

Art of bead making: Khala Zada's journey from Afghanistan to Amrapali

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Founder of Aayenda Jewellery, Khala Zada showcases the handcrafted Jewellery at a store in Delhi.
(Source: PTI)

Designing and selling handmade jewellery fashioned from tiny beads of the semi precious lapis lazuli stone has helped Khala Zada, a widow from Afghanistan, support her family of eight for the last 17 years.

In her fifties, Khala Zada, who first learnt the art of bead making from a neighbour and now runs a small-scale business in downtown Kabul, is here to participate in a showcase featuring a collection of the intense blue semi precious stone jewellery at the Amrapali store in the city.

The showcased collection celebrates a partnership between Amrapali and Afghanistan's Aayenda Jewellery Cooperative whose members comprise local Afghan craftswomen.

"I was engaged in carpet making from my childhood along with other household works. Now I dedicate 10 hours of the day for bead-making and the remaining for my house. I am not the only one doing such things. Almost all the women in my village are doing something or the other to support their families and contributing to the household income," Zada said.

Not fluent in either Hindi or English she spoke with the help of a translator. In 2013, Zada along with 35 other artisans received training in jewellery design, craftsmanship, gem-cutting and business management skills at the Institute of Gems and Jewellery in Jaipur.



Handcrafted Jewellery by widows and other women in Afghanistan is showcased at Amrapali store in Delhi. (Source: PTI)

The 6-months long skill enhancement training programme, organised by a non governmental organisation Future Brilliance also imparted training on the use of social media, m-commerce and basic IT skills to enable research, development and selling of products online with work placements at Amrapali.

Zada also said, that it took her two months to convince her sons to allow her to travel to Jaipur but now she uses the skills learnt to train others back in her country Afghanistan, which is home to the world's oldest lapis lazuli mines, some of which date back 7,000 years.

"She was different from other students, as after designing the jewellery she used to walk out of the institute and look for buyers for her work," Sophie Swire, Executive Chairman, of Future Brilliance, who is part of a visiting delegation from Kabul said.

Zada, who is unable to read and write, practices a 3000-year old tradition of hand carving micro sized lapis beads, using diamond tipped needles and pomegranate twigs. She sources 'waste' lapis stones from a local jeweller and uses that to fashion beads that are used in bracelets and other jewellery.

"My training in India has been very memorable and have made some very good friends with women here. Neither I nor my girls (she has three girls and five boys) could get an education. I want to pass on my training to my countrywomen so that they are capable of earning a livelihood," she says.