

Available online @ <https://jjem.jnnce.ac.in>
<https://www.doi.org/10.37314/JJEM.SP0401>
Indexed in International Scientific Indexing (ISI)
Impact factor: 1.395 for 2021-22
Published on: 31 May 2025

Goldsmithing through the Ages- Evolution, Opportunities and Challenges

Mr. Sathish V ¹, Prof. S. Venkatesh²

^{1,2*} Kuvempu University, Jnana Sahyadri, Shankaraghatta.

sathishpalankar@gmail.com, drvenki@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

Yellow metal popularly known as Gold has its own impact on the lives of Indians historically, traditionally, economically and emotionally. Goldsmiths are the personnel engaged in goldsmithing work from ages. Goldsmiths convert the gold into ornaments with their excellent artisanal craftsmanship. There has been a tremendous shift in the field of goldsmithing and also in the lifestyle of goldsmiths. Present market dynamics has totally changed the direction of many industries and gold industry is no way excluded from it. Traditional method of craftsmanship have taken totally a different direction because of modernization and the globalization. Gold industry is one such which comes under both organized and unorganized sector. Goldsmithing has raised significantly over the ages. Despite its rich legacy and heritage goldsmiths are facing lot of challenges along with the opportunities. Availability of alternate metals, global economic changes has given a threat to the traditional artisans. In this back drop, this paper made an attempt to understand conditions of goldsmiths, changes that has taken place in goldsmithing techniques, the opportunities and challenges that the goldsmiths are encountering.

Key Words: Goldsmithing, Unorganized, Artisans, Goldsmith

1. Introduction

Goldsmiths are the metal workers who are highly skilled and specialized work with highest devotion and dedication. They convert gold metal into beautiful artistic work with the help of their craftsmanship and experience which was inherited to them from their ancestors. Goldsmithing was caste and community based but today because of globalization and modernization goldsmithing activity has crossed the traditional borders. Gold industry is comprised of both organized and unorganized sector. Multinational companies have modernized the ornaments manufacturing process by adopting the

technologies and machineries on the other hand traditional artisans use to depend much on the manual process through different tools and techniques. India is being one of the largest importer of the gold has made significant influence towards the economy and Indian gems and jewels sector has got all growth potential. Indian is one of the largest diamond polishing center in the world and this is because of availability of skilled and cheap labour force. Indian gems and jewels sector is one of the largest foreign exchange earner and has created ample of job opportunities which in turn leads to strong economy.

Most of the people are blissfully unaware that the goldsmith workers who are manufacturing the jewellery maybe doing so at the cost of their health. Commonly used chemicals during jewellery making are cyanide, lead, zinc, cadmium, palladium, iridium, sulphuric acid, nitric acid, chalk moulds containing high percentage of silica, etc. (Choudhari, 2014). Despite their importance and significant contribution, goldsmiths are encountering lot of problems.

2. Research Gap

After reviewing the available literature on goldsmiths and goldsmithing it has been noticed that, considerable amount of work has not been conducted on the changes in working pattern of goldsmiths from ages. Few studies have been taken place on the problems of goldsmiths like, socio economic conditions, impact of goldsmithing work on health condition of goldsmiths, effect of gold mining so on and so forth. Since we have shortfall of studies on the research problem taken for the study present study has been undertaken to study the evolution of goldsmiths from the ages and the changes that has taken place in the working pattern of the goldsmiths

3. Statement of the Problem

India is known for its rich culture and great artistic works. Skill of Indian workforce has been proven since ages. Goldsmithing industry has witnessed considerable amount of changes from centuries and existence of artisans in world history. As the economic, political, cultural and social changes taken place in the economy it has impacted the working and living conditions of the goldsmiths. In this regard this article made an attempt to understand the changes that has taken place that may be in terms of

adopting technology, working patterns, using of tools and techniques

4. Review of literature

Maria & Daniel (2024) examined the volume of gold smuggling that is taking place in India and analyzed the reasons behind it. Study finds that around 200 tons of gold enters India through smuggling and interesting thing about this is more case of smuggling takes place in the month from October to December and that too no Friday's more smuggling cases have been registered. On one hand this smuggling cases are resulting in tax loss to the government but on the other hand it benefiting the country in many ways as it increases the Jewellery export of the country which strengthens the economy. One of the major reason for smuggling is the heavy tax rates. Study concludes that custom duty can be reduced to increase the import of gold through formal ways. **Basilea & Rajalingam (2023)** explored the motivating factors to buy the gold Jewellery. Study was exploratory in nature, primary data was collected from the 132 respondents through structured questionnaire. Study identified the factors influencing to buy the gold Jewellery is that the financial needs, self-love, celebration purpose, collection purpose and so on. Study concludes that these factors identified will help the industry players to draw their plans and strategies.

