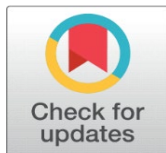
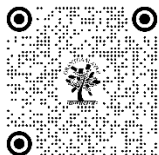


HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND PROSPECTS OF ZARDOZI AND BEADWORK BATUAS OF BHOPAL, MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

The word '*Batua*' comes from Hindi language, and it means a small bag of leather or cloth which has partitions on its inner side. One such craft related to the humble *batua* is the '*Batua*- making' craft of Bhopal. A '*Bhopali batua*' is a small purse adorned with *zardozi* and bead work and was used for keeping *paan* (beetle leaves), *laung* (cloves), *itar* (perfume) and other fragrant material by the royals and subsequently by the locals of Bhopal. Legends associate the development of *batua* making craft at Bhopal to the *begums* of Bhopal. A series of steps are taken to complete *batuas* and involve embroiderers, tailors, and helpers. These are delicately adorned with *zardozi*, bead work or a combination of both. The steps include layout, design transfer, embroidery, setting and stitching, putting the *dori* and finishing. *Bhopali batua*, *zardozi* and *beadwork* embody the cultural heritage and tradition of Bhopal. In olden times Bhopal was a prominent *Zardozi* center along with Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow etc. and till date Bhopal has a vast pool of *zardozi* and *batua* artisans. Patronized by the *begums* of Bhopal, *batua* making and *zardozi* were introduced by the *begums* in Bhopal as a source of income for womenfolk. Even today, these crafts can serve as a potential aid in government efforts for women empowerment and combating unemployment. However, lack of documentation and scholarly attention is posing barriers in the implementation of welfare and training policies. The present study is aimed at exploring the various aspects of *zardozi* and *batua* making for its sustainability and livelihood generation through it. The study is based on a mixed methods approach bordering more towards a qualitative study as the area of research is unexplored and lacks the presence of secondary data. Primary data were collected through unstructured interviews and focus group discussion. The present study aims to explore and document the traditional *zardozi* and beadwork *batuas* of Bhopal for its documentation and sustainability.

Keywords: Bead Work, Begums of Bhopal, Bhopal, Bhopali Batua, Oral Traditions, Zardozi



1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Indian society has a long history of artistic and cultural expression. [Porwal \(2018\)](#). Traditional textiles and handicrafts constitute distinctive symbols of culture and tradition of any place. They are much more than a livelihood source or aesthetic object. They also embody the cultural heritage and hence must be preserved, studied, and popularized. Referring to [Modathi and Karolia \(2023\)](#) has quoted in her study that human life has been deeply impacted by textiles and these have played a

significant role in human lives right from being a source of personal expression to artistic reflections to exploited human labor. [Modathi and Karolia \(2023\)](#)

India has a rich tradition of hand woven and handcrafted textiles. It is home to one of the most vibrant and distinct craft traditions in the world. [Naik \(1996\)](#), [Kumari \(2021\)](#) Some of these have been researched and well documented while many still need to be carefully studied and archived. Most of these survive as oral traditions which are passed down verbally from one generation to another and seldom have a formal record. Thus, it becomes even more important to document these crafts otherwise these may be lost with time. In fact, quite a few crafts of India are on the verge of extinction and in the languishing category, such as *Mendh* printing of Rajasthan, *Rogan* printing of Gujarat and so on and so forth.

One such craft is the ‘*Batua*- Making’ craft of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The small *batuas* serve as an important link to the identity of Bhopal and reflect Bhopal’s culture and traditions. [Suri \(2016\)](#). In fact, the *Bhopali batuas* depict the mingling of two cultures: the early tribal culture and the subsequent *Nawabi* culture. www.directcreate.com. (n.d.)

Bhopal, the capital of the central Indian state Madhya Pradesh, is also known as the city of lakes. It’s called a city of heritage and is famous for its art, culture, and monuments. [Khan \(2004\)](#) Apart from other things, Bhopal was and is still known to be one of the centers of *zardozi* embroidery and is renowned for its delicately adorned ‘*Bhopali Batuas*’. [Bhandari \(2015\)](#)

The face or the outside of the *batuas* is adorned with *zardozi* or beadwork or a combination of both, thus making it an attractive accessory or souvenir. It has both functional as well as an aesthetic appeal to it.

