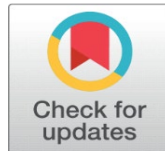


THREADS OF TRADITION: EXPLORING THE HISTORICAL AND ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF ZARI-ZARDOZI CRAFT IN BAREILLY DISTRICT

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v6.i2.2025.5496](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v6.i2.2025.5496)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the rich historical and economic significance of the Zari-Zardozi craft in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh and examines the current challenges faced by this ancient craft. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, it integrates data from both primary and secondary sources including personal interviews, economic data, historical records, and contemporary studies to trace the journey of this craft from ancient origins to its current role in the local and national economy. The origin of gold embroidery can be traced back to the Vedas but the craft of Zardozi was first found in Persia which was introduced and popularized in India by the Mughals. The city of Bareilly which is in Uttar Pradesh is a major hub for this intricate Embroidery, the craft holds deep historical, cultural and economical importance in for Bareilly that it is popularly known as “Zari Nagri” which means the city of Zari. The study takes a deep dive in understanding about types of Zardozi and tools and techniques that are used to create these beautiful designs. The craft is a historical symbol of opulence and currently providing livelihoods for thousands, including a growing number of women. Yet the industry now confronts profound economic and social challenges such as a drastic fall in local turnover, coupled with abysmally low artisan wages that barely cover basic needs, escalating raw material costs (further burdened by an 18% GST), and fierce competition from cheaper, machine-made alternatives, has severely crippled the sector. The study explores that Artisans are exploited by pervasive middlemen, limited access to formal credit, endure hazardous working conditions leading to severe health issues, and perceive a distinct lack of effective government support. These compounding challenges erode the craft's social prestige, actively deterring younger generations and tragically forcing many skilled individuals to abandon their ancestral trade for less dignified, often menial, labor.

Keywords: Bareilly, Crafts, Embroidery, Uttar Pradesh, Zari, Zardozi

1. INTRODUCTION

The state of Uttar Pradesh which is the most populous state of the country is the home of many traditional crafts and arts. Some of these crafts are ancient in nature and passed down through generations. One such craft is the Zari-Zardozi embroidery of Bareilly, which holds immense cultural and economic importance for the people of the state. Bareilly is a major city of western Uttar Pradesh in India; the city is situated on the banks of the Ramganga River and falls under the Rohilkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. The city has a rich history as it was known as Panchala in the Mahabharat which was the birthplace of Draupadi, it is also believed that Gautam Buddha also visited the fortress city of Ahicchatra in Bareilly. Bareilly also played a significant role in the freedom struggle of 1857 and 1947. (History | Bareilly | India, n.d.) There are many industries in Bareilly Bamboo and Cane furniture, gold smith work, and Food processing industry etc but the city is most famous for its unique Zari- Zardozi embroidery work as it is also called as ‘Zari Nagri’. The craft

of Zardozi has always been an integral part of the culture, history and economy of Bareilly which has been performed by skilled artisans through generations. The embroidery of Zardozi is timeless which is present in India from the Vedic times as it is mentioned in Rigveda. (Gaatha, 2022) The embroidery of Zari-Zardozi is believed to be originated from Persia the word Zardozi comprises two word 'Zar' and 'Dozi' where Zar means Gold and Dozi translates to Embroidery or needlework. (Baral & K.H, n.d.) At first, genuine gold leaf and pure silver wires were used for the embroidery. Today's artisans, however, combine silk thread with copper wire that has been polished to a golden or silver hue. The image below displays an ethereal peace of zardozi embroidery from a unit of Bareilly:

Figure 1



The craft is practiced in many cities in India in different forms; Bhopal, Surat, Varanasi, Lucknow, and Bareilly are major hubs of Zari-Zardozi. Zardozi is also an import component of India's handicraft exports, since 2007 its export percentage has risen to 16.83%. The study focuses on understanding the craft of Zari- Zardozi and tries to explore its historical and economic significance for the district of Bareilly.