Sarannya et al., (2022) revealed that the problems faced by the goldsmiths in Coimbatore district. The objective of the study was to analyze the problems of goldsmiths and to provide suitable suggestions for solving the problems of goldsmiths. The study was descriptive and analytical in nature. The simple percentage analysis was used to analyze the data. The study find out that the goldsmiths are not

getting enough income from their job and majority of the respondents are facing musculoskeletal disorder because of improper and long hours sitting. The author concluded goldsmiths are facing various problems from earnings to health. Hence, government should initiate things like providing financial assistance, upgrading technology, effective functioning of goldsmiths associations and setting up off trainings to safeguard the goldsmiths.

Sruti et al., (2021) study delves into the unique dual demand for gold in India, exploring how communities associated with gold Jewellery navigate state regulations and adapt to changing market dynamics. The study was conducted with the objective of investigating state regulations and its impact on goldsmithing, understanding occupational changes. The study findings shed light on the intricate interplay between state regulations, inter- generational skill transfer, occupational transformations and community dynamics within the goldsmithing industry in India.

Mbuyi et al., (2019) study centred on socio-economic assessment and profitability of gold miners. Objective of the study was understand socio-economic profile, level of profitability and constraints determining the profitability. Through cluster sampling method 50 respondents were selected in the study. Study finds that, the marital status, age, experience are the determinants of the profitability of the gold miners and it is also found that miners under study area are operating with good amount of profit.

Wendy& Hassan (2017) in their study “the influence of leadership on employee performance among Jewellery artisans in Malaysia” examined the influence of different leadership styles performance of Jewellery artisans. The objective of the

study was to examine the impact of different leadership styles on the artisan’s performance. The study was carried out on 115 respondents who were selected random sampling method. Study concludes that, supportive and transformational leadership practices have significant and positive influence on the performance of the Jewellery artisans.

5. History and Origin of Goldsmiths and Goldsmithing

Goldsmiths and the goldsmithing has seen considerable amount of changes from the centuries in terms of patterns, approach, style and so on. Here researcher made an attempt to present the goldsmithing in different ages.

Goldsmithing in different ages

Goldsmiths enjoyed more social and economic standing than other craftspeople throughout the Ancient era. They may have done so because they dealt with gold, a precious metal. Due to their proficiency in a variety of talents, including alloy mixing, molding, wire and sheet drawing, etc., they enjoyed royal patronage. The majority of goldsmiths currently live below the poverty line. Numerous goldsmiths and their families have been reported to have committed suicide or attempted suicide in recent years, which demonstrates their low socioeconomic standing. The position and prominence of goldsmiths throughout the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern eras are evident from their historical background.

Indus Valley Civilization: Throughout the Indus Valley Civilization, both male and female members of the elite and impoverished classes frequently wore a variety of decorations. The professional class known as goldsmiths satisfied their

need to wear a variety of decorations. As a result, goldsmiths benefited from high social and economic standing in society.

Vedic Period: Several types of gold, silver, and copper ornaments used during the Vedic Period are mentioned in the Rig Veda. Silversmiths and goldsmiths developed their own professional workshops and were a distinct working class. Goldsmiths, known as "Suvarnakara," used sophisticated techniques to create jewellery. They were also aware of how to cleanse gold. Jewellers and goldsmiths evolved into a distinct working group throughout the Later Vedic period. Goldsmiths enjoyed solid economic and social standing, social respect, and a few rewards for their labour, all of which supported them.

Mauryan Period: The Kautilya's Arthashastra clearly shows the existence of goldsmiths. According to him, "A goldsmith who was known for his birth, talent, and trustworthy nature was given a shop on the high road and appointed as the state goldsmiths. "Rewards for good work and punishment for bad work are established" (Chand Lakshmi Sharma, 1961:10). This reflects the economic, social, and political standing of goldsmiths throughout the Mauryan era. They were also hired to work the King as a personal goldsmith. They participated in a nation's city administration.

