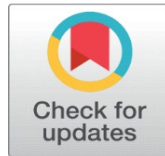
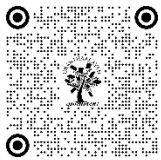


# BIDRI CRAFTS AND ITS ENDURING IMPACT ON INDIAN CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

Bidri art, which comes from Bidar in Karnataka, is representative of a unique type of damascene work called "koftagiri," in which elaborately wrought objects made of an alloy of zinc and copper are covered in gold, silver, or brass encrustations. Turkish, Persian, Arabic, and native influences are all blended together in the art of Bidri, which flourished in the Deccan during the rule of the Bahmani and Baridi Sultanates. Moulding, polishing, designing, engraving, and inlaying are just a few of the eight painstaking steps involved in producing Bidri objects. The deep matte black finish of Bidri art is a distinctive feature that demonstrates a well-balanced fusion of old workmanship and modern artistry. This finish is created using a special combination of alloying, engraving, and oxidizing procedures. Bidriware showcases elaborate patterns, such as calligraphy, geometric shapes, floral motifs, and animal figures, that attest to the superb artistry of local craftspeople. The production of these remarkable works involves several techniques like relief carving, inlaying cut designs, surface crushing, and accurate silver sheet fastening. A Geographical Indication (GI) registry has been obtained by Bidriware, a craft form that is highly valued for its complex artistry and historical significance. This study explores Bidri art's history, cultural significance, and evolution from traditional to contemporary practices. It highlights the unique designs and patterns, the impact of modern technology, and the socio-economic aspects affecting artisans. Achievements and challenges faced by Bidri craftsmen are discussed, providing a holistic view of this traditional art form's past, present, and future.

**Keywords:** Bidri Crafts, Metal Handicraft, Traditional Techniques, Contemporary Artistry, Global Promotion

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bidar, an ancient gem in Karnataka, India, is renowned for its renowned Bidriware and has a long history of Bidri art. A variety of objects, including as jewellery, trays, and boxes, are embellished with this exquisite metalwork, which dates back to the 14th century CE and was created under the patronage of the Bahmani Sultans. Craftsmen carefully carve intricate designs into these items, which are then filled with a unique black alloy made of copper and zinc. The proud symbol of the artistic and cultural heritage of the area, Bidriware is recognized with a

Geographical Indication (GI) designation. It represents both the timeless legacy that reverberates within Bidar's historic walls and the expert craftsmanship of its craftspeople. As a tribute to India's rich artistic legacy, this esteemed craft never fails to fascinate admirers with its ageless elegance and historical significance, connecting the past and present [Stronge \(1985\)](#).

Bidri craft endures even in modern-day India, where artists assiduously pass on their knowledge to succeeding generations. Inspired by the rich cultural legacy of the area, Bidriware is a representation of the long-lasting creative traditions that are deeply embedded in the community. Beyond its simple artistry, Bidriware captures the rich cultural significance of metalworking in Indian society, going beyond its status as an art form to become a poignant symbol of history and legacy. This art form represents the core of India's rich cultural fabric and acts as a conduit for the preservation of customs and values that date back hundreds of years. Beyond just being beautiful, it is significant because it shows how resilient and ongoing traditional craftsmanship can be in the face of modernization. Bidriware is a treasured cultural relic that connects the past and the present while paying tribute to the legacy of talented craftspeople whose commitment guarantees its survival for upcoming generations [Handicrafts \(2020b\)](#).