2. THE CRAFT OF ZARI-ZARDOZI

The word "zari" connotes textiles with intricate and vibrant designs. People have been fascinated by brocade and zardozi since ancient times. Indian artisans were the first to create elaborate designs using strands of precious metal, such as silver and gold. (Singhal and Bhagat, 2017) The Zardozi embroidery is a time taking process and requires steady hands. Various raw materials, such as chandla, sitara, gota, dabka, gizai, moti, etc., are employed according to the design's requirements. Men's and women's clothing, belts, shoes, purses, and home décor items are all decorated with this art. There are many types of Zardozi :

Table 1

Type/Style	Technique and description	Material and Tools	Popular regions
Traditional Zardozi	Heavy metallic thread work using straight wire laying and coiled wire techniques. Features elaborate floral and geometric patterns with raised effect.	Pure gold/silver wires, silk base fabric, pearls, precious stones Aari needles, wooden frames (addas), scissors, thimbles	Delhi, Agra, Lucknow
Kamdani Zardozi	Fine metallic thread embroidery with minute stitching and delicate patterns. Known for its subtle elegance and refined workmanship.	Fine gold/silver threads, silk, cotton base, small sequins Fine aari needles, small wooden frames, and magnifying aids	Lucknow and Bareilly
Aari Zardozi	Uses chain stitch technique with metallic threads. The aari (hook) creates continuous chain-like patterns with metallic threads. Versatile application	Metallic threads, various base fabrics, sequins, beads Aari hooks, wooden frames, thread guides	Lucknow Bhopal Hyderabad
Kashmir Zardozi	Incorporates Kashmiri motifs like paisley, chinar leaves, and floral patterns. Often combined with traditional Kashmiri embroidery techniques. Regional aesthetic	Gold/silver threads, pashmina, silk, local beads Traditional needles, wooden frames, local tools	Kashmir and Jammu
Gota Zardozi	Uses flat metallic ribbons (gota) along with threads. Creates geometric patterns and borders with layered metallic elements. Rajasthani influence	Gota ribbons, metallic threads, cotton/silk base, mirrors Sharp needles, scissors, pressing tools	Bhopal, Ajmer and Delhi

Mukaish Zardozi	Uses beaten metal pieces (mukaish) sewn with metallic threads. Creates textured, dimensional effects with light reflection. Textural variatio	Beaten metal pieces, gold/silver threads, silk base Special needles, metal working tools, frames	Lucknow, Hyderabad
Contemporary Zardozi	Uses synthetic metallic threads and modern techniques. Adapted for mass production while maintaining traditional aesthetics. Commercial viability	Synthetic metallic threads, various base fabrics, plastic sequins Modern needles, mechanical aids, industrial frames	Mumbai Chennai Bangalore
Sitara Zardozi	Features star-shaped sequins (sitara) extensively used with metallic thread work. Creates sparkling, celestial-themed patterns. Decorative emphasis	Star sequins, metallic threads, silk/velvet base, beads Fine needles, sequin application tools, frames	Delhi, Agra and Bareilly
Kundal Zardozi	Uses tightly coiled metallic wires to create raised, dimensional effects. The coils (kundal) add texture and depth to designs. Three-dimensional effect	Coiled metallic wires, base threads, silk fabric, padding Wire manipulation tools, special needles, coiling aids	Lucknow, Bhopal and Hyderabad
Badla Zardozi	Uses flat metallic ribbons (badla) arranged in geometric patterns. Creates bold, architectural designs with metallic sheen. Geometric precision	Flat metallic ribbons, strong base fabric, fixing threads Ribbon cutting tools, precise needles, measuring aids	Delhi, Agra and Chennai
Shisha Zardozi	Shisha embroidery is a kind of hand needlework that uses tiny pieces of mirror-shine metal to create a mirror-like design on fabric.	Fabric, small mirrors or shiny mirror like embellishments	Farrukhabad
Dabka Work	Dabka is a sliver type of thin and lightweight wire material used for hand embroidery on fabric and on many items which also knows as in several type metallic and silver colors.	In the Dabka work also used for sewing with various kinds of materials like stone and thread on fabric.	Rajasthan, Lucknow
Beaded Zardozi Work	A type of embroidery that combines metallic threads with beads to create intricate, raised designs typically floral designs.	Velvet or silk fabric, beads and embellishments	Bareilly and Delhi