Figure 1



Figure 1 a. Bead Work *Batuas* of Bhopal, **b.** *Zardozi Batua* of Bhopal.

Traditionally, *zardozi* was done on curtains, canopies, cushions, table covers, royal attires etc. In Bhopal though, it is the *batua* that has been by far the most favorite medium of creativity for the local artisans. [Dikshit \(1961\)](#) Even today *Bhopali batuas* are much in demand and tourists visiting the city definitely buy them as souvenirs and gifts for their friends and family. Bhopal has been and still is famous for its *batuas* which is evident from a local couplet:

**“Char cheez taufie Bhopal
Batwa, Gutka, Chuneti aur Roomal”**

(Four things are worth taking as presents from Bhopal: a *batua* (small purse), *gutka* (fragrant mixture of cloves, areca nut, rose petals, cardamoms), *chuneti* (a tiny box used for keeping lime) and a handkerchief.)

A large number of artisans, especially home-based women artisans in Bhopal are engaged in this craft as it helps them in earning an extra income and also satisfies their creative instincts. It also gives the women artisans a liberty to earn an additional income from within the confinement of their homes while simultaneously managing their household duties. However, this has also made them prone to a host of issues such as not having a direct customer connection, low wages, dual workload of home and work.

Today there is a strong need for the artist to adapt their thoughts and ideas to meet the contemporary demands. If the artist can understand the customers' needs numerous future possibilities are available and this is the only way to survive in the present times. [Porwal \(2020\)](#)

Moreover, there is a lack of documentation and scholarly attention on the zardozi embroidery and batuas of Bhopal which are a livelihood source of the vast pool of embroiderers of Bhopal. As a result, the continuity of this beautiful craft is also threatened.

Thus, the researchers got inspired to conduct research on the *batua* making craft of Bhopal which was once considered as the only industrial art worth mentioning from the state (Gazetteer of Bhopal) and to document it for its promotion and sustainability. The designs and details of the processes would serve as an important database not just for students and academicians but also for the artisans, trainers, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Thus, an exploratory study was conducted with the objectives of documenting the origin of the *Bhopali batuas* and to delineate the tools, techniques, materials, and motifs of the same.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative and included library research such as analysis of textual and visual information coupled with field visits and interactions with the artisans. Interviews, group discussions along with extensive desk research were conducted for the study. It was planned as an endeavor towards giving holistic information about *Bhopali batuas*.

3. HISTORY

The historical account of *Batua*-making is not well documented and not much data is available. There are many legends associated with the craft and one of the legends has it that in the olden days there was a tradition of eating beetle leaves and a fragrant mixture of cardamom, cloves, lime, betel nut (called *chhaliya* in local language) etc. in Bhopal. It is said that *batuas* came into existence to keep these intact and also these would be helpful in carrying the beetle leaves while travelling. The *batuas* in olden times not only had inner compartments but also had a tiny silver box called *chuneti* attached to them for keeping lime (*chuna* in hindi). It also had small tools for taking out lime, *gutkha* etc.

It is also said that it was Qudsiya Begum, the first of the four consecutive women rulers of Bhopal, who got these made for the first time from a local jeweler. Even today, one can see *batuas* of the royal family kept in the state museum and *Golghar* museum (the erstwhile secretariat) from the times of *begums*.

In the olden times there was a strong tradition of gifting and honoring the visitors and dignitaries of the state with gifts and *paan* in Bhopal state which finds a mention in the books written by the *begums* of Bhopal. Probably *batuas* came into existence for these purposes. One such richly adorned *teen khana* (three division) *batua* and a tea cozy was given as a diplomatic gift to one of the British Commander in Chiefs of India by Her Highness *Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum*, the then ruler of Bhopal State. [Woolley and Wallis. \(n.d.\)](#)

Figure 2



Figure 2 Bhopali Batuas with Ornate Chuneti, Tassels, Beadwork Surahi (Tassels).
Source [deccanherald.com](#)

Figure 3



Figure 3 Bhopali Batuas from the Antique Personal Collection.