This paper explores the historical evolution, techniques, motifs, problems, and future prospects of these crafts. Bidriware's enduring charm and cultural relevance are assured by to government programme, non-governmental organization assistance, international recognition, and the tenacity of its craftspeople. The limitations of this paper result from secondary data that included rich cultural heritage, Bidri types, materials, and techniques of Bidri crafts, limited representation of iconic motifs, antiquated perspectives on current and future trends, challenges and preservation efforts faced by artisans, and global recognition and market dynamics.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Bidri Craft

## 1.1. OBJECTIVE

To explore the historical and cultural significance of Bidri art and assess the impact of modern techniques on its practice and evolution.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research design is based on secondary data, which includes research papers, articles, blogs, magazines, and the internet. This paper included

past and present aspects, including history and development, culture and tradition, the evaluation of the effects of contemporary and technological advancement, and the design and patterns in art. It also included the socio-economic aspects of bidri art and some of the attainments made by bidri artisans in terms of recognition and awards. This approach aims to provide a broad understanding of Bidri art and the challenges and opportunities faced by its artisans.

### 3. HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF BIDRI CRAFTS

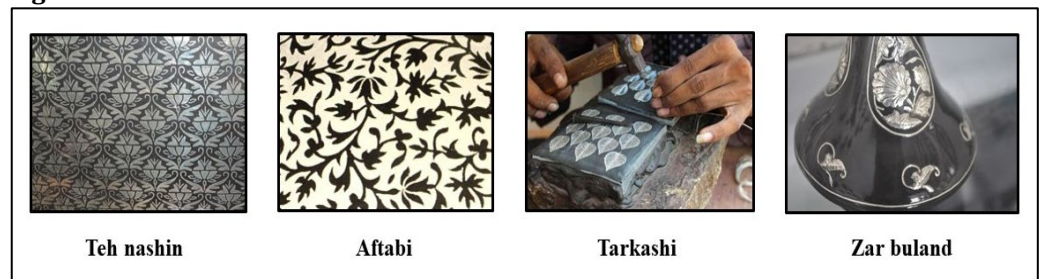
The history of Bidri crafts in Persia can be traced back to the 14th-century Bahmani Sultanate. The roots of bidri art are still mysterious; they are usually attributed to either Iraq or Iran. Later, the art travelled to Ajmer with the Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, and then it spread to Bijapur and other places. Particularly during the rich 14th-century rule of the Bahmani Sultans, Bidar became a well-known centre for artisans. Bidri art flourished throughout this time, being permanently associated with the city. Notable hubs for Bidri ceramic production were Maharashtra, West Bengal's Murshidabad, Uttar Pradesh's Lucknow, and Bihar's Purnia. These areas were crucial to the growth and popularity of Bidri art, adding to the rich cultural heritage of the movement [Pandey \(2016\)](#).

The soil at Bidar Fort has a special composition that gives Bidriware its distinctive black colour and has a transforming effect on the craftspeople who deal with it. For ages, this skill has been deeply ingrained in Indian society, and its development is the subject of many tales and legends. Royalty and nobility, such as Mughal emperors, Rajput rulers, Bengal Nawabs, Bahmani and Vijayanagara Sultans, have long cherished bidriware. The mystical qualities of the soil in Bidar Fort are still there, giving Bidriware its characteristic black hue. Through the decades, this practice has persisted, with artists passing on their knowledge and methods to preserve this beloved art form. Beyond just its visual appeal, Bidriware embodies the rich cultural heritage of India and offers a link to history and tradition. Its manufacture is still going strong because of the artisans who are committed to preserving the history of this amazing trade [Shahbandari \(2022\)](#).

### 4. TYPE OF BIDRI CRAFTS

The metalwork known as bidri, which is distinguished by its elaborate designs and skill, can be broadly divided into four categories, each with unique methods and aesthetic elements as shown in the [Figure 2](#).