Table 2
Tools Of Zardozi



Source Amazon.in

The chart below elucidates the process of creating Zardozi –

Figure 2



- 1) **Design Conception:** Developing the design is the first step in the process. This entails organizing the arrangement of various components, selecting the overarching theme, and sketching the pattern.
- 2) **Material Selection:** It's important to pick the appropriate materials. This entails choosing the zari threads (threads coated in gold or silver), beads, sequins, and other embellishments, as well as the fabric (often satin, silk, or velvet).
- 3) **Frame Setup:** To create a firm platform for stitching, the fabric is stretched tightly onto a wooden frame, or adda.
- 4) **Tracing the Design:** Using chalk or any comparable marking instrument, the design is meticulously traced onto the fabric.

Figure 3



Source <https://www.dsource.in/gallery/zari-zardozi-varanasi>

- 5) **Embroidery Starts:** Trained artists start the embroidery process by utilizing specific needles and methods to weave the zari threads into elaborate designs.

Figure 4

- 6) Adding Embellishments:** To improve the design and produce a rich, textured look, beads, sequins, and other decorative components are added.

In order to fix the embellishments and provide precise details within the design, detailed stitching is required.

- 7) Quality Check:** To make sure the embroidery satisfies the necessary requirements and is error-free, a comprehensive quality check is carried out. Adding any necessary reinforcements, washing the fabric, and cutting out extra threads are the finishing touches.
- 8) Finishing Touches:** The final touches include trimming excess threads, cleaning the fabric, and adding any necessary reinforcements.
- 9) Final Zardozi Product:** The finished Zardozi product is a stunning piece of art, ready to be used in clothing, home decor, or other applications.

3. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ZARI-ZARDOZI IN BAREILLY

The origin of this craft is believed to very ancient as the use of zari embroidery as embellishment on the garments of Hindu deities is frequently mentioned in scriptures, and it is thought that zardozi has been a part of Indian culture since the Rig Veda. (Pathak, 2018) The embroidery work of gold is also mentioned in Hindu mythology books like Ramayan and Mahabharat. (Singh, 2022) In many historical evidences such as books, sculptures, writings and travelogues the mention of gold and silver embroidered clothes can be found time to time from the Gupta period to the Sultunate period. (Pezarkar, 2019) The origin of Zardozi can be traced back 300 years ago to Persia. During the Mughal Empire, Persian artisans introduced this art in India, which was originally used to embellish the clothing and furniture of aristocrats and kings. (Google Arts & Culture, n.d.) The Mughal emperors, especially Akbar, were renowned for their support of the arts, and throughout their rule, Zari-Zardozi embroidery, which denotes wealth and extravagance, blossomed. (TOI, 2023) With its elaborate designs and sumptuous textures, this skill came to represent the opulence of the Mughal dynasty and became a trademark of Mughal dress. After Akbar Jahangir and Shahjahan also supported the craftsmen of Zardozi but Aurangzeb showed no interest towards the craft and due to the lack of support from Royal courts the artisans migrated to other locations and craft spread from Bengal to Rajasthan and even to the courts of Mysore. From 1722 to 1856 AD Awadh became one the biggest center of Zari- Zardozi craft due to the protection of the Nawabs of Awadh. (Singh, 2022) The strategic location of Bareilly between Lucknow and Delhi facilitated it to become a centre for production for this craft in the Mughal era and also reached the royal courts of Nawabs. Although it is difficult to tell as to when and how this work came and started, but it is more than a hundred years since it first came to Bareilly. There is a popular story among Zardozi artisans of Bareilly who credits Hamidullah Khan for bringing this zari work with him, when he came to Bareilly from Punjab. Hamidullah's father, Niyazullah wanted to send him in the army but Hamidullah did not want to join the forces, hence he ran away from Bareilly to Amritsar and opened a shop of zari work on salwar suits and sarees in the chowk area there. The fame of his work spread and reached the ears of the Kings and nawabs of the time. Even the King of Udaipur used to send his potraits made on a special type of paper and they had to

be stitched on the salwar suits, lehngas and chunnris of the queen. During those days Zari work on costumes was done with pure silver and each costume costed around Rs.400/- to Rs.500/-.After a few years the love for his city made Hamiduliah to return back to his city and he started doing zari work in Bareilly. Orders also came from the Nawab of Rampur, who used to order for special designs and the artisan used to go to his palace and make the designs there itself. But as the wheel of time turned and bid farewell to the Kings and Nawabs, the zari zardozi work found a new market among the common people and by 1971 the zari work had entered the homes of the common man. As the Images below show Zardozi becoming the modern trend from the patronage of the mughal court:

Figure 4

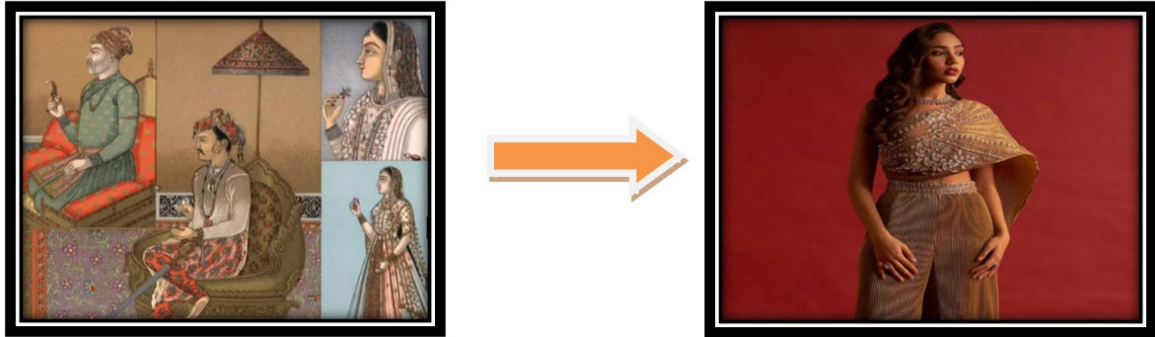


Image source Times of India and Pinterest

The city's craftsmen refined their trade, fusing regional inspiration with age-old Persian methods to produce one-of-a-kind patterns that appealed to a variety of clients. Over the ages, Zari-Zardozi stitching left the royal courts and developed into a beloved aspect of Indian textile arts. It is frequently utilised for ceremonial wear, bridal gowns, and other decorative purposes. The craft became the part of local culture and tradition of Bareilly and it is passed down through generations. The British Raj also influenced the craft but did nothing for its advancement, which led to the downfall of the craft. Areas of Old city, Shyamganj, Qila, Bazariya inayatganj, kunwarpur, malukpur, are some urban centers of Zari-Zardozi in Bareilly besides them rural areas like Faridpur, Baheri, Nawabganj, Bithri chainpur, Parsona, Meerganj, Aonla, and Partapur also participate majorly in the product of Zari-Zardozi in Bareilly.(Kumar,2012)

4. REVIEW LITERATURE

In Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, the Zari-Zardozi craft represents a rich cultural heritage entwined with ongoing socioeconomic difficulties. Zardozi is an intricate needlework technique, which originated in Persia and was honed under Mughal patronage, became associated with royal splendor in 16th-century India. (Singh, 2022) The word Zardozi is made from two words 'Zar' and 'Dozi' where Zar means Gold and Dozi means embroidery. (Pernia's Pop-Up Shop, 2025). Originally the craft of Zardozi was performed using threads made from real gold and silver but today these designs are created by using metallic threads of gold and silver color, other things like beads and sequins are also used in this embroidery. (Singh, 2018) The craft became popular in the Avadh region during the Mughal and Nawab period and slowly came to Bareilly. (Sanadh, 1994) Bareilly emerged as a production epicenter due to its strategic trade routes and skilled Muslim artisan communities, who sustained the craft through generations (Kumar, 2012) However, its prominence was undermined by colonial laws that favored machine-made textiles, turning it from an aristocratic icon to a cottage industry that was ostracized (Roy, 2010; Google Arts & Culture, 2018). Recent studies have also revealed that this ancient craft is facing a lot of issues and challenges. Artists make between ₹150 and ₹300 per day, frequently working 12-hour stints in dark studios, while Zardozi-adorned clothing sells for lakhs in urban boutiques (Mittal, 2022; Outlook India, 2024). Women, who make up 60% of the workforce, are exploited in two ways: first, they are paid 40% less than men, and second, they are expected to handle family chores (Kumar, 2012; Village Square, 2024). While craftspeople lack negotiating power, middlemen control supply chains and take 70% of profits (Dayinee & Priye, 2021) Studies have also revealed that the long sittings and working in poor lighting conditions is making these artists sick by not only creating visual issues but also destroying their posture and back health.(Kohli, 2020, (Garg et al., 2023b). The 2013 Geographical Indication (GI) marking, which was intended to safeguard authenticity, is ineffective against artificially produced copies from China and Surat, which account for 65% of the Zardozi market in India.(Mittal & Singh, 2021) The impact of policy