Kusan and Gupta Period: People from the Kusan and Gupta periods wore various gold-encrusted jewellery. The exceptional skill of goldsmiths is supported by archaeological records from the Kusan period. Jewellers and goldsmiths had different workshops. The creation of decorations advanced significantly throughout the Gupta dynasty. Pearls, coral, diamonds, topaz, sapphire, lapis lazuli, emerald, ruby, and pearls were frequently used as ornaments. The financial

situation of goldsmiths was stable. The Gupta period's gold and silver coins testifies to the high level of artistry of the goldsmiths.

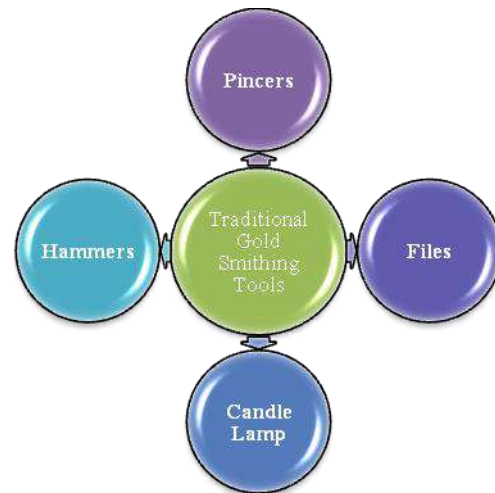
Medieval Period: Many Muslim kings were drawn to goldsmiths' creative abilities. They were appointed to permanent positions as a result of the circulation of gold coins and the exchange of gold for trade. The independence and dignity of goldsmiths, the lack of inequity, organized technical instruction, and guild backing all contributed to their development in the early medieval era. The noble class, middle class, and lower class were the three social classes that made up Later Medieval civilization. Skilled labourers such as blacksmiths, goldsmiths, weavers, and others made up the lower class. Goldsmiths were gradually exploited by the merchant class's dominance. They ceased to be economically and socially significant in the community.

Pre-British Period: The fundamental means of subsistence were consolidated into a set economic structure in the pre-British era, which mostly preserved continuity from antiquity to the middle Ages. Because the caste system had a clear economic goal of assigning each caste a hereditary trade and a division of labour, it was tightly related to economic activity. The four main castes are Brahmana, Kshyatriya, Vaisyas, and Sudras. Craftspeople such as goldsmiths were identified as Vaisyas. Every person was trained in their ancestral vocation from an early age, and caste professions were inherited. "Bani" was the name used to describe the goldsmiths' compensation (Chopra P.N., et.al: 1974). For every total of gold used in the decorations, the bani was fixed. The type and craftsmanship of the ornament determine the rate of award.

British Period: Many crafts in the nation, notably goldsmithing, were destroyed by the

British ruler's anti-artisan attitude. Goldsmiths lost all economic, social, and political standing during this time.

Post British Period: The Indian government launched numerous programs and schemes to help the artisan class grow after independence, but they fell short of expectations, and goldsmiths are not benefiting from them. Their socioeconomic circumstances have deteriorated; they once led comfortable lives but are currently fighting for their lives. It is crucial to support goldsmiths who are preserving our rich jewellery-making legacy.



6. Goldsmithing – Tools

- a. **Files:** Each goldsmith keeps at least 8 to 10 files of various types. These could be triangular files, spear-shaped files, sharp-edged files, round and half-round files, flat files, or pointed round files.
- b. **Hammers:** It takes a lot of hammers to make ornaments. These come in a variety of shapes and sizes. These are purchased from the marketplaces, and the goldsmiths attach wooden handles to them. Hammers can be used for a variety of tasks. These include neck hammers, bossing hammers, chase hammers, and rising hammers. However, goldsmiths exclusively refer to these as hammers.
- c. **Wax or Candle Lamp:** This light is used by goldsmiths to fuse and solder embellishments.
- d. **Pincers:** In their line of work, goldsmiths occasionally need a pair of iron pincers. Pincers are used to manage a unit of heavy ornament that is placed between coals for soldering or annealing.