Figure 4



Figure 4 One Hundred and Twenty-Year-Old (Approximately) Traditional Bhopali Tea Cozy and Batua Gifted by Begum Sultan Jahan to the then Commander in Chief of India.
Source [www.woolleyandwallis.co.uk](#)

The District Gazetteer (1968) mentions zari work as an old-time industry in Madhya Pradesh and there is also a mention of a zari co-operative with a membership of 32 ladies engaged in zari work.

Nawab Sikander Begum, in 1853, was instrumental in opening up of a school where ladies of Bhopal were given training in various handicrafts including embroidery. This was specially done to give a decent source of livelihood to women who were restricted to their households due to purdah system. [Ali \(1981\)](#)

Figure 5



Figure 5 a. Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal, G.C.S.I; Bourne and Shepherd, **b.** Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum attending Delhi Darbar, 1911.

Source The Friday Times.

With time these *batuas* became a fashion statement as well as a medium of expression for the *zardozi* artisans. The *batuas* of the royals and higher echelons were made with opulent fabrics such as *tanchoi*, *kumkhwab*, (a type of silk brocade fabric), velvets, silks, satins, and other rich fabrics. The *batuas* were essentially semi-circular in shape and had compartments. Some of the *batuas* had four compartments and were called *char-khana* having one compartment each for gutkha (mouth freshner), laung(clove), elaichi(cardamom) and supari (areca nut). The *batuas* for currency and coins were larger in size and had three compartments, thus being called *teen-khana*. These were embroidered with precious stones, sequins, metallic discs, beads, metallic threads of various kinds. The designs had a Persian influence. Golden *dori*(drawstrings) with ornate tassels were used to fasten the *batua* for keeping the belongings secure. Traditionally the drawstrings were very ornate but nowadays mostly simple lace or cord fasteners are used to fasten these.

Eventually it became a symbol of status and became the pride of Bhopal. As time passed new designs and variety were added to the humble *Bhopali batua* and it became an icon of Bhopal's artisans and their workmanship.

In 1949 Bhopal State was merged with India marking the end of the state and subsequently the royal patronage to arts and crafts also came to an end. The artisans had to look for newer markets and avenues for their livelihoods and craft. This led to artisans designing and selling the *batuas* for common people in the market. The quality and workmanship also showed a marked downfall.

Slowly people started using these *batuas* for keeping money, cosmetics, and currency. Ladies started using these as a fashion accessory in weddings, functions,

and get together. With increased demand the variety in batuas also increased. The stylish batuas which were used to carry some loose change, a small bottle of *itra* or incense and along with it two wrapped *paans* are now a part of trousseau, festive attires, and runways. [Suri \(2016\)](#)

Batua making is a traditional craft practiced till date in the city of Bhopal though there has been a steady decline in the artisans as well as the products due to various market influences. [Bhopali Batua. \(n.d.\)](#) It's a unique *Bhopali* craft which is an amalgamation of traditional *zardozi*, beadwork and *patwa* craft.

It takes around one month to manufacture just three to four purses and requires a lot of precision and skill. [Bhopali Batua \(2017\)](#) *Batuas* come in all price ranges from simple to very ornate. The basic ones are made of plain brocade, satin or velvet and can cost around 250-400 Rs depending upon the quality of the fabric. The more opulent ones have *zari (jari)* or bead work on them and can cost upto Rs 3000 depending upon the quality of workmanship and material. This includes intricate needle-work with fine gold or silver thread.

Owing to a demand for variety these are now made in different shapes and sizes. These *batuas* have a lot of charm and attraction even today and make a great fashion accessory with traditional attires.