actions varies. Although 58% of craftsmen are still ignorant of such programs, the ODOP initiative increased market access for registered units through platforms like Bareilly's Urban Haat (J & M, 2022; Verma & Verma, 2023). Since 2020, skill programs such as Samarth have trained 1,200 craftspeople in digital tools; yet, only 15% of them report consistent revenue growth (Tyagi et al., 2024). Creative approaches give hope according to Karolia's (2023) research on the Zardozi resurgence in Bhopal, artisan incomes increased by 35% when traditional themes were combined with modern designs. Similarly, an example for doing away with middlemen can be seen in Kerala's Surabhi cooperative model, where craftspeople keep 85% of revenues (Mittal, 2022). Systemic obstacles still exist, nevertheless, as 90% of units run without electricity during the hottest summer months and 72% do not have formal banking access (Kaur & Dharni, 2024; Kohli, 2020). Urgent, comprehensive action is required to ensure the craft's survival. Immediate issues could be resolved by including health precautions, creating craft cooperatives, and stepping up GI enforcement. Transferring knowledge across generations is necessary for long-term survival. Bareilly runs the risk of losing not only a financial asset but also a living reminder of India's artisanal legacy if decent pay, social security, and modern-market adaption are not given first priority.

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To trace the historical development and cultural significance of the Zari-Zardozi craft in Bareilly district.
- To assess the economic importance of the Zari-Zardozi industry in terms of employment and livelihood generation for local artisans.
- To identify the major challenges faced by artisans involved in Zari-Zardozi work.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design to investigate the economic, cultural, and historical value of the Zari-Zardozi craft in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly district. It is based on primary and secondary data sources and aims to comprehend the historical development of Zardozi craft and its contribution to socioeconomic advancement of Bareilly. Few Businessmen, artisans and officials from district industrial office of Bareilly were interviewed to gather primary data. A variety of published sources, including government reports, policy documents, scholarly books, journal articles, and official publications of the Ministry of Textiles and the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), were reviewed to gather pertinent data. Data was also sourced from news articles, research papers, and other academic and non academic literature. These sources shed light on the employment patterns, revenue generating, skill development, and institutional support systems for the Zardozi craft of Bareilly. A thorough grasp of the historical significance, current issues, and future development potential of the Zari-Zardozi sector in Bareilly was made possible by the use of qualitative content analysis to critically evaluate and synthesize the data collected. The study's geographical focus is restricted to the Bareilly district, and its thematic focus is still on the historical evolution, economic contributions, and policy context of Zari-Zardozi craft of Bareilly.

6.1. ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF ZARDOZI IN BAREILLY

A sizable section of the Bareilly district's population relies on the Zari Zardozi industry as their main source of work and income, making it a vital sector of the local economy. According to estimates, hundreds of thousands of people in the area depend on the art for their lives, either directly or indirectly. All accounts highlight the enormous reliance of the local community on this traditional craft, even though the numbers vary from one source to another. According to the official website of ODOP Uttar Pradesh around 2 lakh people are directly or indirectly employed through the craft and the data from craft clusters of India indicates that there are more than 1040 artisans and 100 self help groups involved in Zari – Zardozi. The craft supports a diverse range of workers, including designers, embroiderers; thread makers, suppliers, and retailers. In the interview the official of district industrial office explained that the sector is highly unorganized and many units work without proper registration that is why it is very hard to estimate the actual number of units and artisans involved with the craft. The data from DCMSME indicates that there are 4 major zardozi clusters in Bareilly that contains a total of 1700 units; details are explained by the table below-

