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ABSTRACT

In India, folk arts and crafts form an integral part of daily life. They are deeply ingrained in our daily lives through the items that we utilise in our ceremonies as well as daily lives at home. Since ancient times, textiles have been of tremendous cultural, social, and economic significance and have also long been valued as an important profession. Textiles in India have been immensely benefited owing to its abundant natural resources, a conducive climate, skilled craftsmanship, and traditional wisdom of our craftsmen. Patronage from rulers and wealthy sections of the society is another fortunate reason which supported art and craft for their promotion, trade and as a form of leisure.

Handicraft sector can serve as an aid for sustainable development as it has the potential for dignified as well as local employment generation especially for women, weaker economic sections, school and college dropouts and marginalised communities. It can also save people from the compulsion of abandoning their ancestral professions due to economic constraints and undesirable migration to urban slums.

Each state or region in India is known for its handicrafts, be it *chikankari* and brocades of Uttar Pradesh, *Ajrakh* and *Patolas* of Gujarat, *Kaantha* and *Dhaniakhali* of West Bengal, *Kanjevarams* and *Kalamkari* from Tamilnadu. Even today some form of textile craft is still practised in every village across the vast expanse of the country. This holds true for central India also.

The central region of India, now known as Madhya Pradesh, presents a smorgasbord of textile traditions ranging from woven textiles to hand printed, resist dyed and embroidered textiles. **One of the most magnificent techniques of the region is *zardozi* embroidery which is practised in Bhopal, the present-day capital of Madhya Pradesh and which was once a part of the erstwhile Bhopal state.**

Bhopal, the present capital of central Indian state Madhya Pradesh and former capital of the princely state of Bhopal, possesses a rich cultural past and heritage. It is home to numerous monuments, historical landmarks, oral traditions and legacies. It was one of the prominent *zardozi* centres and till date is famous for *zardozi*, beadwork and

batuas. After the merger of the Bhopal state with the newly formed Madhya Pradesh state in nineteen hundred and forty nine the royal patronage stopped. A change in the patronage also resulted in far-reaching effects on the materials used for the craft, the workmanship and designs. From creativity the craft became consumer-dictated. Not able to understand the markets and trends the artisans adopted a variety of coping mechanisms such as use of synthetic fabrics for base, artificial *zari* instead of pure, simpler motifs to name among the few. Sadly, it also resulted in dyeing of some of the old techniques, disappearance of traditional products and hence a dilution of the original craft. All this also came with a sense of loss of identity and pride in the artisan community of Bhopal.

Preliminary visits revealed that many government organisations and NGOs have been working to improve the conditions of the local artisan community of Bhopal, however their efforts are limited by constraints such as lack of craft documentation about *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal and non-availability of disaggregated data on artisans and present status of the craft. Thus, it was deemed fit to conduct an exploratory study titled **“Sustenance of *Zardozi* Embroidery of Bhopal through Documentation, Training and Product Development”**.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the research to gather information about the *zardozi* craft ecosystem and its various stakeholders and was valuable in the formation of the research design. A descriptive cum exploratory research design with a mixed methods approach was used for the present study as there was a lack of disaggregate data on the topic. The study was carried out in four phases. For better reliability of results different approaches were used in the different phases of the research. The use of multiple data sources and data collection methods not only helped in achieving a comprehensive understanding of the craft but also aided in achievement of data triangulation.

In the first phase documentation of the history, origin and traditional motifs and craft practices was conducted. In the second phase information of present craft and market practices, socio-economic survey of artisans and entrepreneurs as well as collection of contemporary motifs and techniques was done. The third phase consisted of exploring the issues and challenges of the Bhopal *zardozi* artisans studying existing training programmes and designing a training programme based on the unmet needs of