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Types of Bidri Art

**Source** Sahapedia - Types of bidri work [Dhamodaran \(2019\)](#)

- 1) Originating in the early bidri tradition, **“teh nashin”** refers to elaborate gold or silver inlays set within deeply engraved surfaces made of base metal (Sen 1983:37). This method is still used today; it is particularly common in bidri workmanship. The patterns usually have black backgrounds with silver embellishments. There is no raised relief in these designs; they are melded into the metal surface flawlessly. A procedure that symbolizes the painstaking artistry and enduring tradition of this esteemed art form, artisans expertly etch floral designs onto the metalware's surface before deftly inlaying silver over them.
- 2) **“Aftabi”**, also known as mehatabi, is the painstaking application of silver inlay over a dark background, which contrasts sharply with the blackened patterns. Using this method takes a lot of time and requires excellent expertise. First, the required designs are drawn by artists onto the surface of the object. Then, they scrupulously preserve the highlighted designs by painstakingly engraving the surrounding background. This elaborate procedure highlights the deft work and intense commitment needed to accomplish the fine workmanship typical of aftabi craftsmanship, capturing the creativity and accuracy inherent in this esteemed custom.
- 3) **“Tarkashi”** is the craft of simple wire work, in which the surface of an object is painstakingly carved with grooves to fit the intended design. Then, appropriately sized silver wire is carefully formed to suit the pre-cut grooves and then gently inlaid onto the smooth black surface. The artists use great care and precision in each step of this process, which requires patience and precision. Silver wire is expertly woven into the etched grooves by Tarkashi artists to create a variety of complex patterns and motifs that contrast with the opposing background, demonstrating the skill and commitment needed to accomplish the harmonic synthesis of workmanship and beauty.
- 4) Inlay work with either high or low relief is referred to as **“Zar buland”** or **“Zar nashin”**. The "zar buland," a lead pad with finely inlaid silver, is the tool used to do this technique in the bidri tradition. This technique gives the complex pattern a three-dimensional appearance by enabling it to stand out clearly from the surface. Its fine craftsmanship guarantees that the design contrasts sharply with the background. Artists create a remarkable depth and contrast by deftly incorporating silver over the lead pad, demonstrating the creativity and amazing artistry of the Zar buland technique, which is part of the bidri craft heritage [Dhamodaran \(2019\)](#).

## 5. MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Bidri crafts are labor-intensive and need a precise eight-step approach as well as careful raw material selection. Bidri matti is a special black soil that is mixed with resins, castor oil, and a mixture of zinc and copper alloys. Steps in the crafting process include moulding, filing, chiselling, engraving, inlaying with pure silver, buffing, smoothing, and oxidation with a mixture of soil and ammonium chloride. First, the alloy is moulded. It then goes through a number of processes, such as etching and decorating with pure silver to create complex designs. The alloy is then oxidized using specialized soil to give it the distinctive deep black tone. Producing these one-of-a-kind Bidriware items requires an intricate eight-step process and the accurate use of particular raw materials. Known for its intricate patterns, Bidri craft is a traditional metalworking skill that dates back to the 14th century and originated in Bidar, Karnataka, India. Usually made with a combination of copper, tin, and zinc

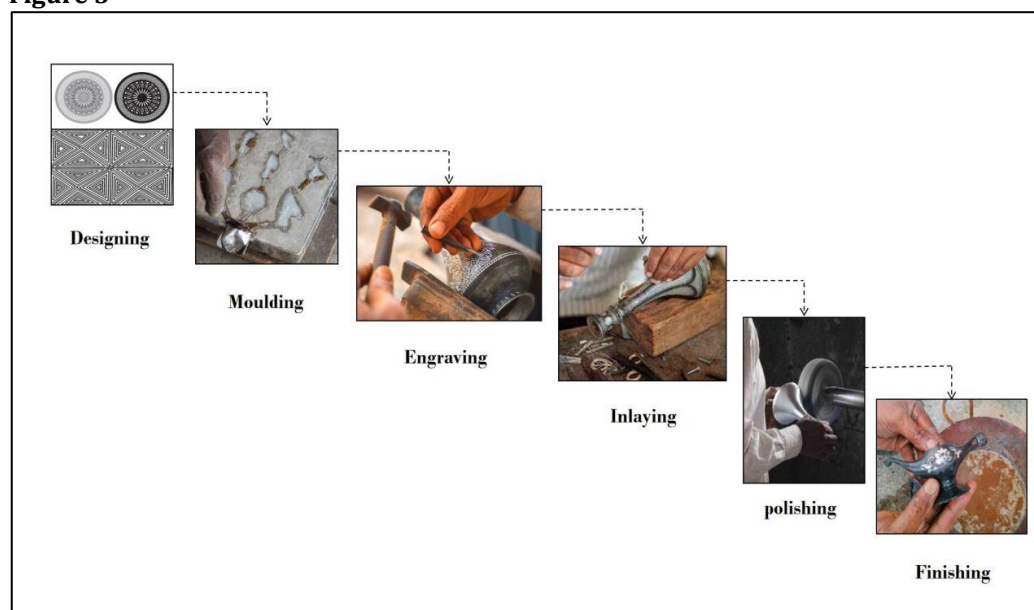
alloys, this art uses mud and sal ammoniac (ammonium chloride) to get its distinctive oxidized or darkened look [Gaatha. \(2023\)](#).