Table 3

Name of the Cluster	Total Units
Jogi Nawada	200
Kakartola Purana Sheher	500
Cahknavada	500
Arbitola	500
Total	1700

Source <http://www.dcmsme.gov.in/schemes/Clusters.pdf>

The enormous number of craftspeople involved demonstrates how deeply ingrained Zari Zardozi is in Bareilly's socioeconomic structure. However, there have been notable shifts in the Zari Zardozi industry's overall economic impact on Bareilly's local economy in recent years. According to data, the industry's yearly turnover has drastically decreased, from a peak of about Rs 100 crore in 2010 to about Rs 10 crore by 2023. (Gupta, 2023) This dramatic decline indicates a significant decline in the district's craft-related economic activity. The daily salaries of the craftsmen themselves frequently remain low, ranging from Rs 100 to Rs 300 depending on the kind and duration of work, even though firm owners engaging in Zari work in Bareilly are said to earn roughly 20% of the manufacturing cost. (Fatima, 2024) It's crucial to remember that India's larger Zari embroidery market exports to numerous foreign markets like UAE, Australia etc. The table below shows the data of export of zari and zari goods in FY 2021-22 and 2022-23-

Table 4

Export Performance of Zari & Zari Goods (Rs. in Crores)

S. No.	Country	2021-22 (Rs. Cr)	2022-23 (Rs. Cr)	% Change
1	Australia	0.06	0.03	-50.0%
2	Canada	0.03	0.11	266.7%
3	France	0.44	1.16	163.6%
4	Germany	1.64	0.51	-68.9%
5	Italy	0.24	0.37	54.2%
6	Japan	1.48	1.06	-28.4%
7	Netherland	0.02	0.26	1200.0%
8	UAE	10.21	8.8	-13.8%
9	U.S.A.	1.62	0.89	-45.1%
10	U.K.	0.26	1.08	315.4%
11	LAC	0.38	0.57	50.0%
12	Other Countries	53.02	56.41	6.4%
	TOTAL	69.4	71.25	2.7%

Source EPCH India <https://www.epch.in/sites/default/files/policies/exportsofhandicrafts.htm>

Total exports of Zari and Zari goods grew marginally by 2.7% from ₹69.40 crore in 2021-22 to ₹71.25 crore in 2022-23. There is no exact data of the contribution of Bareilly in this export yet it is important to note that the Zardozi Businessmen from Bareilly secured international orders of more than 1cr in the UP International trade show-2 2024. (Amar Ujala, 2024) In the personal interview too Sudeep kumar Rajgadhia who is one of the most famous Zardozi firms in Bareilly told us that he gets orders from all around the world and he exports Zardozi fabric and prepared dresses to national and international designers from around 18 countries, his creations are styled by celebrities like miss universe 2023 Sheynnis Palacios, Urvashi Rautela and other celebrities. He also explained that due to the high cost of production of authentic handmade Zardozi there is a very low domestic demand but he believes international markets like Italy and America as growing consumers for this craft specially beadwork. It is also notable that Zari- zardozi was identified as the key product under the One District One Product Program by the Government of Uttar Pradesh. The Zari Zardozi craft of Bareilly also received a Geographical Indication tag in 2024 which can be proven as a major step towards its development. Though the current state of the economy in Bareilly presents an image of a struggling industry, the unorganized nature of the handicraft sector, particularly Zari Zardozi, has the potential to greatly contribute to the national economy through the creation of jobs and rural income

7. CHALLENGES BEFORE THE CRAFT OF ZARDOZI

Notwithstanding its historical and financial importance, the Bareilly Zari Zardozi sector has several obstacles that could jeopardize its long-term viability. Among these difficulties are:

Decline in Demand: Because of shifting design trends, the availability of less expensive substitutes, and the popularity of machine-made embroidery, there has been a decline in demand for traditional Zari Zardozi items in recent years (Times of India, 2023). Orders for Bareilly's Zari Zardozi garments and apparels are declining. Businessmen believe that due to handwork being expensive domestic demand is low but there is a growing trend for authentic handmade zardozi among famous national and international designers.