artisans despite numerous welfare schemes, training programmes and a burgeoning market. Validation of the training programme was also conducted in the third phase. The training programme developed in the third phase was implemented in the fourth phase of the study. The effectiveness of the developed training programme was also checked in the fourth phase. The documentation helped in identifying various traditional aspects of the Bhopal *zardozi* embroidery which would help in preservation of the cultural heritage and community identity behind the craft. The field studies for surveying the present status of the craft and the people associated with it revealed loss of workmanship and quality as well as the unsatisfactory conditions of the craft as well as the artisans. Analysis of the government programmes and schemes revealed very low awareness and utilisation of these which could be attributed to policy gaps and ignoring the specific needs of the Bhopal *zardozi* artisans. Thus a training programme was developed keeping in mind various socio-cultural barriers and limitation of skill and education of the artisans. The training programme helped in skill development and capacity building of artisans which were shown in the effectiveness test of the training programme. The study, thus, helped in documentation of the craft as well as training the artisans in various critical aspects of the craft such as cultural heritage, product development as per customer demand, re-associating artisans with the traditional form of craft as well as developing a high quality product.

LIST OF PLATES

S.No.	List of Plates	Pg. No.
3.1	Contemporary Zardozi Products available in the local market and an old traditional bhopali batua, around sixty five years old.	83
3.2	Observation of Tools, techniques, material and working of the Bhopal <i>zardozi</i> artisans	86
3.3	Formal focus group discussion with the <i>zardozi</i> artisans	91
4.1	Son-in-Law and Grandsons of Sultan Shah Jahan, Begum of Bhopal in elaborately embroidered costumes	101
4.2	The reception of the Begum of Bhopal c. 1875-6	106
4.3	A portrait of Princess Shahjahan of Bhopal (1838 CE -1901-CE) dating back to CE 1862 (c.)	108
4.4	Her Highness Begum Sultan Kaikhusrau Jahan Begum (1858 CE-1930CE) the then Begum of Bhopal leaving the Delhi Coronation <i>Durbar</i> , 1911	108
4.5	Portraits of prince and princess, grandchildren of Sultan Jahan Begum of Bhopal, c.1910 CE	109
4.6	The Begum of Bhopal escorts the Prince of Wales to the <i>Durbar</i> Hall, India, 1921.	109
4.7	Nawab Sikander Begum with her ministers.	110
4.8 a&b	The resplendent teacosy and <i>batua</i> , embroidered with exquisite <i>zardozi</i> embroidery; diplomatic gifts from the then Begum of Bhopal to General Herbert Horatio Kitchener.	112
4.9	The Begums of Bhopal in resplendent costumes in <i>kinkhwab</i> and with embroidered borders	115
4.10	A <i>bhopali batua</i> with ornate tassels called <i>surahi</i> and a small box called <i>chuneti</i> (for keeping lime)	118
4.11	Zardozi embroidered cartouche from Bhopal in V & A digital collections	121
4.12	Cartouches embroidered with <i>mukke ka kaam</i> and <i>salme sitaare ka kaam</i> from Bhopal	121
4.13	Shoe uppers embroidered with <i>zardozi</i> and <i>salma-sitara</i> from Bhopal.	122
4.14	Nawab Shahjahan Begum in zardozi embroidered apparel and headgear	122
4.15	Her Highness Nawab Sekunder, Begum, G.C.S.I. Bhopal. dated and Nawab Jumalooddeen Bahadur (Dewan), Bhopal dated 1868	123
4.16	Her Highness Nawab Sekunder, Begum, G.C.S.I. Bhopal. [with bodyguards]	123
4.17	Begum of Bhopal in a print created by Bourne and Shepherd in 1877	124