## 5.1. RAW MATERIALS

- 1) **Metal Alloys:** Copper, zinc, and occasionally tin are the main metals utilized in bidri crafts. After these metals are melted together, a strong alloy that can be shaped and designed into a variety of shapes is created.
- 2) **Ammonium chloride, or sal ammoniac):** Sal ammoniac is a crucial component in the blackening of Bidriware. It is applied to the metal's surface to give it its distinctive black hue.
- 3) **Mud:** The mould for forming the Bidriware is made from mud or clay. It aids in giving the metal the appropriate shape before complex designs are engraved on it.
- 4) **Cotton Wicks:** During the blackening process, cotton wicks are utilized to apply the chemical solutions.

## 5.2. EIGHT-STAGE PROCESS OF CRAFTING BIDRIWARE

Figure 3



**Figure 3** Process Flow of Bidri Art

**Source** Lai dDesigns [Blog. Lai. \(2016\)](#)

- 1) **Designing:** Using chisels and other engraving tools, skilled artists first etch elaborate designs onto the metal object's surface. These patterns frequently feature geometric shapes, flowers, and occasionally calligraphy.
- 2) **Moulding:** After the design is complete, moulds formed of clay or mud are used to cast the metal item into the appropriate shape. Prior to the addition of fine features, this step aids in giving the metal its fundamental form.
- 3) **Smoothening:** To get ready for the next step, the metal object's surface is smoothed with sandpaper and files.