Low Income: Declining income and abysmally low wages earned by the artisans is a significant issue for this art. The industry being highly unorganized there is no standard wages for the artists and it varies with the demand. Some studies suggest artisans earn INR 150-250 for a day (Fatima, 2024) also some artisans even report earning as little as INR 80 for three days of painstaking work. (Shefali, 2018) In the personal interview artists revealed that they get paid from 300-500 per day when the demand is high but when the demand reduces their income is reduced to 200 per day and the freelancers sometimes don't receive any work so they have to switch to other jobs. These meager incomes are often insufficient to cover the basic necessities for the artisans and their families, pushing them into a cycle of poverty and food insecurity. This economic instability forces many to seek alternative, often less skilled and less dignified, forms of employment simply to survive.

High Cost of Raw Materials: Artists find it challenging to sustain their profit margins because of the continually rising cost of raw materials like silk, metallic threads, sequins, and beads (Times of India, 2023). A considerable portion of these materials is reportedly imported from China, making the industry susceptible to fluctuations in international prices. This issue has been made worse by the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Artisans face 18% GST on raw materials and another 18% on finished products, making Zardozi embroidery less competitive. This has led to a drastic reduction in orders, shrinking artisans' work opportunities to just 4-5 months a year instead of year-round employment. (Shefali, 2018)

Growing competition and obsolete techniques: The Zari Zardozi sector is facing a serious threat from the growth of machine-made embroidery. (Gaurav, 2024) At a fraction of the price of hand stitching, computerized embroidery machines can swiftly and effectively recreate complex designs. The demand for handcrafted Zari Zardozi has decreased as a result of buyers choosing the less expensive machine-made substitutes. One of the main issues facing the Zari Zardozi craft in Bareilly is the craftsmen's restricted access to modernization and uptake of new technologies. (Sonkar et al., 2025) A lot of craftspeople are unable to afford to buy expensive equipment that could boost their output and general productivity. The industry's overall lack of organization also adds to the sluggish adoption of contemporary methods. (Gupta, 2023) This technical divide severely reduces the artisans' output, makes it more difficult for them to compete with machine-based production techniques, and makes it more difficult for them to adjust to the constantly shifting demands of modern design.

Migration to other Jobs: In order to make ends meet, many highly talented Zari artists are being compelled to give up their traditional profession and choose low-paying, frequently physically taxing menial employment like rickshaw pulling and agricultural work. One According to reports, there have also been cases of seasoned artists and former Zari workshop owners being forced to work in slaughterhouses or sell vegetables in neighborhood markets as a result of the extreme shortage of Zari labor and erratic or nonexistent reimbursements. (Gupta, 2023) In addition to the heartbreaking loss of priceless traditional creative legacy, this forced occupational movement of seasoned and talented artisans seriously jeopardizes the region's prospects for future development, innovation, and the maintenance of complex Zari Zardozi skills. (Mittal and Singh, 2021)

Middlemen Presence: Middlemen and contractors frequently take advantage of Zari Zardozi artists by controlling the supply chain and setting the prices. This reliance extends to the procurement of raw materials, access to much-needed financial credit, and the marketing and sale of their finished products. This dependence is often amplified by the artisans' limited literacy, lack of awareness about market dynamics, and pervasive poverty. (Shaurabh & Khan, 2021) These intermediaries frequently exploit the vulnerable position of the artisans by offering them meager wages, delaying or partially paying for their work, or taking a disproportionately large share of the profits generated from the sale of their handcrafted item.