4.18	One of the dresses of Begum of Bhopal displayed in the state museum in Bhopal.	124
4.19	A flag belonging to the royal family of Bhopal ornamented with inscriptions and emblem	125
4.20	One of the dresses of Begum of Bhopal displayed in the state museum in Bhopal.	125
4.21	A traditional <i>bhopali batua</i> embroidered with <i>zardozi</i> and interspersed with <i>poth ka kaam</i> .	126
4.22	A traditional <i>bhopali</i> purse embroidered with <i>zardozi</i> and interspersed with <i>poth ka kaam</i>	126
4.23	A traditional <i>bhopali potli</i> embroidered with <i>zardozi</i> and interspersed with <i>poth ka kaam</i>	127
4.24	<i>buti</i> embroidered on a pure satin silk off-white fabric c.1950 and	127
4.25	A traditional floral <i>kinaari</i> /borderembroidered on a pure satin silk off-white fabric c.1950.	128
4.26	A traditional floral <i>kinaari</i> /borderembroidered on a <i>dupatta</i> from a personal collection	128
4.27	A traditional floral <i>jaal</i> /trellisembroidered on a <i>kinkhwab sherwani</i> from a personal collection	129
4.28	A traditional <i>bhopali batua</i> embroidered with <i>zardozi</i> and <i>chuneti</i> (small box for keeping lime/choona) and tools for taking out lime from the <i>chuneti</i>	129
4.29	Handbag made from <i>zardozi</i> embellished silk fabric that dates to pre-1960s India	130
4.30	Ceremonial umbrella with raised metal embroidery consisting of flowering plants around a vase and enclosed within a cartouche	131
4.31	A velvet carpet (c. 1868-1901 CE) from Bhopal embellished with gold thread embroidery.	132
4.32	Begum of Bhopal in <i>kinkhwab</i> and richly embroidered <i>juties</i> and caps, sitting on a <i>vasli</i> seat cover	133
4.33	Chain stitch, Satin and french knot stitch, Bead work, <i>Chidkav</i> and <i>Chadiyan</i>	136
4.34	Steps in <i>zardozi</i> embroidery: (4.34 a) <i>Tankai</i> or stitching the fabric to <i>adda</i> (4. 34b) perforated <i>khaka</i> , (4.34 c) tracing of design (4.34d) <i>zardozi</i> material (4.34 e) embroidery in process (4. 34f) finishing and cutting of threads	137
4.35	<i>Parekh Brothers</i> -one of the oldest <i>zardozi</i> shops in Bhopal	139
4.36	National <i>Zari</i> House in Bhopal	140
4.37	Typical shop in old Bhopal city selling traditional <i>zardozi</i> and beadwork <i>batuas</i> , clutches and <i>potli</i> bags	140
4.38	A local design studio specialising in <i>zardozi</i> products.	141

4.39	Actress Divyanka Tripathi Dahiya dressed up in handcrafted zardozi attire by designer Mumtaz Khan of Bhopal	141
4.40	Some Bhopal zardozi readymade products available in the local market	143
4.41	Readymade beadwork clutch of Bhopal	143
4.42	Traditional zardozi costumes in comparison with contemporary readymade zari-zardozi products of Bhopal	146
4.43	Exquisite zardozi embroidered garments from a personal collection from Bhopal	147
4.44	An ornate Kinkhwab sherwani embroidered with heavy zardozi embroidery with gilt and sequins from a personal collection.	147
4.45	A navy blue dupatta in pure silk fabric embroidered with heavy zardozi embroidery with impeccable workmanship from a personal collection	147
4.46	The heavy zardozi embroidered wedding dress of Begum Sajida Sultan of Bhopal	148
4.47	Soha Ali Khan in traditional bhopali costumes embroidered with zardozi	148
4.48	The noticeable differences in the workmanship of a traditional Bhopali batua and a contemporary bhopali batua	149
4.49	Differences in the workmanship of a traditional hand fan displayed in the state museum, Bhopal and a contemporary hand fan made by one of the home based women artisans of Bhopal.	149
4.50	The attractive, luxurious packaging of Sabyasachi Couture	150
4.51	Specialized packing and care label used by one of the leading designer studios of the city for <i>zardozi</i> products.	151
4.52	A product made by an artisan without any intervention and towards right manufactured by a designer	153
4.53	The products made in zari centres of the city and a young zari centre owner with a tablet.	153
4.54	A belt and clutch designed by Nandita Nair, Studio Aawarna for discerning clients of Bhopal. The studio is known for its high quality zardozi accessories and apparels	154
4.55	Difference in the fabric and raw material of a traditional and contemporary bhopali batua	154
4.56	The visible differences in the workmanship of a traditional and a contemporary batua resulting in different aesthetics in the two products	155
4.57	Full-time male zardozi artisans at work in one of the zari centers in the old city of Bhopal.	158
4.58	The home-based women zardozi artisans of Bhopal	216
4.59	Formal focus group discussion with artisans, trainers and entrepreneurs	220