7. Goldsmithing in global economy

Gold is one much very valuable and attractive metal liked by all as a sign of prosperity and in many cases it is a safe investment to many. Because of its look and advantages gold is accepted everywhere in the world. As far as the Indians are concerned they are one step ahead when it comes to jewellery buying since they have emotional attachment with it and as a reason India is one of the largest importer of gold in the world. Gold has got global level recognition because of its nature and wider applicability as gold is used for different purposes like technology, investment, ornaments, food and so on. China is the largest importer of gold in the world and next comes the India.

Beyond geographical boundaries, goldsmithing has evolved into a worldwide craft in which methods and aesthetics from many cultures interact to provide a thriving, varied market for artisan metals and Jewellery. Around the world, goldsmiths are an essential component of their cultural legacy. Goldsmithing has a strong cultural and religious foundation in places like India, the Middle East, Italy, and West Africa.

Small-scale goldsmiths contribute to local economies in many developing countries. Thousands of artists create handcrafted Jewellery in countries like India and numerous African countries, providing a significant source of revenue for local companies and families. A broader supply chain that encompasses gold mining, refining, and trading includes goldsmiths. Major gold-producing nations include South Africa, Russia, China, and Canada; goldsmiths around the world use the raw material to create their goods.

Thanks to e-commerce sites like Etsy, eBay, and specialized online stores, many goldsmiths—even small craftspeople—now have access to international marketplaces. This makes it possible for craftspeople in far-flung places to connect with clients worldwide, boosting competition while simultaneously opening up new market prospects. Goldsmiths and jewellers from all over the world come to international Jewellery fairs like Baselworld in Switzerland or Vicenzaoro in Italy to display their creations to consumers, collectors, and retailers. These international shows encourage competitiveness and a sense of fellowship among goldsmiths around the world.

Globally, goldsmiths embody a fusion of contemporary invention and age-old custom. They are important contributors to local economies and cultural traditions, but they are also major players in the global luxury market and the shift to products sourced ethically and sustainably. In order to maintain its status as a vital and developing craft, the global goldsmithing industry is adjusting to shifting customer demands, technical improvements, and the need for more responsible practices.

8. Goldsmiths – Opportunities and Challenges

Despite of their significant influence on the economy and growth potential, goldsmiths and the gold industry is encountering different opportunities and the challenges. The problems faced by the goldsmiths are categorized into economic problems, technical problems, social problems and other problems.

Opportunities

In spite of lot of problems, goldsmiths enjoy the different opportunities equally. The opportunities enjoyed by the goldsmiths are discussed below.

Craftsmanship: traditional goldsmiths or the artisans are highly skilled and dedicated workers. Since they make ornaments on their own they can provide customized ornaments to their customer where the big companies do not have this option since they make ornaments in huge volume.

Trustworthy: Indian market is one such where in many people visit shops to buy things with whom they have long relationships and on whom they have trust. On the other hand the jewellery business companies do not possess such relationship with their customers and the traditional goldsmiths does.

After sale service: this is very important activity which every business concern should look at into. When it comes to gold business, traditional goldsmiths have that added advantage of providing sales after service to the customers which is not that easy for multinationals to provide such benefits to the customers quickly and at the lower prices.

Hereditary Profession: Goldsmithing is a hereditary profession where required professional skills will be inherited from

their seniors which gives them additional skill to deal with the profession effectively.

Low cost of production: Conversion of gold into gold ornaments attracts different types of cost at different stages of production and big companies cannot escape from any of such cost on the other hand traditional manufacturers will escape certain expenditures at different stages since they themselves involves in production. In this regard traditional goldsmiths enjoy advantage over gold manufacturing companies.

New technologies: Earlier goldsmiths use to prepare attractive ornaments by conventional method where involvement of machinery was too less and almost all the ornaments were made from hand but today invention of machineries made the process easy and most importantly variety of designs can be made by employing machineries but this was not the situation during earlier times.

Hall marking: Hall marking is made use of to ensure the purity and quality of gold ornaments. Before the hall marking, jewels were sold purely on the basis of trust but this made many customers to mislead with regard to purity of the ornaments. After introduction of hall marking it has become easy for the goldsmiths to increase their credibility and there are very less chances of fraudulent activities. Once the goldsmiths increase their trustworthiness thereby they increase their business volume.