Lack of Credit Facilities: Many studies have revealed that the Zardozi artisans of Bareilly lack education and financial knowledge. (Kohli, 2020) Due to this they often rely on unorganized sources such as money lenders who impose exorbitant rates of interest, further entangling them in a vicious cycle of debt. The artists receive low pay and little negotiating power as a result of these intermediaries taking a substantial portion of the revenues. A report suggest that Zari artisans with small businesses could not secure loans from the bank under the ODOP program due to their lack of financial education. (Mishra, 2021) For the Zari Zardozi craftspeople of Bareilly, poverty and economic instability are sustained by this unequal power dynamic.(Daynee & Priye, 2021)

Gaps in technology and skills: One of the main issues facing the Zari Zardozi craft in Bareilly is the craftsmen's restricted access to modernization and uptake of new technologies. (Sonkar et al., 2025) A lot of craftspeople are unable to afford to buy expensive equipment that could boost their output and general productivity. The industry's overall lack of organization also adds to the sluggish adoption of contemporary methods. (Gupta, 2023) This technical divide severely reduces the artisans' output, makes it more difficult for them to compete with machine-based production techniques, and makes it more difficult for them to adjust to the constantly shifting demands of modern design.

Government Policies and Support: Despite the existence of various government schemes and policies intended to support the handicraft sector, Zari Zardozi artisans in Bareilly often express concerns about their ineffectiveness and limited accessibility. Many artisans claim that the benefits of these schemes are not reaching them on the ground, and initiatives like the 'Zari Card Health Benefit Scheme' have artisans regarding the availability of these schemes, often due to illiteracy and insufficient information, further hinders their ability to access potential benefits.(Anwar, 2021) It is also suggested that government programs help already established large businesses while artisans and small businesses gets mocked by the bureaucratic process. (Mishra, 2021) There is a prevailing sentiment among artisans of a perceived lack of proactive and effective support from government authorities towards their craft, with some believing that this apathy has significantly contributed to the industry's current predicament

Bad Working Conditions: Zari Zardozi craftspeople frequently labor in claustrophobic, dimly lighted, and unclean environments, which can result in respiratory disorders, eye strain, and back pain (Agarwal, 2016). Many workplaces' inadequate ventilation and safety precautions make these health hazards even worse (Kohli, 2020).

Social and Cultural Factors: The Zari Zardozi craft in Bareilly is also affected by certain social and cultural factors. The declining economic status of artisans has unfortunately led to a loss of respect and social standing within the community, with reports indicating that people are becoming hesitant to marry their daughters into families of Zari Karigars due to their poor financial condition. This erosion of social prestige could further discourage younger generations from pursuing the craft, potentially exacerbating the existing skill gap and threatening the future of this traditional art form. Interestingly, while the craft was traditionally dominated by Muslim artisans, there is now an increasing participation of individuals from all castes and religions in Zari Zardozi work in Bareilly. (Mittal 2022) However, this shift is often primarily driven by poverty and a lack of other viable economic opportunities in the region, rather than by a deep passion for the craft itself. While this broader participation might seem positive in terms of employment, there are concerns that it could potentially lead to a compromise in the quality and artistry of the work if the focus shifts solely towards mass production for meager earnings. Furthermore, the traditional gender roles within the Zari Zardozi craft are also undergoing a transformation. (Google arts & Culture, nd) While historically, men primarily engaged in commercial production, with women occasionally working on items for their own personal use, there has been a significant rise in the number of women joining the commercial workforce in Bareilly, often working from their homes. This changing dynamic presents both an opportunity for women's economic empowerment and a potential challenge in ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to necessary training and resources for these home-based female artisans.

This drastic decline across all these critical metrics unequivocally points to a deep-seated and systemic crisis within Bareilly's Zari Zardozi industry, posing a significant threat to its long-term viability. The magnitude of this downturn suggests that the challenges are not merely temporary setbacks but rather fundamental issues that are causing a rapid and widespread collapse of the sector, compelling artisans to abandon their traditional skills in search of more sustainable means of survival.

8. CONCLUSION

Zari-Zardozi, a centuries-old tradition rooted in Bareilly, is both a cultural treasure and an economic asset. Despite its historical grandeur and skilled artisan base, the craft today faces existential threats from mechanization, inadequate government outreach, financial hardship, and socio-cultural neglect. This paper concludes that revitalization requires an integrated approach—preserving traditional knowledge while enabling artisans through technology, policy support, and fair trade practices. Strengthening artisan livelihoods is essential not just for economic growth, but for sustaining India's living heritage.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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