4.60	Zardozi Couture Garments of International Coutouriers	224
4.61	A picture from celebrated Indian designer Sabyasachi's 2021 collection	225
4.62	Details of the panelists for Focus Group Discussion	228
4.63	Formal focus group discussion with representatives of government and non government organisations	228
4.64	The panelists of the third focus group discussion along with the audience and organising team.	229
4.65	Training in progress with special session by designer Nandita Nair.	257
4.66	Using simple technological solutions for managing training programme	259
4.67	Exhibition cum craft demonstration workshop during a craft exhibition in Pune, Maharashtra.	261
4.68	Training team and trainee artisans during the ' Two Day Zardozi Craft Demonstration cum Master Class'	263
4.69	Artisan trainees, design students of Government Girls Polytechnic Bhopal and Renaissance University, Indore, design facilitators and training team at Ravindra Convention Centre, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh during the 'Two Day Zardozi Craft Demonstration cum Master Class'	264
4.70	class with design academician and craft researchers for artisans and design students	264
4.71	Discussion on craft practices, community identity and cultural heritage in progress during the master class.	265
4.72	Knowledge sharing during the masterclass and artisan introduction.	265
4.73	The training kits pre-packed for the participants / design students and faculties for the craft demonstration cum master class	265
4.74	The trainee-artisans interacting with the design students as part of the craft demonstration cum master class held towards the end of the training programme.	266
4.75	Press coverage of the zardozi training programme and master class	267
4.76	Artisans making the samples before undergoing the training programme.	268

LIST OF TABLES

S.No.	List of Tables	Pg. No.
3.1	Phase wise details of methodology, data collection tools and data analysis	74
3.2	Phase wise details of Sampling Techniques	78
3.3	Sample Selection for Phase II	85
3.4	Sampling for Focus Group Discussion	92
4.1	Provenance of Traditional Embroidery in Bhopal	113
4.2	Presence of Zardozi Embroidery in Bhopal	116
4.3	Common Terminology Used in Zardozi Embroidery of Bhopal	120
4.4	Traditional Zardozi Products of Bhopal	145
4.5	Approximate Price Range of Various Readymade Products Available in the Local Market:	151
4.6	Distribution of Artisans as per Gender, Marital Status, Age at Marriage and Number of Children	159
4.7	Distribution of Artisans as per Marital Status	159
4.8	Distribution of Artisans as per Age at Marriage	160
4.9	Distribution of Artisans as per Number of Children	160
4.10	Distribution of Artisans as per Age	165
4.11	Distribution of Artisans as per Education	166
4.12	Distribution of Artisans as per Language Profile	166
4.13	Distribution of Artisans as per Family Type of the Respondents:	168
4.14	Distribution of Artisans as per Family Size of the Respondents	168
4.15	Distribution of Artisans as per Chief Bread Earner of the House	169
4.16	Distribution of Artisans as per Monthly Family Income (Inclusive of Zardozi	172

	Embroidery) of the Respondents	
4.17	Distribution of Artisans as per Total Monthly Income Excluding Additional Income from Zardozi Embroidery	172
4.18	Distribution of Artisans as Per Monthly Savings:	173
4.19	Distribution of Artisans as Per Ration Card/Aadhaar Card/Bank Account/Pan Card Details of Respondents	174
4.20	Distribution of Artisans as per Construction Type of the House	174
4.21	Distribution of Artisans as per Ownership of the House:	175
4.22	Distribution of Artisans as per Facility of Attached Toilet in the House.	176
4.23	Distribution of Artisans as per Electricity Connection	177
4.24	Distribution of Artisans as per Water Connection	177
4.25	Distribution of Artisans as per Consumers Durables Use	178
4.26	Distribution of Artisans as per age of initiating zardozi learning	180
4.27	Distribution of Artisans as per Age of Starting Earning from Zardozi	180
4.28	Distribution of Artisans as per Sources of learning of Zardozi Embroidery:	182
4.29	Distribution of Artisans as Right to Selection of Designs	185
4.30	Distribution of Artisans as per Frequency of Payment	186
4.31	Distribution of Artisans as per Mode of Payment	187
4.32	Distribution of Artisans as per Responsibility of Maintenance of Tools:	189
4.33	Distribution of Artisans as per Mobile Usage:	190
4.34	Distribution of Artisans as per Mobile Type:	190
4.35	Distribution of Artisans as per Knowledge of Basic Computer Programmes like word, Powerpoint	191
4.36	Distribution of Artisans as per Having and Using Email ID	191
4.37	Distribution of Artisans as per Social Media Usage (Facebook Usage, Whatsapp	192

