



# Types of Zari used for Brocade Weaving

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The term *zari* is synonymous with textiles having elaborate and rich patterns. Since ancient times, the fascination of people with brocade and zardozi is unmatched. Indian craftsmen were pioneer in producing intricate patterns with use of precious metal threads made of gold and silver. This metal thread was known as *zari* which has its origin in the Persian term *zar* meaning gold. Originally *zari* was made of pure silver gilded with gold. Gradually, due to increasing cost of gold and silver and invention of newer and faster methods of production, changes in the manufacturing process occurred. Artisans started using copper instead of pure silver. Techniques like lacquering, electroplating were being used for production of *zari*. The present study discusses the developments and innovations in the *zari* manufacturing industry in India over time and the various types of *zari* that are produced at present.

## Methodology

The *zari* industry in India is majorly situated in Surat and Banaras. These two centers cater to the requirements of the domestic market as well as international market for *zari*. Thus, field study was carried out in these two areas in order to understand the historical background, organization of industry and the manufacturing process of *zari*. Data collection was done using interviews and observation. Sample selection was purposive; artisans involved in *zari* manufacturing were selected for interviews.

It was observed that the *zari* making industry exists majorly as a household industry. The industry works through a structure of many decentralised units which are involved in carrying out either one or two processes involved in manufacturing of *zari*. Availability of space and capital for investment are the main factors which affect the type of unit one runs. Few composite units (family business) are also present. Since the *zari* making process is fully mechanised now, the traditional *zari* makers or the artisans are now either the owners of the units, traders or the workers in the units. Three different types of *zari* are manufactured: Real *zari*, Imitation *zari* and Metallic *zari*. Attempts were made to include respondents from all the facets of the industry and fifteen units were visited. Data was collected from the people who were available and willing to share information with the investigator. Table no. 1 gives the detail of units selected as the sample.

- **Composite unit:** A unit where all the processes of *zari* manufacturing are carried out under one roof. The units studied under this category were run by families, which have been in the business of *zari* manufacturing for past two to three generations. The owner of the unit knows the process of *zari* manufacturing and has workers under him who operate the machines and are given fixed wages.

Table No. 1

Category	Place	Type of zari produced	Sample size
Composite unit	Banaras	Real silver zari	2
		Imitation zari	2
	Surat	Imitation zari	1
Decentralised unit	Surat	Metallic zari	5
	Banaras	Metallic zari	2
Household unit	Surat	Imitation zari	2
	Banaras	Imitation zari	1
Total			15

- **Decentralised unit:** A unit, which specialises in carrying out specific steps in manufacturing of zari (for instance, coating of metallized sheet). But the production of such units is much higher than a household unit. Generally, the zari manufacturing industry works on a network of these units. Each unit owns specialised machines depending upon the space availability and the capital invested. Workers are employed who are paid according to the amount of work done.
- **Household unit:** A unit, which is operated in a house by the members of the family. The number and type of machines owned by a household unit is affected by the availability of space and money. Work is shared by the members of the family and profit is also shared by all. Both men and women are involved in running of a household unit.

### Results and Discussions

**Historical Background:** Interviews with some of the older members of artisan community involved in zari manufacturing revealed some interesting facts about the history of this art. The art of gold and silver wire making has existed in India since the Vedic period. References to various articles having zari work are mentioned in the Vedic texts like RigVeda and mythological texts like Ramanaya and Mahabharata, thus, making this craft almost 3000-4000 thousand years old. During the interviews, it was suggested by one of the respondents that the first attempt to attach the precious metals on the textiles was through sticking pieces of metal to the cloth using some kind of adhesive material. Later the creative mind of man must have thought of converting the metal into wire and weave it into the fabric. Consequently after many attempts zari and the process of making zari would have been developed. As mentioned in the texts by B.C. Mohanty and George C.M. Birdwood, Delhi, Lahore and Surat were the major centers for manufacturing of zari during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Surat was an important port for export of various Indian handicrafts and the art of zari making thrived here because of this reason. Presently, Surat and Banaras are the main zari producing centers in India. Zari manufacturing industry in Surat contributes largely to the economy of the place and is preceded by textiles industry and diamond industry.

