

Design Resource

Zardozi

Various Handicrafts

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/zardozi>



1. Introduction
2. Purana Lakhnau (Old Lucknow)
3. Mohalla (Locality)
4. Adda (WorkPlace)
5. Karigar (the Craftsmen)
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<http://dsource.in/resource/zardozi/introduction>

Introduction

Located in what was historically known as the Awadh region, Lucknow has always been a multicultural city. It is popularly known as the the city of Nawabs, who were great patrons of the fine arts. Regarded as one of the finest in India, the city represents a culture that combines emotional warmth, a high degree of sophistication, courtesy, and a love for gracious living. The Pehle-aap (after you) culture, popularized as a tagline for the society of Lucknow and rightly so, is the etiquette possessed by the Lucknowites. This sublime cultural richness famous as Lakhnawi tehzeeb blends the cultures of two communities living side by side for centuries, sharing similar interests and speaking a common language.

Lucknow has been famous for its various handicrafts like chikankari, zardozi and kamdani for as long as anyone can remember. These are the important small-scale industries in the city and provide employment to thousands of people who keep alive the invaluable traditions of a magnificent city.



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Purana Lakhnau (Old Lucknow)

Old Lucknow is a feast for the eyes, totally full of life. People running around, tourists stopping by to see British Residency, Chota Imambara and Bhool Bhulaiya (the iconic buildings of the city), cows walking in the middle of the road, fruit sellers all along the footpaths, chaotic traffic, taanga rides and old people catching their share of winter sunshine are a common sight.

Chowk, as the name suggests, is a street in Lucknow with the distinction of being the oldest in the city. This commercial stretch is an ideal shopping hub for those looking for good quality chikan or zardozi garments - each one unique, handcrafted with special warmth and care, giving a glimpse of the hours and days of hard work gone into making them beautiful.

Chowk is also famous for traditional jewellery, flowers and attars (scents). It is a gourmet's delight as well. It boasts of the best quality non-vegetarian food available in Lucknow. A visit to this area would be incomplete without trying one's hand at the tasty Tunde ke kebabs, the wide range of Lucknow's authentic Lassi, Kesaria doo-dh, Thandai, Rabri, Malai paan and the very famous Chatapati-chaat.

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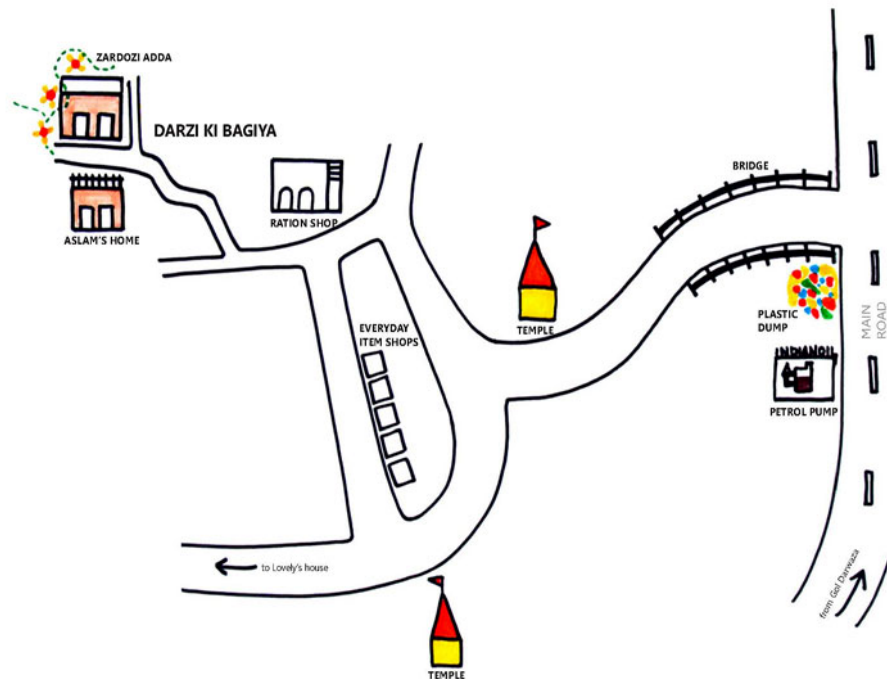
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Mohalla (Locality)