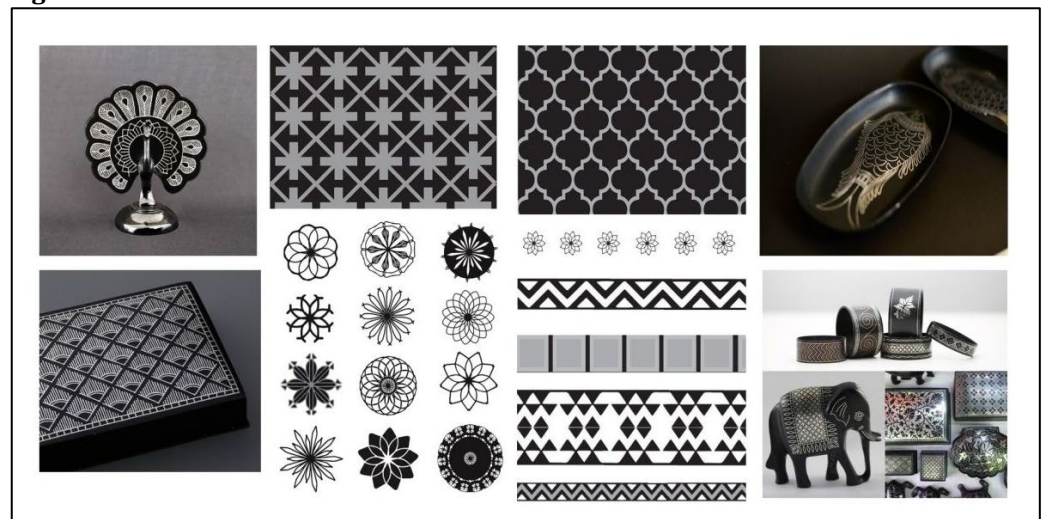


- 4) **Engraving:** Using fine chisels and other carving tools, artisans then etch the elaborate designs onto the metal's polished surface. This calls for a great degree of dexterity and proficiency.
- 5) **Inlaying:** To create a contrast against the dark backdrop of the metal, small strips of brass or silver are delicately hammered into the etched grooves.
- 6) **Oxidising:** After heating, a paste consisting of salt ammoniac and water is applied to the metal object. When this paste comes into contact with the metal, it oxidises and turns black. This is an important process that results in the characteristic black colour of Bidriware.
- 7) **Buffing:** The Bidriware is meticulously buffed to remove any extra oxidation and polish the surface, exposing the detailed inlays and designs, following the blackening process.
- 8) **last Finishing:** Before the completed Bidriware is prepared for sale or display, it is lastly examined for flaws and given a last polish [Lai. \(2016\)](#).

## 6. ICONIC BIDRI MOTIFS AND DESIGNS

Several patterns and designs, including regional influences like the "swastika" and the lotus, are included into the Bidri art style. They are renowned for the unique way that their patterns and designs have evolved over time. Bidriware's traditional themes include a wide range of components, such as geometric patterns, flowers, and vines, in addition to famous pieces like the Persian Rose and Arabic-scripted passages from the Quran. Bidriware's handiwork is a blend of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian influences, resulting from the blending of native styles with Arabic and Persian cultures. The abundance of floral themes, which are evocative of Persian and Mughal art, is indicative of this fusion. Bidri designs have changed over time, reflecting a dynamic evolution grounded in tradition while adjusting to modern tastes and maintaining their cultural heritage. A wide range of products, including wall plates, showpieces, cutlery, textiles, lampshades, wine decanters, hookahs, and other ornamental objects, have been made possible by the popularity of the technique. In addition to showcasing the craft's cultural heritage, using Bidri crafts during festivals is essential to the craft's continued existence and promotion as a beloved traditional art form [Markel \(2014\)](#).

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Bidri Motifs and Design

**Source** Tarangati Process [Athreya \(n.d.\)](#)

## 7. BIDRI CRAFTS IN CONTEMPORARY ART AND DESIGN IN FUTURE PROSPECTS

The modern progression of Bidri crafts takes several forms, such as the incorporation of contemporary aesthetics, collaborations with modern creatives, and the investigation of novel trends and inventions.

- 1) **The Modern Landscape's Challenges and Opportunities:** Rising silver prices, fake goods, little government assistance, and difficulty getting soil from Bidar Fort - two of the most important resources - are among the difficulties faced by Bidri artists. Working with contemporary artists, investigating new trends, and maintaining historic patterns are all essential to the survival of Bidri crafts in the future.
- 2) **Creative Accessory and Decor Ideas Inspired by Bidri:** Vases, animal sculptures, hookahs, jewelry, and other items are inspired by bidri crafts, enhancing personal and home decor.
- 3) **Working along with Modern Artists:** Traditional artistry and modern sensibility are combined in fusion pieces made by Bidri craftsmen and designers.
- 4) **New Developments and Innovation in Bidri Handicrafts:** By experimenting with novel materials and methods, bidri artists bring new life to their craft and increase its marketability.
- 5) **Prospects for a Sustainable Future for Bidri Crafts:** Collaborations with contemporary artists, the investigation of new trends, and the preservation of traditional patterns and motifs are essential to the longevity and expansion of Bidri crafts [Shopify \(2022\)](#).

