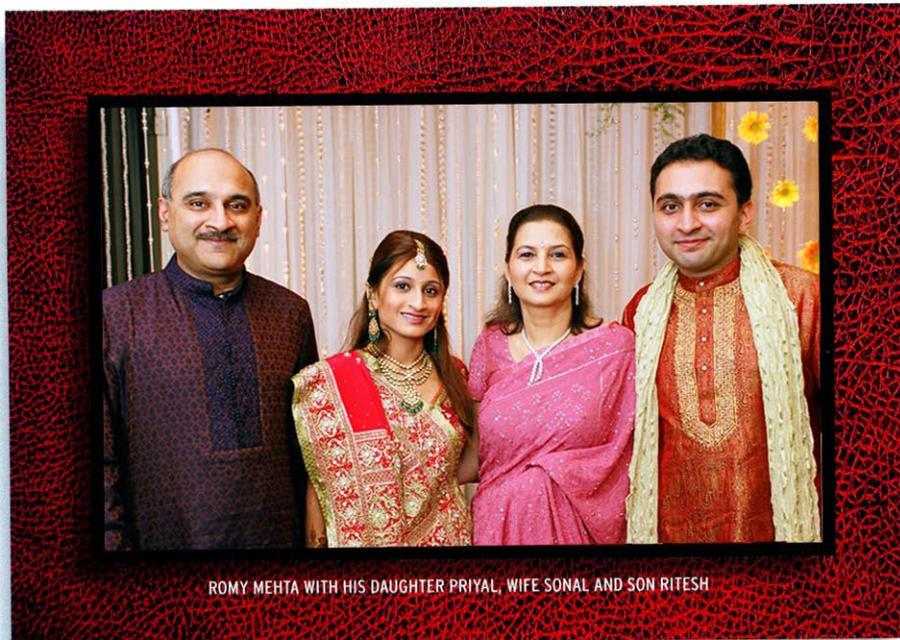




FAMILY  
LEGACIES

INDEPENDENT JEWELLERY HOUSES  
ARE BECOMING AN INCREASING  
RARITY. WE SALUTE SOME OF THE  
WORLD'S LAST AND GREATEST ONES





ROMY MEHTA WITH HIS DAUGHTER PRIYAL, WIFE SONAL AND SON RITESH

## { MULTI-FACETED THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE }

*The three-generation-old Bapalal Keshavlal remains true to the values of its eponymous founder while taking a bold approach towards its jewellery designs*

BY MELISSA PEARCE

A visit to the Mumbai boutique of India's leading international luxury jeweller Bapalal Keshavlal might be by appointment only but it is rarely a solitary visit for the city's patrons. For Indian women, jewellery purchasing is a highly sociable affair, often peppered with enthusiastic argument. Indians, by their own admission, are not overly private, and there is a certain pride and enjoyment in family-centred wrangling and pageantry.

Bapalal Keshavlal has been catering to the vicissitudes of feminine desire since 1939, with three generations of the Mehta family serving this clientele. Romy Mehta, president/CEO and son of the eponymous founder, describes his

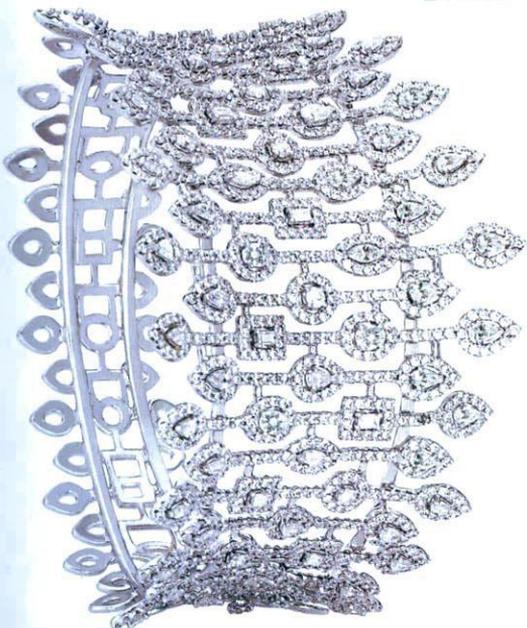
responsibility: "To serve customers for whom luxury is not necessarily a marker of class but something precious, unique, thoughtful, inventive and representing an aspect of themselves that is constantly in search of affirmation."

Steering the business now are the second and third generations of the household and they acknowledge Indian society's expectation of this familial continuation. Romy's son Ritesh, who is in charge of branding and public relations, recalls balancing undergraduate life with this sense of duty. Romy's wife Sonal has bolstered his efforts by overseeing the administration and back-end operations, while Romy's daughter Priyal Kothari manages marketing in the US.

"Jewellery's emotional value makes a company like ours best run by a family who maintains a corporate environment while promoting family values," says Romy of the family's strength in the competitive jewellery industry. All important policy decisions are taken as a family, though design choices are primarily discussed among Romy, Ritesh and the creative team. In 2004, the evolution of Bapalal Keshavlal's brand identity entailed extensive discussion between the family and branding experts, before they changed the former decorative 'BK' initials to a circular radiating symbol inspired by the cosmos and the origin of all things.

The initiative to incorporate a new logo was borne from a need to portray an image more befitting of the company: An international Indian brand with an increasingly contemporary take on traditional Indian jewellery. "We felt the new logo captured the entrepreneurial spirit of our founder and denoted a creative spirit moving unfettered towards its ultimate potential," says Ritesh.

Founder Bapalal Keshavlal displayed an admirable modesty for a son of a prosperous jewellery industry player, and his quiet spirituality is said to have guided his work approach with humility and affection. This understated constancy may have been in part encouraged by self-reflection during the early challenges of his own business that saw him living in relative modesty for the first three decades of his 50-year career. His first and most formative break was





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setting out independently from leading Indian jeweller Surajmal Lallubhai (est 1895). Bapalal wanted to focus on customer relations where customer feedback was integral to his design principles.

The greatest lesson left by Bapalal to Romy about the business was honesty, something he has in turn drilled into Priyal and Ritesh. “Ethics, honesty, integrity, clarity of purpose, humility to customers, and total customer satisfaction,” says Romy. Ritesh elaborates, “My father has shown me how business is a multi-faceted theatrical performance that requires shrewdness, tact and foresight at times and, at other times, a glint of smiling approval and honest advice to enhance interpersonal trust.”

Bapalal Keshavlal’s design ethos, in the hands of Romy and his children, has evolved in the last two decades to evince Indian classicism with a 21st century twist. “The jewellery we tend to pride ourselves on are pieces which we have taken risks with the design,” says Ritesh. As a result, designers are encouraged to experiment with different techniques.

While a bride’s trousseau — made up of necklace, earrings and bangles — are popular items sold and traditionally important, the brand’s resplendent long Funky Hariyali earrings are some of their most successful risks. “The creative process is an exchange of ideas. Not all inspiration succeeds and it is in moments when we don’t expect it to that a piece of jewellery emerges,” says Ritesh.

Romy, who took charge of the business in 1972, is convinced that his family will keep mapping the way ahead in ever vital ways.

“My son has insisted on design over numbers,” he says. “And on making conspicuous the philosophy underlying design and art, rejecting a mass-produced aesthetic or outcome.”

At the same time, the business does not sway from what Bapalal Keshavlal would deem as important: Continued service to his treasured customers and loyalty as his family’s most precious asset. His commitment is in the safest of hands; hands that are captivating the West one diamond at a time.