Darzi ki Bagiya is a small mohalla (area) in Chowk where a lot of zardozi craftsmen live and work. The lanes here are narrow but noisy. One can spot cows and dogs basking in the sun, men driving around on bikes and cycles, women working in courtyards or terraces, vegetable sellers announcing the seasonal veggies and their price list, lots of electric wires hanging from poles that host loud speakers emitting the lyrics of the namaaz from time to time. The architecture is British. The houses here were built more than a century ago and face each other from each side of the narrow lane with the sky bright blue between them. They have big windows for fresh air and light to seep in.

Only the men go to work while women take care of the household chores. It is predominantly a Muslim area and most of the people residing here are embroidery experts. A few Hindus live here too but they are not involved in craft. They usually own small shops that sell everyday items or grocery. The people here are extremely warm, simple and down to earth. They smile at you when you pass them by. They are great hosts. They are wonderful story-tellers. And they are workaholics.



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Adda (WorkPlace)

An adda is actually a large wooden frame that the fabric is stitched upon but the word is loosely used for a space where craftsmen work. There are lots of those in Darzi ki Bagiya. Locks at the workshop doors usually open at 9 a.m. each morning, sometimes earlier. Slippers and shoes are removed outside and the men walk in barefeet, for the respect of their craft. They come from various parts of the mohalla to work. There are meal breaks in between and the workshops usually close by 9 p.m. Unlike sarkari offices (government offices that are usually nine to five desk jobs), they work hands-on, twelve hours a day (nine to nine) and sometimes even more. Sitting for hours on the floor is undoubtedly back-breaking work but the quantum of work is seasonal. During the wedding season, dresses are produced back to back and the craftsmen have to work over-time to meet the demands of the market and customers. But during the off-season (when the weddings don't happen) there is just about enough work to keep them busy.

There is a constant prick-in-the-fabric sound of the needle with a background score of the namaaz five times a day. Their needles move up and down in a rhythm so fast that they make it seem almost effortless at that. It is amazing how they seem an everyday task look so exquisite. It is true of all handicrafts that the craft seems like an extension of the craftsman, natural and full of grace.

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Karigar (the Craftsmen)

The craftsmen who create zardozi patterns are known as zardoze (pronounced zar-do-zay). Usually children are made to sit at the addas from a very early age to learn the skills. This makes them imbibe the spirit and understand the nuances of the craft as they grow up. This is how they keep the tradition alive. Women usually knit crochét for chikan sarees and suits. They don't go to work at addas because men in this locality are firm believers of the thought that they should be the bread earners in the family.

Most of the outfits are made to order and the design is selected by the shopkeeper or the customer. The craftsmen only do a sample swatch to get it approved for colors and motifs. Then the final order is placed. No design decisions are made by the craftsmen themselves. They charge them only after the outfit is finished according to the kaam (extent of work) done on the fabric. Though the profits are minted away by the big players of the trade, none of them wants to discontinue practicing the craft because it has become more than a source of livelihood for them. The pride they feel in being associated with it is beyond commerce.

