

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Indian Handicrafts and Textiles:

Crafts in India extend beyond the tangible boundaries of skill, workmanship and other physical aspects. Indian craft reflects the immense creativity of ordinary people in the quest for self-expression and contentment. India has been known as a land of crafts and craftsmen (**Chattopadhyay, 1985**).

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 utilize in our ceremonies as well as daily lives at home. Thus, they also create a platform for expressing our feelings and emotions (**Dhamija, 2004**).

“Traditional wisdom needs preservation and needs to be nurtured and used to unfold new values in contemporary settings. Each culture has much to offer and India is full of such precious nuggets of traditional wisdom that can be applied to local uses or even global exchange” (**Ranjan, 2007**).

In India, handicrafts are not just products or income sources; in fact, they have much deeper significance which binds them to rituals and traditions. In that sense handicrafts are deeply rooted in our culture and thus are interlinked with our identity too.

The rich heritage of arts and crafts of the Indian subcontinent is renowned and makes the subcontinent a dwelling to vibrant cultures, races, religions and languages (**Karolia, A. 2019**). The rise of handicrafts in society was an indication of the development of sensitivity as well as the rekindling and mellowing of humanism. It represented man's attempt to infuse grace and elegance into a life that was otherwise harsh and uninteresting (**Chattopadhyay, K. 1985**).

The magnificent workmanship from India is acknowledged worldwide and Indian craftsmen have not only produced but also ornamented the most exquisite textiles with variegated charms of embroidery (**Naik, S.D. 1996**).

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. Thus, each region developed its own aesthetic style and products. Textile production in India reflects our socio-cultural and economical evolution and is as old as our civilization. *Vedas, upanishads*, religious scriptures and historical records all refer to its overarching symbolism and significance. Indian textiles have endured numerous transformations in the micro and macro environment and still survived to present times even after a prolonged time period spanning over thousands of years. This can be attributed to its firm foundation **(Kumari, P. 2021)**.

Textiles primarily served as a protecting layer for the body, with time having been decorated implying ornamentation techniques which had been derived as a matter of necessity to decorate the fabric **Mehta, R. J., (1970) as quoted in Dholakia, K.L. (2012)**.

However, industrialization and modern market forces have resulted in a host of problems for the Indian handicraft sector. Despite its numerous benefits the handicraft sector today faces many challenges and the artisans and craft persons are shifting to other menial jobs.

One of the biggest advantages of handicrafts such as embroidery, weaving, and block printing work is its sustainable nature. The world is now realizing the immense benefits inherent in crafts. In the recent decade Crafts are increasingly being considered as crucial for rural development and employment generation in emerging nations, as governments and institutions seek to combat migration of rural population to urban areas, resultant unemployment and also to promote economic growth. Owing to this the relevance of crafts has gained impetus in recent years. The inherent qualities of the handicraft sector are increasingly being considered as a potential tool for sustainable development.

1.2 Handicrafts as a Tool for Sustainable Development:

Since the past few decades sustainable development has been the point of limitless discussions both internationally as well as locally **(Greyling, 2003)**. Handicrafts and

artisanal products are way beyond just beauty and heritage value. Apart from being aesthetic and possessing heritage value artisanal or handcrafted production is environment -friendly, has very low carbon footprint and is aligned with most of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **Shah, A. 2021**

Handicraft sector can serve as an aid for sustainable development as it has the potential for dignified as well as local employment generation specially for women, weaker economic sections, school and college dropouts and marginalized communities. It can also save people from the compulsion of abandoning their ancestral professions due to economic constraints and undesirable migration to urban slums. Thus, it can also check conversion of skilled artisans into unskilled laborers for earning a meager livelihood. Thus, the present study focuses as much on the artisans as on the skill itself. It aims to find approaches for the sustenance of the traditional craft heritage of the local artisan community to address two of the most pressing and urgent concerns that our society faces in present times: rising unemployment and need of sustainable livelihoods to check rural migration.



Figure 1.1 The interconnectedness of handicrafts, sustainable development and nation building

It is thus clear that handicrafts are a potential tool for nation building through sustainable development. However, owing to modernization, market forces and various barriers, the handicraft sector is under systemic pressure. Efforts for its revitalization and bringing it into organized sectors are being made but there are various constraints to it.

Over the centuries, as communities and cultures have changed and evolved, no section of Indian society has remained unaffected. The last fifty years has witnessed a tremendous change in every sphere of life, be it economic, social, technological or aesthetic. These changes have had a major influence on the traditional handicraft sector. These overwhelming changes have broken down systems and contexts in which these traditional cultures functioned and sustained themselves. More and more,

1.4 Notable Handcrafted Textiles and Centres of Madhya Pradesh:

Silk and cotton weaving from Chanderi and Maheshwar, block prints from Bagh and Tarapur, batik from Bhairongarh, knotted carpets of Mandla, woolen durries from Jabalpur, tribal textiles from Waraseoni, Sausar and Dindori, gond painting from Patangarh and exquisite *zardozi* embroidery from Bhopal are textiles offered by the state.