**Technique:** Traditionally zari was made using pure silver gilded with gold. The complete process was carried out by hands. It was a time consuming and laborious process involving higher degree of skills of the craftsman. According to a senior respondent whose family has been working in this field since last three generations, a major revolution occurred in the zari making process with the invention of electroplating during early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This facilitated the use of other metals as the base for gilding instead of silver. Increase in cost of precious metals also motivated the artisans to shift to other metals like copper to be used for manufacturing of zari. In order to reduce the cost of zari, mixing of copper in silver started happening. It is believed that this practice started in Surat around early 1930s and as a result the zari manufacturing units in Banaras suffered a loss. The amount of copper used started increasing slowly and finally reached to 97-98%, which is sold as real zari at present. With the introduction of electricity in India during early 1900s, the process of zari making was mechanized step by step. Over the next few years machines were developed for almost all the processes and mechanized completely by 1930s.

This reduced both the cost and the time consumed involved in the process. Changes were also seen in the types of zari produced. Use of copper as the base metal, use of lacquer for coating and use of metallized sheets started which resulted in different products. Variations in composition of metals, type of core yarn used, type of lacquer used for coating, etc. affected the cost and quality of the final product. During the field visit to Banaras, it was found that there are only 1-2 units which make pure silver zari only on order. Such a practice is not prevalent in Surat which is known for production of imitation zari and metallic zari.

**Types of Zari:** Majorly three distinct types of zari are produced at present. They are:

- **Real zari/Pure zari:** It was traditionally used and was made up of pure silver plated with gold along with core of either cotton or silk. At present it is manufactured in Banaras but only on order. (Figure 1)
- **Imitation zari:** In literal terms, imitation zari (Figure 2) means simulated or fake zari. This type of zari is the one where copper serves as the main base metal, which is coated using silver, gold or lacquer. This is a broad category which covers two different types but some people classify them separately:
  - **Tested gold zari:** In this type instead of silver, copper is used and it is gilded with gold. The copper has 2-3% silver content in it.
  - **Powder zari:** In this zari copper is coated with 2-4% silver. Instead of gold plating, it is coated with lacquer to give golden colour.



Figure 1: Real zari/Pure zari

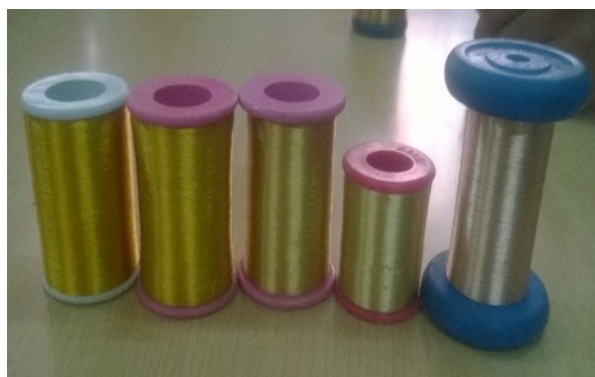


Figure 2: Different shades of imitation zari

The imitation zari completely took over the market of real zari during mid-twentieth century. This is the most widely used zari at present for weaving of traditional handloom products.

- **Metallic zari/Plastic zari:** This type of zari is purely artificial in which fused plastic is coated with metal like aluminum. This metallized sheet is dyed in various colours according to the requirements and converted into thin tapes, which are finally wound on a core of polyester, viscose or nylon to make the final product. (Figure 3)



Figure 3: Different shades of plastic zari

**Manufacturing Process:** The following flowcharts give a glance at the steps involved in manufacturing techniques for different types of zari: (Figure 4, 5 and 6)