## 8. ARTISANS AND THEIR MASTERY

- 1) **Expert Craftsmen and Apprenticeship Customs:** The handicraft of the bidri people has its roots in family customs that have been passed down through the ages. For more than fifty years, artisans such as Shah Rasheed Ahmed Quadri-received with the esteemed Padma Shri Award- have devoted their lives to creating and selling Bidriware. As the third generation of his family, Quadri personifies this lasting legacy.
- 2) **Bidri Craftsmanship is Transmitted Generation to Generation:** Bidriware's artistic legacy endures through family lines, with craftspeople passing on their knowledge to children and trainees. For example, Shah Rasheed Ahmed Quadri ensured the continuation of the craft by mentoring twenty people under government sponsorship.
- 3) **The Current Obstacles Bidri Craftsmen Face:** Current Bidri artisans face a multitude of obstacles, such as rising silver prices, a glut of fake goods on the market, insufficient government assistance, procurement limitations within the borders of Bidar Fort, competition among artisans, intricate negotiations with buyers and middlemen, and a lack of genuine Bidri-style craft markets.
- 4) **Preserving Customary Methods:** The preservation of traditional Bidriware techniques is aided by several initiatives, including as

government programme that facilitates artisan training and craft promotion. Additionally, Bidriware has been recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

- 5) **The Development of Bidri Handi craftsmanship:** The inventiveness of bidri artists allows them to create cutting-edge patterns such as wall tiles, office supplies, and USB drive covers, which increase the craft's usefulness and attractiveness. Their work develops in step with current trends.
- 6) **Creative Movements in Modern Bidri Painting:** Bidri artists explore new mediums and methods, creating creative designs that appeal to a wider range of consumer tastes.
- 7) **Bidri Crafts' Sustainability and Prospects for the Future:** Collaborations with modern creatives, research into new craft trends, and unwavering preservation and promotion of historic styles and motifs are all necessary for the continued success of Bidri Crafts [K \(n.d.\)](#).

## 9. CHALLENGES AND PRESERVATION EFFORTS

Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are essential to the preservation of the Bidri craft and the assistance of its artists.

- 1) **Governmental Programme:** The primary government agency for crafts and artisan-based initiatives in India is the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). The Government of India has developed several initiatives, like the Integrated Design & Technical Development Project in Bidri Craft at Bidar, to support the Bidriware sector. Acknowledging its importance, the Karnataka government awarded Bidriware the Geographical Indication (GI) label, improving its marketability and attractiveness.
- 2) **Non-Governmental Organizations:** An NGO called Sahayog, with headquarters in Bidar, is committed to promoting Indian handicrafts, especially Bidriware. In order to further the interests of Bidriware, Sahayog plays a significant role in organizing and carrying out activities supported by the government. Sahayog also holds workshops and training sessions to help Bidri craftspeople become more financially and marketing savvy [Roshini. \(2017\)](#).

## 10. GLOBAL RECOGNITION AND MARKET IMPACTS

- 1) **Bidri crafts in the international market:** Bidriware has been updated with more modern designs to boost its use and popularity, including USB drive covers, office supplies, lampshades, candle stands, jewelry, wall pieces, and even wall tiles. Knowledge about Bidriware has been disseminated by prestigious design institutions such as the National Institute of Fashion Technology and the National Institute of Design. Numerous artisans have won national and state honours, and bidri art is acknowledged and honoured worldwide. Bidriware's market potential and popularity have increased even more with the GI tag that it has been awarded. Indians create bidri art, which is highly regarded globally for its breathtaking beauty. By supporting artisans and maintaining the craft's traditional methods, policies, and efforts that support the Indian government and non-governmental organizations aim to promote and safeguard bidriware [Shopify \(2022\)](#).