4. TOOLS AND MATERIAL

The main equipment required for *batua* making is *adda* or *karchob* (frame). It keeps the fabric to be embroidered under tension and is made by skilled carpenters locally. *Thapa* (pedestal) is a tool used for making decorative drawstrings for the *batua* and *pitta* is a wooden hammer for flattening the embroidery to give it a finished look. An assortment of metallic threads (*kalabattu*), beads (*moti*), pipes (*katdana*) and sequins (*sitara*), flat discs (*salma*) are also used to embroider the design. Apart from this butter paper, kerosene, zinc powder, indigo is used for tracing the embroidery designs onto the fabric.

5. PROCESS AND PRODUCTS

A series of steps are taken to complete batuas and involve embroiderers, tailors, and helpers. Since it involves so many people, it is a potential source of livelihood for women, unemployed youth, and other marginalized sections of the society too.

5.1. MOUNTING OF THE FABRIC

The first step is mounting the fabric tightly on the *adda* or *karchob* (wooden frame). The *adda* can be made of metal as well as wood and its size depend on the article to be embroidered. The *adda* keeps the fabric under required tension thus helping in smooth embroidery. The artisan sits on the floor behind the *adda*.

5.2. LAYOUT

First a number of *batuas* are drawn on the fabric to be embroidered. Both the front and the back of the *batua* are drawn on the fabric with the help of tailor's chalk.

5.3. TRANSFER OF DESIGN ONTO THE FABRIC

Next, the design to be embroidered is drawn on a paper and transferred to a butter paper. The design on the butter paper is then pierced with a needle. Next the

pattern is transferred on the fabric by applying a solution. This solution consists of kerosene with chalk powder/zinc powder for dark-colored fabrics and kerosene and indigo for light-colored fabrics. The solution passes through the holes replicating the exact design to be embroidered on the fabric.

Figure 6



Figure 6 a. Kerosene Solution and Cloth Dauber, **b.** Tracing/Transferring the Design on Fabric.

5.4. EMBROIDERING

Once the mounting of fabric and tracing is complete, embroidery is done on the fabric. For this the embroiderer sits on the floor with his legs cross-legged. The needle used for embroidery can be a simple embroidery needle or a hook shaped needle called *aari* (awl). Traditionally zardozi and beadwork were done with hand needles but nowadays these are executed with *aari* as it helps in faster work. The *aari* needle is a crochet like hook fitted on a wooden stick and greatly enhances the speed of embroidery work.

Figure 7



Figure 7 Mounted Fabric Being Embroidered with an Aari (Hooked Needle).

Along with thread an assortment of pipes, beads, sequins, and crystals are used to make the design more attractive. Traditionally semi-precious stones and beads were used which have long been replaced by artificial sequins, metal discs and plastic beads. The real *zari* has now been replaced with tested *zari*.

5.5. STITCHES AND MOTIFS

A repertoire of stitches such as couching, chain stitch, herringbone, stem stitch, satin stitch, bullion stitch is employed for embroidering. The motifs can also be padded prior to the embroidery giving it a raised effect.

5.5.1. MOTIFS

The traditional motifs embroidered on a batua had a mughal influence and mainly included *paan* (inspired from betel leaf), *phool* (floral motifs), *patti* (leaf) of various kinds. Rarely can peacocks also be seen on some tea cosies and batuas.

Apart from zardozi the batuas are also adorned with beads of various sizes called *pot* (small circular beads), *katdana* (cylindrical beads cut in smaller sizes) and *nalki* (long cylindrical beads).

Figure 8



Figure 8 Semi-Finished Bhopali Batua in Velvet Fabric with Bead-Work, A Simple Bhopali Batua.

The beadwork craft on the batuas can be linked to the early tribal culture, which made beautiful ornaments from wood, shells, metal, ivory, and bones. Later this art caught the eyes of the begums. Under the patronage of the begums the traditional skill of beadwork was later influenced by Persian art. [Bhopali Batua. \(n.d.\)](#)

Artisans also opine that beadwork is less time consuming as compared to Zardozi and hence is preferred nowadays.