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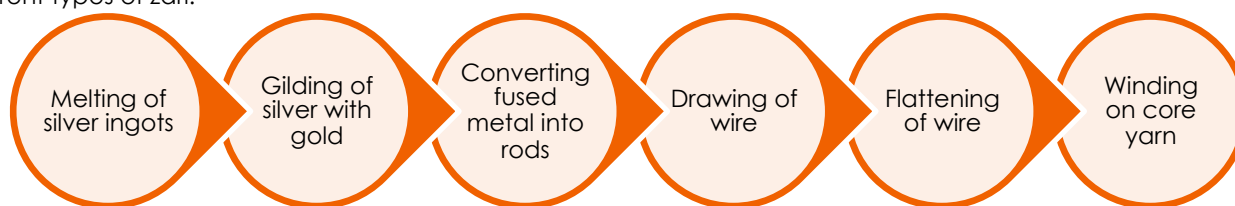


Figure 4 :Traditional process for real zari



Figure 5 : Manufacturing process of imitation zari

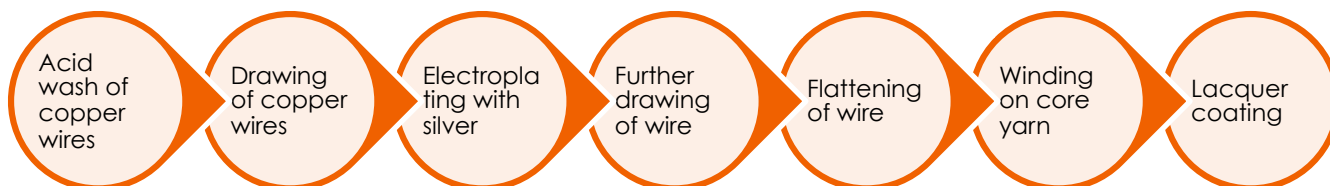


Figure 6: Manufacturing process of metallic zari

The costing of different types of zari varied depending upon the raw materials used. The price of zari, which is made using real gold, silver and copper depends on the rate of respective metal in the market and it is sold by weight. In case of metallic zari, cost is determined by the quality of coating done on it, whether it is dye-guarantee or non-dye guarantee, type of core yarn used, etc. As per the respondents the price of zari ranges from Rs.400/- per kg to Rs.40,000/- per kg (approximately).

## Conclusion

The market is flooded with brocade saris ranging from Rs. 2500/- to Rs. 25,000/- per sari. But most of the consumers are not aware about the type of zari being used in them. All the saris have real zari in them according to the sellers. The consumers prefer cheaper goods which gives a boost to the use of plastic zari in weaving. It is cheaper and does not tarnish. People nowadays have started believing in the concept of use and throw instead of preserving a textile as a family heirloom and this has resulted in increased use of plastic zari and imitation zari at present. The manufacturers are constantly involved in carrying out innovations and experiment with newer types of zari in order to increase the aesthetics and value of the final product. Changes are generally made in terms of winding of core and sheath, type of core yarn used and colours of zari produced. For instance, a new type of zari has been developed using the flattened metal wire as the core and the winding is loosely done using cotton, silk, viscose, nylon or polyester. It forms a zigzag pattern on the flattened wire and when the final product is dyed, the textile fiber used for winding takes up the colour and gives a good visual effect.

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## About the Author

DivyaSinghal, presently a Ph.D. scholar at University of Delhi has completed her post-graduation in Fabric and Apparel Science from Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi. She is a Gold Medalist and has been a meritorious student. She has a passion for textiles and believes in advancement with technology along with the upliftment of traditional crafts. The area of her doctorate study is conservation of brocaded textiles in museums. She has worked as an Assistant Professor at Lady Irwin College for one and a half years before opting for further studies. Her M.Sc. dissertation was in the area of her keen interest, i.e., conservation of textiles. Her supervisor for Ph.D. is Dr. Simmi Bhagat, Associate Professor in the dept. of Fabric and Apparel Science, Lady Irwin College, has been teaching undergraduate and post-graduate courses for the past 20 years. Her areas of specialization include Traditional Textiles, Community Outreach Program, Fashion Illustration and Textile Conservation.