One of the most magnificent techniques of the region is *zardozi* embroidery which is practiced in Bhopal, the present-day capital of Madhya Pradesh and which was once a part of the erstwhile Bhopal state.

1.5 *Zardozi* or Gold and Silver Embroidery from Bhopal:

Gold has long captivated people's imaginations. It has elicited a powerful reaction in humankind. Since ancient times, it has been used to ornament and enrich the human body in the form of not only jewelry but also as an adornment to man's clothing.

From ancient times, textiles ornamented with gold and silver have been coveted and valued greatly. The materials used for embroidery can signify luxury, religion, social identity, superstition, vanity etc. *Zardozi* falls in the category of luxury textiles as profuse use of gold and silver can also be seen in *zardozi* embroidery, a reason which also gave birth to its popular nomenclature as the gold and silver embroidery.

Zardozi embroidery uses pure gold and silver wire, popularly called *zari* (Ojha, S. 2014). *Zari* embroidery, *karchobi* or metal embroidery are some other terms used for *zardozi* (Dikshit, P.K. 1965; Bhandari, V. 2015). The word *zardozi* has its roots in Persian words *zar* meaning gold and *dozi* meaning embroidery. The embroiderer is thus called a *zardoz*. Perhaps for the first time, the term *zardozi* was used by Firoz Shah in his autobiography *Futahat-i-Firozshahi* during fourteenth century (Bhandari, V. 2015). The Mughal period saw extensive use of the *zardozi* surface embellishment method, which has persisted in Indian domestic, court, and religious culture even to this day (Gupta, C.S. 2006). Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, Banaras, Jaipur, Bhopal, Surat, Mumbai, Aurangabad, Hyderabad and Murshidabad are important centers of gold and silver embroidery (Brijbhushan, J. 1990).

Bhopal owing to its strategic geographical location and it being the second largest Muslim principality of its time, became a prominent *zardozi* center around the early nineteenth century. The city is still famous for its delicately adorned *zardozi* and beadwork *batuas* though few people know about its prominence as a historic *zardozi* center.

1.5.1 Bhopal: A Prominent *Zardozi* Centre

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*. It is the only state to be ruled by four consecutive women rulers who were efficient administrators and very progressive in their outlook. They were also huge patrons of arts and crafts and utilized it for the betterment of the society.

The Bhopal state was a stable, powerful region due to fewer external invasions and the second-largest Muslim principality after Hyderabad. These circumstances were ideal for the advancement of needlework and other arts and crafts. As a result, Bhopal is associated with a number of artistic triumphs, including *zardozi*, often known as gold and silver embroidery (**Hamid, R. and Rafat, S. 2000**).

There is definite evidence that the Begums patronized the art of *zardozi* and promoted its development at Bhopal. The history of *zardozi* and *zari* embroidery in Bhopal goes right back to the year eighteen hundred and seventy eight. The artisans were given all facilities and they worked in the palace executing the embroidery on a vast variety of products ranging from carpets, apparels, slippers, curtains, canopies and so on and so forth. Such was the amount of work that the embroiderers were never idle **Dikshit, P.K. (1965)**. The work was mostly performed for clients on a commissioned basis, and this still holds true even today.

Zardozi embroidery incorporates a variety of metal wires of different shapes and forms. Other materials such as beads, sequins of various kinds, semi-precious stones, even wings of Elytra beetles and the likes are used for filling into patterns. The outlines of the patterns are defined by *zari*. The term *zardozi* today is viewed as a generic term which is applicable to a wide range of surface embroideries worked in

metal **Bhandari, V. (2015)**. Gold and silver embroidery use satin, chain, stem, running stitches which can also be seen in other regional embroideries of India. Couching or laid stitch is also used and is one of the most important techniques of gold and silver work. A predominantly floral and geometrical base can be seen in the Designs and motifs used in *zardozi* embroidery.

Zardozi embroidery has been in existence in Bhopal for almost three hundred years **Ranjan, M.P. (2007)**. 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. The luxurious silks and velvets that were used as a base fabric were soon replaced with mill made synthetic and cheap replicas of the original fabrics. The original *zari* was replaced with imitation *zari* and the quality of embroidery also went down. The resultant products were thus of inferior quality as compared to the original products and the workmanship also failed to match the quality of the products from earlier times. Adding to the agony of the artisans were the rapid technological advancements, changing markets and cheaper products. The new conditions demanded a change in the way artisans worked. 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. In the aftermath of this downfall the younger generation also started to drift from the craft.