Socio-economic Challenges

Under economic problems, goldsmiths face the different problems which are discussed below

Income problem: Since gold price and the business both are very dynamic in nature goldsmiths are not assured of regular income

and stable income. There will be a continuous changes in their income earning capacity

Financial problem: since goldsmiths fall under the category of unorganized sector, they have lack of funding assistance from the authorities further the raw material cost is too high they find it very difficult the adjust capital for the business. Literacy rate among the goldsmiths is comparatively low because which they fail in handling the less available funds effectively.

Under technical problems, goldsmiths come across below listed problems.

Technology: many of the traditional goldsmiths still follow the production method which their ancestors followed for the decades. Since they fail to adopt new technologies they are not able to meet the need of modern customers. Because of resources that new technologies demand for the traditional goldsmiths are not able to adopt the new technologies in the production process.

Market: Presence of big giants in the market has created a lot of threat to small and traditional goldsmiths. They fail to compete with the multinationals in the market which leads to decline in business volume and at the end profit making capacity. These traditional goldsmiths still depend on the customers who are known to their earlier generation but they fail to attract new customers in the market.

Standard of living: Majority of the goldsmiths a leaving low standard of living because of no proper education, unproductive expenses, no financial plans and so on. One more important concern of the goldsmiths are they earn very less amount and in some cases they are exploited by the middleman's.

Health and hygiene: Majority of the goldsmiths work under very poor working conditions which deteriorates their health condition. Goldsmiths deal with very dangerous fluids like acid, sulphur, Cadmium and all which sometimes even gives the life threat to the goldsmiths. Majority of the goldsmiths faces certain health issues like eye sight issue, throat infection, and back pain and so on and the worst part of this is these health concerns have become common in case of goldsmiths.

Social involvement: Goldsmiths are socially far away from many of the activities. They involve very less themselves into the social activities and this may be because of lack of confidence, low education, work pressure and all. Recent studies have identified that there have been many suicidal attempts from the goldsmiths and many have committed suicide because of the above discussed problems.

9. Concluding Remarks

Goldsmithing can be seen since centuries and even today it is present all over the world. Goldsmithing industry and the goldsmiths have seen significant changes over the years as the market and economic conditions have changed. Despite being one of the larger contributors to the economy, the industry is suffering from many problems especially the family based and traditional goldsmiths. Entry of corporate style of business into jewellery industry has posed new threat to the traditional goldsmiths. Goldsmithing is present in both organized and unorganized sector where in unorganized sector holds major portion of goldsmiths. Under organized sector we have multinational companies, well established business units whereas the organized sector includes family based and traditional goldsmiths. In comparison of these two,

goldsmiths who fall under unorganized sector are facing lot of problems to run their business in even some cases they struggle just to survive. Concerned authorities should pay required attention to solve the concerns of the goldsmiths and policy decisions should be taken to safeguard the interest of the goldsmiths since they represent the rich culture and heritage of the country.

References

1. Chanchala Jain (2012) "A Trend analysis of Export Performance of Gems & Jewellery industry in India", *International Journal of Engineering Sciences and Management*. Vol. 2, Issue-2, Pp. 170-174.
2. Basilea Catherine & N. Rajalingam (2023) "Why do people go for Jewellery? An insight into Consumers' motivation", *Sataraachee*. Vol. 38, Issue-2, Pp. 223-229.
3. Maria Immanuel Susai & Lazar Daniel (2024) "Gold Smuggling in India and its Effect on the Bullion Industry", *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*. Vol. 17, Issue-122, Pp. 1-19.
4. Mbuyi M. Melodi & Ganiyu W. Ajibade (2019) "Socio-Economic Assessment and Profitability of Artisanal Gold Miners in Niger State, Nigeria", *FUOYE Journal of Engineering and Technology*. Vol. 4, Issue-2, Pp. 48-51.
5. Ms. Saranya Sivasankaran, Ms. Pavithra M (2022) "Problems faced by Goldsmiths- A Study with Special reference to Coimbatore District", *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*. Vol. 10, Issue-6, Pp. 821-826.
6. Sruti Kanungo, Anindita Chakrabarti (2021) "Gold governance and goldsmithery: Economic sociology of an informal manufacturing sector in India", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. Vol. 55, Issue-2, Pp. 172-199.
7. Wendy Lor & Zubair Hassan (2017) "The influence of leadership on employee performance among Jewellery artisans in Malaysia", *International Journal of Accounting and Business management*. Vol. 5, Issue-1, Pp. 14-33.