	Usage, Instagram and Pinterest Usage)	
4.38	Distribution of Zardozi Entrepreneurs as per Gender	195
4.39	Distribution of Zardozi Entrepreneurs as per Education	196
4.40	Distribution of Zardozi Entrepreneurs as per Religion	197
4.41	Distribution of Zardozi Entrepreneurs as per Marital Status	198
4.42	Distribution of Entrepreneurs as per Technology Usage	199
4.43	Distribution of Artisans as per Products manufactured or sold:	200
4.44	Distribution of Entrepreneurs Craft Business Started By:	200
4.45	Gender Wise Distribution of Artisans and Entrepreneurs:	201
4.46	Education wise Distribution of Artisans and Entrepreneurs	202
4.47	Comparison of Technology Usage in Artisans and Entrepreneurs:	203
4.48	Active Membership of any NGO/SHG/Cooperative/ or any other organisation:	231
4.49	Possession of Artisan Cards by Artisans	232
4.50	50Perusal of Artisan Helpline by Artisans	232
4.51	Availing of Free Tool Kit Scheme	233
4.52.	Awareness of Pradhanmatri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojna (PMJJBY) Scheme	234
4.53	Awareness of PM Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) Scheme:	235
4.54	Training Programme Awareness in Artisans	236
4.55	Distribution of Artisans as per Participation in Government Exhibitions/Craft Fairs/Buyer Seller Meets:	237
4.56	Artisan Awareness Regarding Various Government Schemes	238
4.57	Distribution of Artisans as per Increase in Speed of Embroidery Work after Training:	239
4.58	Increase in Finishing and Neatness in Work after Attending Training:	240
4.59	Distribution of Artisans as per Increase in Earnings	241
4.60	Motivation and Ability of Starting own Enterprise:	242

4.61	Decrease in Middlemen Dependency After Training	243
4.62	Artisans as per the Development of Ability to Connect with Customers Independently	243
4.63	Funds utilized for Handicraft Promotion and Development by Indian Government	247
4.64	Duties for the Training Team	258
4.65	Details of the Zardozi Craft Demonstration cum Master Class	263
4.66	Pre and Post Training Scores of Artisan Trainees in Knowledge, Skill and Attitude	269
4.67	Descriptive measure and p-value	271

LIST OF GRAPHS

S.No.	List of Tables	Pg. No.
4.1	Number of Children of the Respondents	160
4.2	Gender of Respondents	161
4.3	Marital Status of Respondents	161
4.4	Age at Marriage of the Respondents	161
4.5	Age Group of Respondents	166
4.6	Educational Level of Respondents	167
4.7	Language Proficiency of Respondents	167
4.8	Family Type of Respondents	169
4.9	Family Size of Respondents	169
4.10	Chief Bread Earner of the House	170
4.11	Monthly Family Income (Inclusive of Zardozi Embroidery) of the Respondents	172
4.12	Construction Type of House	175
4.13	Type of House	175
4.14	Facility of attached Toilet in the House	176
4.15	Electricity Connection	177
4.16	Water Connection	177
4.17	Reasons for joining the Craft	179
4.18	Age of learning zardozi	180
4.19	Age of earning from zardozi	181
4.20	Source of learning/training	182
4.21	Time of Practice of Craft (Part Time/Full Time/Hobby):	183