However, the local *zardozi* artisan community has faced these challenges with resilience. Despite obstacles the craft has continued to be practiced in the narrow lanes and alleys of the old city of Bhopal.

1.7 Sustenance of the *Zardozi* Embroidery of Bhopal and its Artisans:

The *zardozi* artisan community of Bhopal is predominantly based in the old city and works from the narrow alleys and by lanes. Most of the artisans are battling economic

hardships and do not have time for repeated rounds of offices required to avail the benefits and sops. Barring a few exceptions the artisans are grappling with numerous issues which have been made worse by their poor education, low socio-economic status and various personal and social barriers. These barriers also restrict their ability to take benefit from the government schemes.

Over the years there also has been a steady increase in the population of women *zardozi* artisans in Bhopal; majority of these work from home and thus get left out of the government initiatives and programs. These homebased women artisans have specific needs which often go unnoticed in the regular training programs.

The artisans depend mostly on local sales and tourists. Due to reasons unknown and unexplained, the craft finds no clearly visible links with export or couture markets. Thus even today the demand is seasonal. Various newspapers, blogs and field surveys have time to time brought into light the poor wages, unsatisfactory work conditions and slow changes in the *zardozi* embroidery sector despite numerous schemes and programs. Hence the craft has lost its shine and the younger generation of artisans is not ready to continue the craft tradition. This has put a question mark on the sustenance of the craft in Bhopal.

Any goals of sustenance of handicrafts cannot be achieved without the help of craft communities, which are the core of our craft traditions. In recent years a number of schemes and training programs have been initiated by various developmental agencies including the government bodies for the empowerment of artisans.

Both government and private organizations are involved in implementing welfare and training programmes for the betterment and upgradation of *zardozi* artisans of Bhopal. Most of the efforts are targeted towards skill development of the *zardozi* artisans through training, design inputs for product development, branding and creation of market linkages for a better income. A host of other schemes such as distribution of free tool kits, artisan card, microfinance, stalls at national and local fairs and exhibitions for the welfare of artisans have also been introduced. *Zardozi batua* and embroidery has also been declared as the chosen product under the One District One Product from Bhopal district in the year two thousand and twenty. Many stakeholders

such as NGOs, design education institutions, industry partners, independent designers have also been working alongside the government for execution of these programs.

Despite numerous efforts the desired results are far from achieved and artisans are not able to fully utilize these welfare measures owing to a variety of reasons which range from simple ignorance to more complex issues such as rigidity on part of artisans, lengthy documentation process, presence of middlemen etc. The less than expected growth also indicates that there exist reasons that are hampering the various initiatives for the artisans.

1.8 Rationale of the Study:

In Bhopal, *zardozi* embroidery reached its zenith around the nineteenth century. Patronized by the *Begums*, it evolved as a royal tradition, gradually shifting to utilitarian products for the masses for its survival. However, this change in patrons also saw a decline in quality and craftsmanship. The traditional skill and beauty were missing in the new age products. This downfall in workmanship and availability of cheaper machine made goods resulted in a decline in demand and hence less work and poor wages for the *zardozi* artisans.

Thus, it became necessary to examine the various aspects of the *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal. This is specially required for its sustenance as well as its transformation into a sustainable livelihood option for the artisans. It is also important to investigate the causes leading to fading away of the glory of Bhopal as a prominent *zardozi* centre as the gazetteer mentions this craft as the only industrial art worth mentioning from Bhopal. Thus, the research investigates and seeks knowledge on various issues facing the *zardozi* embroidery craft as well as its artisans for its sustenance and it is in this context that several questions about the genesis, historicity, patronage, design, evolution and present status were therefore raised.

1.9 Research Questions:

1. How and under what context was *zardozi* embroidery initiated in this part (Bhopal) of the country?

2. Who were the patrons behind the initiation of *zardozi* embroidery in Bhopal and what patronage did the craft enjoy in the past?
3. Why was the embroidery brought to this area and how?
4. Was the tradition oral or well documented?
5. Is there any documentation available for the craft? If yes then do the artisans have access to the documentation?
6. Are the artisans aware about the rich cultural heritage of the embroidery traditions?
7. Are the artisans thriving?

1.10 Statement of the Problem:

Although there is a wealth of research on Bhopal as well as *zardozi* embroidery, there is a lack of research that considers these fields together. The study of Bhopal as a prominent *zardozi* center has received scant attention by the scholars. Whereas sizable works on various crafts from Madhya Pradesh namely *gond* painting, *maheshwari* and *chanderi* weaving, *Bhairongarh batik*, *bagh* block printing have appeared during last few decades, there has been a lack of attempts of documenting the genesis of *zardozi* embroidery in Bhopal, its materials, techniques and motifs in a comprehensive manner.