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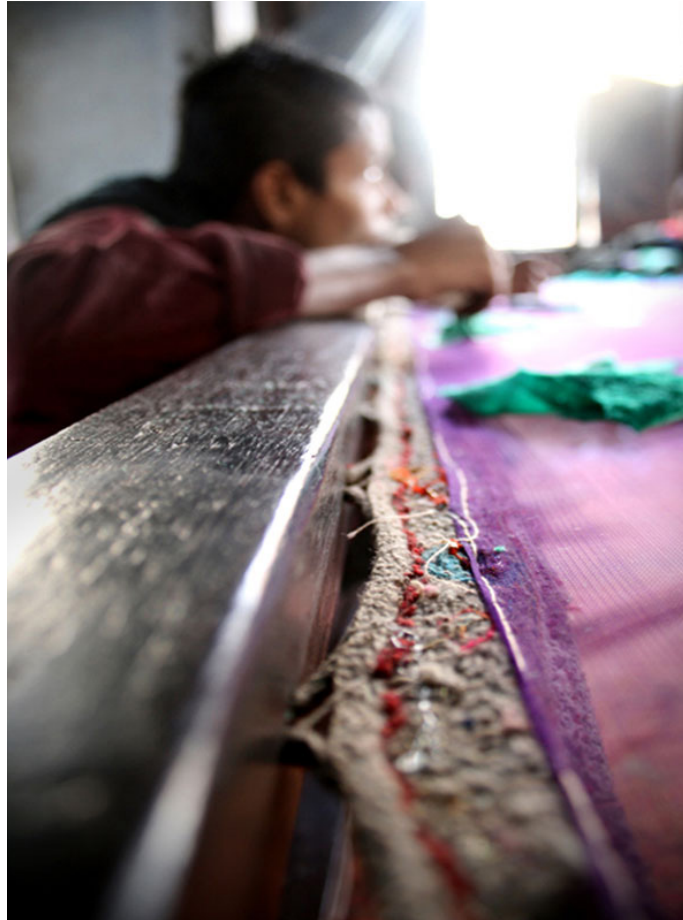
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Zardozi Craft

Zardozi is an ancient Persian art (Zar = gold, dozi = embroidery). It has been passed down for many generations. It is called the queen of all handworks on garments, originally a privilege enjoyed only by the royalty. Pure gold and silver were used for zari threads in olden times but that is now replaced by copper as the base metal to cut costs.

Steps of the embroidery:

1. The first step is laying out the wooden frame. It is called adda bichana. Four wooden planks are held together with nuts and bolts. Then the fabric is stretched and wound up tightly with a strong sutli (thread) along the width of the frame. This process is called taankna.
2. The next step is transferring the pattern to be embroidered onto the fabric. This process is called chapayi. The craftsmen sit cross-legged around the adda with their tools and start stitching. Motifs include elephants, peacocks, dancing figures, leaves, floral and geometric patterns etc.
3. Zardozi stitches are done with muthiya, a special kind of wooden needle with a bent metal tip that is used to pull the thread from below the fabric. This kind of stitching allows the craftsmen to use both hands as they work. The hand above the cloth works with the needle while the hand below the cloth ties each stitch. Thus the products are not only beautiful but long-lasting and durable. Most of zardozi embroidery is done with saadi and naksi which are small metallic springs made by swirling metal threads tightly. It is done on all sorts of fabrics like silk, cotton, net, georgette, shaneel (velvet) etc.
4. After all the stitches and embellishments are done, the fabric is unstitched from the wooden frame and the finished garment is sent to the person who commissioned it.

