

AJAY MEHRA

Ajay Mehra is Managing Director of Mehrasons Jewellers, one of India's best-known jewellery retail brands. He is currently the Co-Chair of FICCI, (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry), Gems and Jewellery Committee, through which he interacts with the various government departments highlighting the concerns of the jewellery sector.



He advocated the revamping of the Gold Deposit Scheme since 2011, which was launched as the Gold Monetization Scheme in the Budget 2015. On December 1, 2015, The Indian Bullion & Jewellery Association, (IBJA), awarded Ajay Mehra the "Jewellery Icon of the Decade Award" in recognition of his contributions for the jewellery industry of India. He is a member of the "Committee to Transform India's Gold Market", that has been constituted by NITI Aayog, to better understand how the gold industry can play a bigger role in the growth of the Indian economy.

AOJ : *Can you share a few of your most satisfying moments and most valued accomplishments during your professional career?*

Ajay Mehra : *I feel that our industry is, by and large, extremely 'misunderstood' by the officials of the GOI. My most satisfying moments are when I am able to make a 'believer' out of the same official that has, previously, not been in favour of our industry.*

These moments are precious as they lead to alleviation from painful policies in the future. On the business front my most valued accomplishment would most certainly be leading the change in the style of the functioning of the business and to make it more 'professional', through removing the requirement of a family member to be in charge of critical functions of the business.

AOJ : *What are the fundamental values and qualities a successful jeweller should possess?*

Ajay Mehra : *First off, a value system needs to be in place which everyone in the enterprise should adhere to, based on integrity and honesty. Thereafter 'success' itself needs to be defined and, with the growth of the business, this should move away from increasing profits only, to include concepts such as sustainable growth, introduction of professionals, defining profitability with a 'Return of Capital Employed', (ROCE) etc.*

AOJ : *What are the qualities and the attributes required for a selfless and dynamic leader to serve our industry?*

Ajay Mehra : *It is imperative for any leader to first have a deep understanding of the subject-matter from not only a domestic viewpoint, but also an international perspective. My interactions with the officials of the*



GOI have lead me to believe that they accept that it is the industry member that is the domain expert and they are more than willing to inculcate our views in the formation of their policies.

Unfortunately, history has shown us that it is the flawed representation from the industry that has lead to the introduction of legislation that the industry has,



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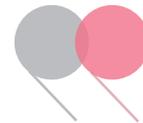
thereafter, decried. Therefore, it is not merely enough to give one's time for the upliftment of the industry; it is critical to comprehensively understand the concerns of the industry.

AOJ : *How can we attract bright and talented youngsters passing out from premier institutions like IIMs, XLRI, and Symbiosis etc. to jewellery industry as other corporate companies do on a regular basis?*

Ajay Mehra : *The gems and jewellery industry would have to demonstrate a future for the candidate, so that they would aspire to be a part of the industry. And this would only be possible with the migration to the organised sector, where all financial transactions are recorded and responsibilities are allocated based on the capability of the candidate, rather than the proximity to the owner-family.*

AOJ : *Today, many first generation jewellers have entered the jewellery industry and within a short span have scaledup to multi-chain stores, especially from South India whereas family jewellers have been more conservative. Your views.*

Ajay Mehra : *Multichain stores do not necessarily mean a successful and profitable enterprise. Sure, they have more outlets, but this does not dilute the family jeweller in any manner whatsoever. More often than not, it is the family jeweller that is the leader in that specific market. Moving forward, both entities shall have space in the marketplace and there is clearly enough space in the industry for both.*



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AOJ : *How do you think that PM Modi's vision of 'Make in India' can be implemented for the jewellery industry?*

Ajay Mehra : *The policy makers first need to create a Vision for this sector, that should clearly define what they aspire from this sector and thereafter, frame policies towards the same. Unfortunately, this is missing and, as a result, policies are not holistic in nature and create hurdles in aiding the growth of the sector. The fact is that 90-95% of our industry comprises of MSMEs, which is a target area for the 'Make In India'*

initiative, yet our industry is not a focus industry of this initiatives, which is a failing of our industry leaders. Opening up our sector by completely removing the import duty on gold bars would serve to enhance gold exports and attract foreign investment in our sector. India can only become a global player in the gold sector if we are able to manufacture all types of gold jewellery, including light-weight, machine-made items, which shall only be possible through the support of the Government.

AOJ : Do you agree that Artisans and Karigars of jewellery industry have not got their due recognition and remuneration? How can we address this issue?

Ajay Mehra : The fact that 90-95% of the gold industry is made up of MSMEs, suggests that the players are, by and large, small enterprises. Smaller players focus on personal profitability and issues such as upliftment of workers, unfortunately, takes the 'back seat'. With the policies aiding the growth of our industry, one of the immediate benefits would be the increase of larger manufacturing units which, in turn, would result in better facilities and pay for the Karigars. Moreover, foreign investment in the industry would exponentially assist this, as they are extremely sensitive to ensuring good working conditions and higher salary scales.

AOJ : What is your message to the fellow jewellers?

Ajay Mehra : Please spread the message to everyone that the gems and jewellery industry is approximately INR 6,45,000 crores in size, provides jobs for 61 lac people, 90-95% of its members are MSMEs and it contributes 7% of the GDP of the nation. The fact is that we play a large, contributory role in the economy of the nation.

AOJ : Where do you see the jewellery industry in 2025?

Ajay Mehra : As a large contributor to the Indian



economy and an industry whose growth is supported by the GOI.

AOJ : What is your vision for the future of jewellery industry?

Ajay Mehra : India shall be the global destination for gold and shall become the "Jeweller to the World".

AOJ : Any role model you follow? What inspires and motivates you?

Ajay Mehra : Mahatma Gandhi. I am most inspired and motivated through stories of human accomplishment and perseverance in the face of adverse circumstances.

AOJ : Your favourite book?

Ajay Mehra : Shogun by James Clavell.

AOJ : Your favourite holiday destination?

Ajay Mehra : Goa.

AOJ : Your favourite restaurant and your favourite food?

Ajay Mehra : Orient Express at the Taj Palace Hotel, New Delhi. I love eating chicken burgers.

AOJ : What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

Ajay Mehra : This is best encapsulated through the saying, "Character is what you do when nobody is looking".