Preliminary visits revealed that many government organizations 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. There is a need for comprehensive documentation on various aspects of the *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal was strongly felt as the data is scattered and for maintaining the purity of the craft systematic and authentic data is also required. The identification of various constraints would also help in effectively implementing the schemes and welfare measures.

Thus, the main focus of the study was to acknowledge and understand the issues and needs of artisans and aid in creation of sustainable livelihoods through *zardozi* embroidery in Bhopal.

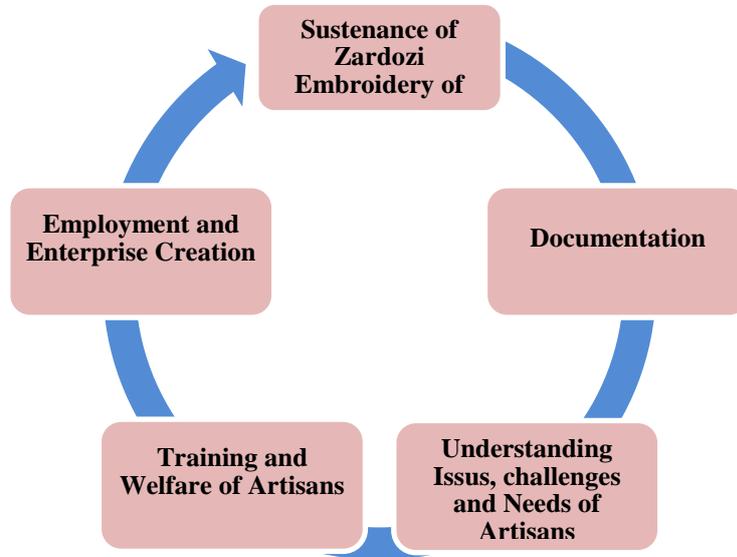


Figure 1.3: Sustenance of *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal through various measures such as documentation, diagnosis of artisan needs, training and employment generation

New dimensions without diluting the traditional craft techniques are required for the *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal in terms of design intervention, training in order to achieve the requirements of the contemporary customers. Thus, it was deemed fit to conduct a research on the *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal. This would not only serve as an aid to the efforts of its rejuvenation but will also bring the much-needed scholarly attention for its preservation, promotion and sustenance. Thus, it was deemed fit to conduct an exploratory study titled “**Sustenance of *Zardozi* Embroidery of Bhopal through Documentation, Training and Product Development**”.

1.10.1 Research Objectives:

The present study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To document the history and origin of *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal.
2. To explore the present status and changes in the *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal.

3. To document the traditional and prevalent motifs, material and techniques of *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal.
4. To study the issues, challenges and training needs of the Bhopal *zardozi* artisans.
5. To design and develop a training program for capacity building and skill up gradation of the Bhopal *zardozi* artisans.
6. To implement and analyze the effectiveness of the developed training program.

1.10.2 Scope of the Study:

Therefore, it becomes significant to mention here that a need arose to inquire in-depth into the history of the *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal specifically with reference to its history, origin and the patronage it received from the erstwhile Bhopal state. In addition, the information relating to the craft is available from a number of sources, but it is partial and incomplete because of the fact that the field is still largely unexplored.

The relevance of crafts has increased in recent years owing to its manifold advantages. Increasingly handicrafts have been seen as a tool for sustainable development, poverty alleviation and women empowerment. Crafts are being looked upon as a key driver of local economic growth and employment generation.

This provides a lot of scope for research which is as follows:

- provide valuable reference material for academicians, researchers, students, art enthusiasts, historians, and fashion and textile designers.
- pave way for the documentation of the origin and history of the craft in Bhopal and the changes that have occurred with respect to the motifs, material, techniques and workmanship.
- reveal the present socio-economic conditions and hurdles encountered by the artisans which could have policy implication

- create an environment for the benefit of the local artisan community
- throw light on various aspects that are crucial for effective modular training course design that enhance knowledge, skill, and attitude of the artisans keeping in mind their socio-cultural requirements
- serve as an aid to the craft designers for development of designs that maintain the visual identity of the craft while also taking into consideration the inherent features of the respective craft designs
- provide direction for sustainable livelihood generation through *zardozi* embroidery specially for home-based women artisans and aid in employment generation for other marginalized sections of the society too.
- suggest policy recommendations to further support the safeguarding and sustenance of *zardozi* embroidery of Bhopal with future research directions.

1.10.3 Delimitations:

1. The analysis of training programs would be limited to government training programmes.
2. The time period for traditional design would be taken from 1822 to 1950 CE
3. The time period for contemporary designs would be taken from 1951 to 2023 CE.