The designs have changed with modern influences and it's not uncommon to find geometric and animal motifs adorning the *batuas* now.

Figure 9



Figure 9 Motif and Stitches Employed in Zardozi Batuas.

5.6. SETTING OF THE BATUA

After the embroidery is complete fabric is given to the tailor who stitches it in the desired shape and does the final fitting. Sometimes the embroiderer may themselves stitch and finish the batua too. Drawstrings with decorative tassels are attached to it, according to the requirements. [Baral and Manasa \(n.d.\)](#)

The *dori* is generally made with matching cotton thread or metallic thread on a *thapa* (pedestal). The decorative ends of the *dori* are called *phundas*. *Phundas* are

coniform ends of the *dori* and are made by wrapping a cotton thread very tightly and closely on the ends of the *dori* to make it coniform. This coniform part of the *phunda* is called *surahi* in local language. The *dori* is finished by wrapping the *surahi* with thin metallic wire called *kalabattu*. In place of *kalabattu*, tiny beads can also be wrapped with the help of a thread. It takes around 15 minutes to complete the *dori* with *phunda* and *surahi*. In the end the *dori* is put inside the *batua* and helps in opening and closing of the *batua*. [Dikshit \(1961\)](#).

5.5. PRICING

The price of a finished *batua* is decided by its size, intricacy of work, the base material and can range anywhere between 150 Rs to 2000 Rs.

6. PRESENT STATUS

Once a prerogative of the royalty, the art now finds connoisseurs in people from all walks of life. Apart from *batuas* artisans also make tea cozy. Today, the traces of the craft can also be found in other fashion accessories such as saree pins, belts, and other fashion products such as dress materials, wall hangings, lampshades, bags, and other decorative items. [Bhopali Batua. \(n.d.\)](#)

There have been numerous transformations in the way craft and its trade is practiced now. Some of the changes have been positive but largely these have affected the artisan population negatively. These changes have specially been heavy for the home-based women artisans.

Today *bhopali batuas* are made in all shapes and sizes with different kinds of fabrics and material. The traditional real *zari* and pearls have long been replaced by artificial *zari*, sequins and synthetic fabrics. What has not changed are the deftness and the passion with which the artisans still create these beautiful works of art. The artisans still make the *batuas* with the same zeal and pride.

Figure 10



Figure 10 A Bhopali Batua Shop in the Old City of Bhopal.

One must not confuse between *batua* and *Bhopali* purse. *Batua* is essentially a small semi spherical shaped purse with beads & stars stitched on its front side only. Whereas *Bhopali* purses are modern designed differently shaped large and small sized with bead/Pot work all over. These purses are gifted by localities to their friends and relatives visiting the city, as a symbol of the city of lakes. [Prasad \(2010\)](#)

Bhopal is still famous for its *batuas* though cheaper machine embroidered fabrics have become a threat to its existence. In the absence of Royal patronage (which is long gone), the artists were left on their own to fend for business and clients. There is a decline in the workmanship and quality of products. [Ranjan \(2009\)](#) This can be attributed to various factors such as decline in royal patronage, change in the customers' taste and preference, need of skill up gradation of artisans, artisans' lack of market connect. [Bhopal: Experts a Dying Breed, Low Wages Keep New Artisans Away. \(2019\).](#)

Figure 11



Figure 11 a. A Homebased Women Artisan Working on her Adda, **b.** Focus Group Discussion with Zardozi and Batua Artisans of Bhopal.

