*kho gayā*). A crack, for instance, is generally understood as evidence that a stone has protected a person from an accident and that it should be replaced as quickly as possible since its power has been used up. The loss of a gemstone is presumed to be a bad omen, indicating that the stone’s associated planetary influence is so negative that all means of protection are gone. It may even happen that the smell of a gemstone

is interpreted as a symptom. Thus a businessman from Mumbai complained to an astrologer about the bad smell of his zircon (*gomeda*, Rāhu’s gemstone):

Client: You prescribed me a zircon but it stinks so badly that I was not able to wear it, even for a week. It stinks only on me, not on other people. On me, it stinks so badly that people refuse to sit next to me. And I am not even able to eat with this hand...

Astrologer: Do you smell badly when you sweat?

Client: Not at all, I can wear the same socks for a month and it smells good...

Astrologer: Zircon is a gemstone that protects you from external obstacles (*uparibādhā*), from sorcery (*ṭonā-ṭotkā*) and from black magic (*kālā-jādu*). It is time to change it.

In the astrologer’s view, foul smell is an indication that the gemstone has absorbed a negative external influence.

CONCLUSION: DOES ‘PRECIOUS’ MEAN COSTLY?

We conclude this chapter with some remarks about the costliness of precious stones. Price is an important aspect throughout most gemological literature, going back to Kautilya’s *Arthaśāstra*. Although the price of gemstones is generally thought to be proportional to the valuableness of a stone, and therefore a mark of its quality, astrologers nowadays are well aware that many clients cannot afford to pay several thousand rupees to procure the most precious stones. This is a problem stated in classical treatises as well. The author of the *Muhūrtacintāmaṇi* and its commentators, for instance, seem fully aware of the fact that gemological remedies are not affordable for everyone. They thus describe different options so that people can choose according to their capacity (*yathāśakti*). One (quite expensive) option described is the *navaratna* ring (MC 4.9):

In order to please the planets, one should make a gold ring with a round shape, divided into nine parts (*navadhā*). The nine gems should be set in the nine divisions starting in the eastern region.

Table 4.2. The placement of the nine planetary gemstones according to the spatial directions (MC 4:9).

Northwest (<i>vāyavya</i>) Cat's eye for Ketu	North (<i>uttara</i>) Topaz for Jupiter	Northeast (<i>īśān</i>) Emerald for Mercury
West (<i>paścima</i>) Blue sapphire for Saturn	Center Ruby for Sun	East (<i>pūrva</i>) Diamond for Venus
Southwest (<i>nairṛitya</i>) Zircon for Rāhu	South (<i>dakṣiṇa</i>) Coral for Mars	Southeast (<i>agni</i>) Pearl for Moon

Figure 4.1. Navaratna jewel. Photograph by C. Guenzi.

Another option advances the idea that planetary stones should be worn in individual gold rings, according to the conventional associations between *navagraha* and *navaratna*.⁴⁶ A third and cheaper option is available to people who cannot afford the first two.⁴⁷ As clearly stated in the Hindi *pīṭāmbārā* commentary of the *Muhūrtacintāmaṇi*, whenever it is not possible to wear more expensive stones (*adhik mūlyavān ratna*), one should wear less expensive stones (*alpa mūlyavān ratna*). Thus, for Venus and Moon, a

⁴⁶ MC iv.10.

⁴⁷ MC iv.11.

silver ring (*raupya*) can be worn instead of diamond and pearl; for Jupiter, a pearl (*muktā*) may substitute topaz; for Saturn, an iron ring (*lauha*) will replace sapphire, and so on.

In astrological practices observed in Banaras, the principle of *yathāśakti*, of paying according to one's capacity, is vital in determining the efficacy of a gemstone. It is commonly said that one should always pay for a gem, even if it is just a nominal fee (*nāmmātra mūlya*): 'You should never wear a stone for free, a stolen gem or a gem lost (by someone else) on the road.' (Joshi n.d.: 194). In order to accommodate their clients' financial means, astrologers very often prescribe *uparatna*, 'semi-precious stones,' as substitutes for the truly 'precious' (*kīmatī, mūlyavān*) gems. Therefore, instead of ruby, a gemstone worth several thousand rupees, they might prescribe cheaper substitutes like *sūryakānta* (sun-stone), *saugandhika* (the 'perfumed' one), *tāmṛā* (a reddish-blue artificial stone), or star ruby (*maisūrī māṇikya*), each of which can be purchased for a few hundred rupees. Usually these stones are prescribed for shorter periods than the most precious ones because their therapeutic powers are considered limited. They typically should not be worn more than a few months or years, whereas the power of authentic precious stones is not supposed to diminish if the stone remains intact. The genuine precious stone may in fact last several years or even an entire lifetime. In the words of one practitioner, while an authentic stone is as powerful as sunlight, an artificial or semi-precious stone is just like an electric torch: its batteries should be renewed regularly.

ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

H. = Hindi Skt. = Sanskrit

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