- 2) **Recognition and awards received by Bidri artisans:** An increasing price for silver, fake goods on the market, inadequate government support, limitations on buying land in Bidar Fort, rivalry between craftsmen, haggling over prices with customers and middlemen, and a dearth of demand for genuine Bidri style crafts are just a few of the problems that face the industry. All the same, given that the craft is practiced both domestically and abroad, Bidriware has a substantial potential market for growth on a worldwide scale. The Bidri crafts can continue to thrive by partnerships with modern artists and designers, research into new trends in the craft, and preservation and promotion of old patterns and themes [Gaatha. \(2023\)](#).
- 3) **Awards:** Bidri ware has received several awards and recognition for its craftsmanship and cultural significance. In 2006, it was awarded the Geographical Indication status by the Indian government, which recognizes its unique origin and traditional crafting techniques. Bidriware has also been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity [Artform in news: Bidri Crafts. Civildaily. \(2023\)](#). Rasheed has won numerous awards for his work over the years the State Award of 1984, the National Award of 1988, the Karnataka Rajyotsava Award of 1996, and the Great Indian Achievers Award of 2004 [K \(n.d.\)](#).

## 11. THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON BIDRI CRAFT PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION IN FASHION AND TEXTILE

- 1) **Contemporary Influence in Bidri Art:** Contemporary Bidri Art blends modern designs and themes, including international motifs and home decor accessories, to attract a broader audience and remain market-relevant. This art form has significantly influenced fashion and textiles, with its intricate designs and patterns being incorporated into jewelry, clothing, and home furnishings. The fusion of traditional and contemporary styles has helped sustain Bidri Art's popularity, appealing to both traditionalists and modern consumers. This evolution not only preserves the cultural heritage of Bidri but also ensures its continued relevance and appreciation in today's diverse and dynamic market [Giri \(2024b\)](#). Designers and fashion labels have embraced the rich cultural heritage and visual appeal of Bidri, blending it with modern silhouettes and materials. This fusion of traditional and contemporary styles has resulted in the creation of unique and visually striking fashion and textile products that resonate with both domestic and global audiences.

**For example,** Bidri motifs and patterns have been used in the embroidery of high-end garments, adding a touch of cultural authenticity and exclusivity to the designs. Similarly, Bidri-inspired jewelry, such as necklaces and earrings, have become sought-after accessories that allow wearers to showcase their appreciation for Indian craftsmanship.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5** From Metal Surface to Haute Couture (Fashion) and Accessories

Source Pinterest <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/939000591036977570/>

- 2) Impact of using Bidri Techniques for Modern Art:** Bidri crafts have expanded their appeal and practicality by evolving into modern products including wall art, USB drive covers, office stationery, lampshades, candle stands, and jewelry. Artists have improved methods to make lighter designs, increasing affordability without sacrificing the quality of workmanship. Government and non-governmental organizations are actively revitalizing and preserving Bidriware through various initiatives. These include providing financial support, conducting training workshops, collaborating with luxury brands, organizing exhibitions and events for increased awareness, and participating in cultural exchange programs. Leveraging online platforms and e-commerce channels, along with innovative product development and collaborations with contemporary designers, aims to introduce Bidriware to new global markets and applications. The recent Geographical Indication (GI) designation further enhances Bidriware's market potential and appeal, ensuring the preservation of its traditional craftsmanship and patterns for future generations [Gaatha. \(2023\)](#).

## 12. CONCLUSION

This study, based on the secondary data that is available on Bidri crafts, has been able to sustain access to a number of challenges. A combination of contemporary ideas and technology in producing Bidriware artifacts, coupled with the effort of experts in the field, has helped this craft retain its symbolic meaning and aesthetic value. This helps in the protection of Bidri crafts as a geographical indication, and accreditations received from UNESCO also go a long way in promoting these handicrafts. Bidri products have been modernized, and new markets have been created by the National Institute of Design and other contemporary artists. These initiatives, coupled with the growing international

awareness and support from governmental and non-governmental organizations, provide the foundation for the continuance and expansion of Bidriware. This study concluded that Bidri crafts' timelessness is rooted in their ability to adapt to both traditional and contemporary aesthetics while preserving this exquisite art form and looking forward to future lively developments.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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