A focus group discussion was carried out to understand the issues and challenges of artisans. 9 respondents were chosen purposively. Firoza, a 61-year-old zardozi artisan turned zardozi trainer revealed that though there are many schemes and programmes, but the benefits are not reaching the needy. Uzma, a homebased batua artisan, was of the opinion that lack of education and household responsibilities act as a barrier for the women artisans. She also opined that training centres should be closer to homes and apart from training they should also provide information about various government schemes to artisans. Huma Khan, a state awardee and master craftsmen, has been engaged in zardozi embroidery and batua making since a tender age of 14 years. She says that lack of steady income and continuous work are the biggest hurdle in the continuity of the craft. She further revealed that despite undergoing training there is not much work available which leads to frustration in artisans. As revealed by Adnan Ali, another zardozi and batua artisan, it is difficult to encash the government welfare scheme as the process is very time consuming and work is adversely affected in making repeated rounds of government offices. Razia, 36 years and mother of three children, works as a part-time zardozi artisan from her home. Her husband works as mechanic and brings home about 15,000 Rs. a month which is not sufficient for the family's needs. They also have to send money back home to their old parents who stay in a nearby village and don't want to shift to the city in their last days. Thus, Razia started taking orders for batua making at home to support her family. Many other ladies in her locality also take orders for zardozi and beadwork batuas which are Bhopal's identity right from the days of Begums' rule. Educated only till 10th she is not able to find decent work and needs to be at home for taking care of her children. Thus, she is forced to work for meagre payments. She is not savvy with social media and banking also

which further restricts her entrepreneurial capabilities also. She earns around 4000 Rs from her zardozi and bead work embroidery which is mostly spent in supporting her family's requirements.

6.1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE PRESENT-DAY ARTISANS

Zardozi artisans in Bhopal in the present times are facing difficulties in continuing the craft as it is a seasonal employment and wages are low. Most of the male artisans have started shifting to comparatively better paying jobs such as driving, office jobs, grocery shops and younger generation is also unwilling to continue with the traditional craft as it is laborious and doesn't pay well.

6.2. EFFORTS FOR SUSTENANCE OF THE ZARDOZI EMBROIDERY OF BHOPAL

Local designers and connoisseurs have taken a note of this and are making efforts to revive this beautiful craft. Government policies and training programmes such as *USTAAD* (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Arts/Crafts for Development) and *SAMARTH* (Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector) have also been introduced to preserve and popularize the craft of Batua making.

7. PROSPECTS

Today *batuas* make a great accessory and have been in vogue since the time of the begums. They are an ideal choice for rounding off the traditional look for weddings, parties or other such festive occasions and come in numerous stunning and elegant designs. Some are very tiny, and some are very spacious to carry all belongings.

Increased disposable incomes and more occasions for dressing up have created a huge demand for the *batuas*.

Figure 12



Figure 12 Celebrities with Batuas and Potli Bags.

Apart from the local market, there is a huge demand for traditional products in other countries owing to an increasing NRI population. E-commerce has made it convenient for the artisans to reach out to various corners of the world and collaborate with retailers. Also, there has been an increased focus on sustainability in fashion which has brought back the use of traditional craft items.

However, the artisans not only need to be skilled in their craft, but they also need to be well versed with computers, internet and branding of their craft. The artisans require handholding for product development as per the current demands and also for marketing their products.

8. CONCLUSION

Every aspect of our life is intertwined and woven with the richness of Indian Textiles. Local crafts are interlinked with the identity, emotions and livelihood of the artisan communities who practice them. [Karolia \(2019\)](#). They are an important source of sustainable livelihoods as well as export earnings. Thus, there is a need for continuous and focused scholarly efforts on the realm of traditional crafts and textiles.

Bhopali batua is also one such traditional craft in need of preservation and promotion as it is linked to the cultural identity and heritage. Patronized by the erstwhile *begums*, these were made with high quality raw material and fine workmanship. Involving a series of steps from mounting and tracing to embroidery and finishing, these were a source of livelihood as well as pride for many artisans and their families. Today however it needs a facelift and requires urgent attention in terms of artisan training, creation of market linkages and promotion.

Traditional arts and crafts can also serve as a potential aid in government efforts for women empowerment and combating unemployment. *Bhopali batua, zardozi and beadwork* of Bhopal can serve these purposes for the artisan community of Bhopal and hence require in depth study and further research.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTIONS

AK and MS were responsible for the overall framework and research. AK and MS played an important role in understanding the relevance of Bhopali batua as a part of textiles and traditional heritage and showcasing it as an important aspect in the contemporary textile crafts and fashion.

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