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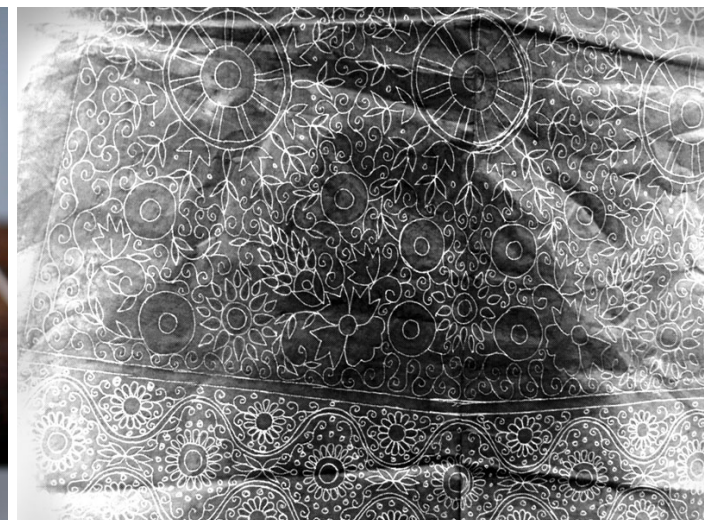
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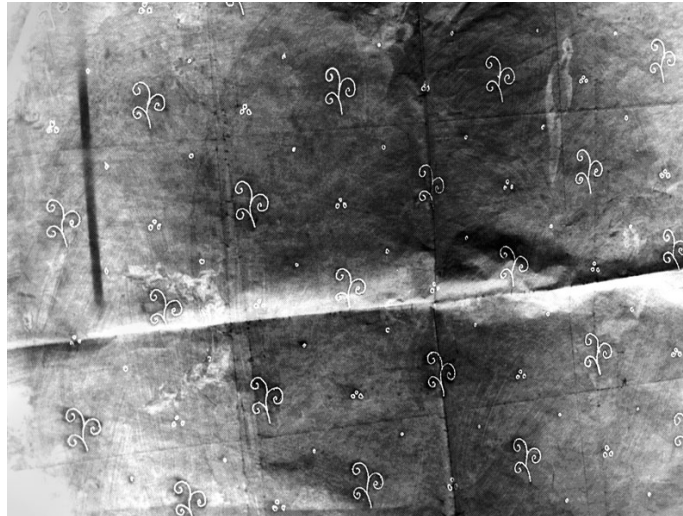
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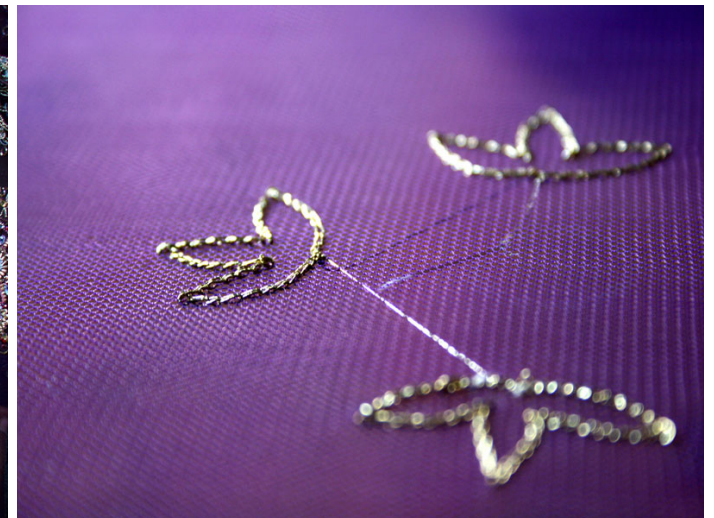
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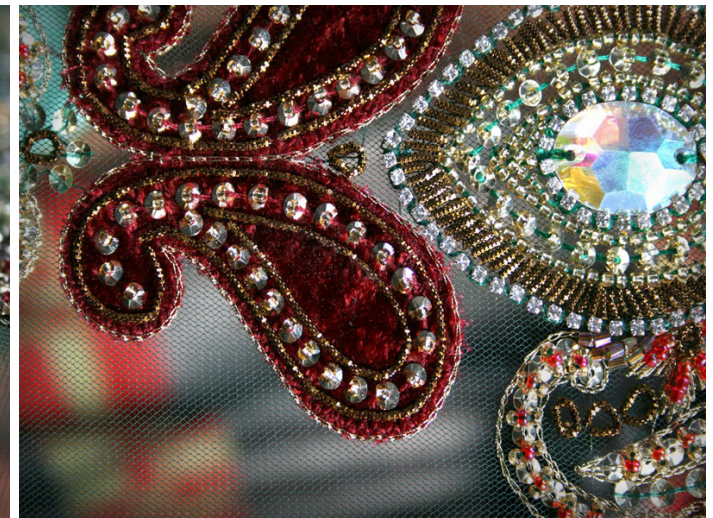
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This documentation was done by Sakshi Gambhir, M. Des., at **IDC, IIT Bombay** as part of Special Project under guidance of Prof. Nina Sabnani

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