4.22	Mode of Getting Order (Direct or Indirect):	184
4.23	Design Selection by:	185
4.24	. Distribution of Artisans as Right to Selection of Raw Material	187
4.25	Frequency of Payment	188
4.26	Frequency of Payment Difference in Male and Female Artisans:	188
4.27	Daily Hours Spent in Working on Zardozi Embroidery:	188
4.28	Responsibility of Maintenance of Tools:	189
4.29	Mobile Type and Usage:	190
4.30	Knowledge of Basic Computer Programmes like word, Powerpoint	191
4.31	Having and Using Email ID	192
4.32	Social Media Usage (Facebook Usage, Whatsapp Usage, Instagram and Pinterest Usage	193
4.33	Zardozi Entrepreneurs as per Gender	195
4.34	Entrepreneur/ Shopkeeper Education	196
4.35	Religion wise representation of entrepreneurs	197
4.36	Marriage wise representation of entrepreneurs	198
4.37	Technology usage in Entrepreneurs	199
4.38	Business Initiated by Self/Family of Entrepreneur	200
4.39	Comparison of Artisan and Entrepreneur in Education	202
4.40	Active Membership of any NGO/SHG/Cooperative/ or any other organisation	231
4.41	Possession of Artisan Cards by Artisans	232
4.42	Perusal of Artisan Helpline by Artisans	233
4.43	Availing of Free Tool Kit Scheme by the Artisans	233
4.44	Awareness of Pradhanmatri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojna (PMJJBY) Scheme:	234

4.45	Awareness of PM Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) Scheme:	235
4.46	Training Programme Awareness in Artisans	236
4.47	Increase in Speed Owing to Training	239
4.48	Increase in Finishing and Neatness in Work after Attending Training:	240
4.49	Increase in Earnings of Artisans after Training:	241
4.50	Motivation and Ability of Starting own Enterprise:	242
4.51	Distribution of artisans as per change in knowledge, skill and attitude after training.	271

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. No.	Title	Page No.
1.1	The interconnectedness of handicrafts, sustainable development and nation building	4
1.2	Craft Map of Madhya Pradesh	5
1.3	Sustenance of zardozi embroidery of Bhopal through various measures such as documentation, diagnosis of artisan needs, training and employment generation	12
3.1	Organisations visited during the pilot study	72
3.2	Research Design for the Study	75
3.3	Locale of the Study	76
3.4	Conceptual Framework for the study “Sustenance of the Zardozi Embroidery of Bhopal through Documentation, Training and Product Development”	77
3.5	Making of Design Catalogue	83
3.6	Training preparation and groundwork	94
4.1	The prominent zardozi clusters of Bhopal	99
4.2	Central Indian Province	103
4.3	Various Stakeholders of Zardozi embroidery of Bhopal and their interconnectedness	155
4.4	Causal Loop of Craft Production	158
4.5	Types of Zardozi Entrepreneurs	194
4.6	Vector Motif	205
4.7	Vector Motif	205
4.8	Vector Motif	206
4.9	Vector Motif	206
4.10	Vector Motif	206
4.11	Vector Motif	207
4.12	Vector Motif	207
4.13	Vector Motif	207
4.14	Vector Motif	208
4.15	Vector Motif	208
4.16	Vector Motif	208

4.17	Vector Motif	208
4.18	Vector Motif	209
4.19	Vector Motif	209
4.20	Vector Motif	210
4.21	Vector Motif	210
4.22	Vector Motif	210
4.23	Vector Motif	211
4.24	Vector Motif	211
4.25	Vector Motif	211
4.26	Vector Motif	212
4.27	Vector Motif	212
4.28	Vector Motif	212
4.29	Vector Motif	213
4.30	Vector Motif	213
4.31	Vector Motif	213
4.32	Vector Motif	214
4.33	Vector Motif	214
4.34	Capacity Building and skill development training programmes by ministry of textiles, Indian government	249
4.35	A conceptual framework explaining factors responsible for lack of awareness and unsatisfactory performance of home based women artisans of zardozi artisans as per the field studies.	253