

Design Resource

Zari Zardosi - Agra

The Art of Metal Embroidery

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and

Vijay G.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/zari-zardosi-agra>



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Introduction

Zari zardosi is an art of metal embroidery which was usually done with gold and silver threads to decorate the attire of the kings and royals in ancient India. Though its existence can be dated back to the Vedic period, but it was only during the medieval era when this embroidery craft played a significant role in embellishing the attire of various Mughal rulers. Its usage was not only limited to the royal costumes, but it was also used to adorn the walls of royal tents and accoutrement of regal elephants and horses. Thus this imperial craft had flourished from the medieval times, reaching its peak during the reign of Emperor Akbar. Later the proficiency of this gold thread embroidery was carried forward by the other great Mughal rulers like Shah Jahan, under whose reign the craftsmen also known as zardos, developed the art of weaving saree using this technique of zari zardosi for Empress Mumtaz Mahal. But this craft got a major setback under the rule of Aurangzeb, which in turn resulted in its decline. Due to its high cost and the rarity of the raw materials the craftsmen could not carry on the embroidery work on their own and were forced to search other alternatives. As a result of which many craftsmen migrated to other cities in search of work. Finally this imperial style of metal thread embroidery was revived in north India after independence in 1947.

Zari zardosi is one of the most important elements of Persian culture which derives its name from two Persian terms, of “Zar” meaning gold and “Dozi” meaning embroidery. It is one of the most famous and elaborate techniques in metal embroidery which involves making intricate designs using gold and silver threads. It involves the use of metal pieces like sequins and precious stones on velvet, satin and heavy silk bases to make the craft more magnificent. The art of zari embroidery was originally done with pure silver wires coated with real gold, known as kalabatun, but gradually due to the rarity of raw materials, these silver and gold wires were replaced with synthetic thread, without changing the authenticity of the craft. This Persian craft has a strong Indian essence to it, due to the use of the metal embroidery in Indian textiles and costumes which are used for various ritual and ceremonial purposes.

The process of zari zardosi begins with the craftsmen drawing the basic layout of the design on a butter paper, which is later perforated using a needle. He then marks the designs on the fabric which is stretched on a wooden frame called adda having four wooden legs. The craftsmen then uses different types of needles depending on the design to make intricate patterns with zari. This zari was traditionally made up of fine gold and silver when it originated in Persia during the Mughal era, but the gradual rise in the cost of gold led to the use of cotton and polyester yarn instead of gold thread. And hence this zari embroidery got segregated into three different types, depending upon the use of raw materials to make the embroidery products. They are “Real zari” which is made up of pure gold and silver, second is “imitation zari” made of copper wires which are electroplated with silver, and “metallic zari” which is a metallized film slitted with polyester. India has always been known for its zari embroidery, because of the traditional skill of Indian craftsmen who have for centuries practiced the craft by inheriting its qualities from father to son.

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The constant demand of the present market has brought in a successful transition from traditional techniques of zari embroidery, to modern ones. All the equipment's used in zari manufacture are locally fabricated making the industry more self-sufficient and a unique one.



Clutch decorated with beads and zari work depicting peacock design.



Wall decorative embellished with beads and stones.



Frame of a wall hanging is being designed with floral motif.

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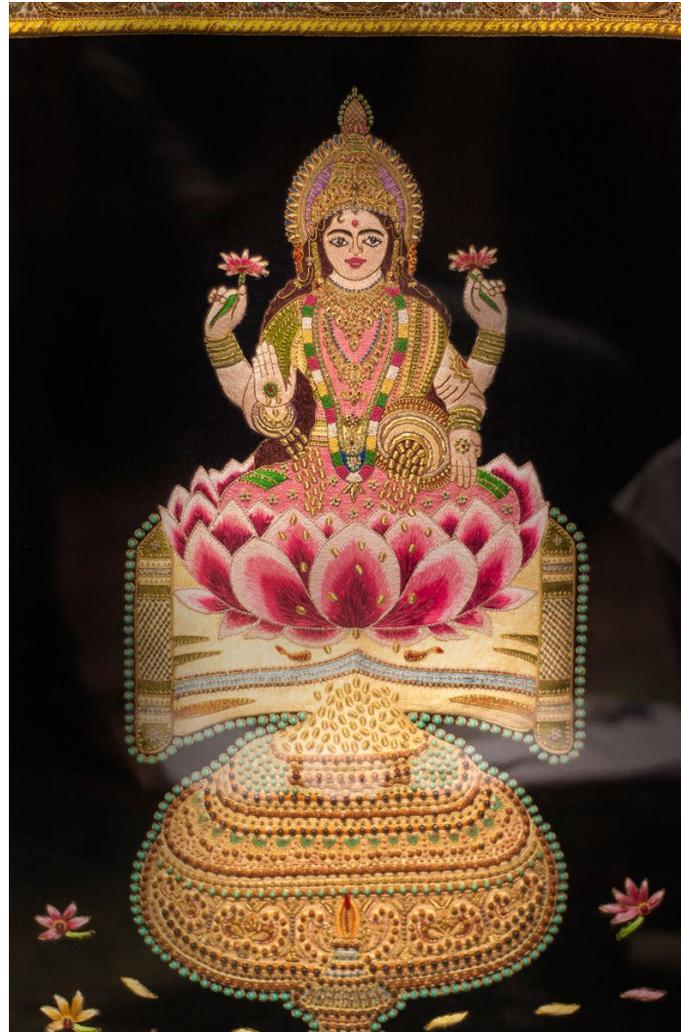
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Wall hanging made of zari work depicting Goddess Lakshmi.



Craftsmen involved practicing zari embroidery craft.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Zari embroidery uses a special kind of metal wire which are made from metal ingots. These blocks of steel or ingots are melted and pressed through perforated steel sheets to form wires, which are subsequently hammered to get varied thickness. These flattened threads are even twisted around the silk threads to form the spring like zardosi known as “dabka”. As these threads come in long curled strips they are manually cut using a scissor depending on the design. The plain wires are called “badla” while the round ones are called “kasab”. The glittering effect of these threads were a result of silver. Beside these threads a variety of materials are also used for the embroidery like zari, sequins, beads, small crystals and stones, metallic wires, purl thread, round sequin and even a sequin lace.

The process of zardosi embroidery requires the following tools and raw materials for its production:

- **Pencil/Pen:** To draw/trace the design on the paper.
- **Ruler:** To mark a perpendicular line for symmetrical designs using a pen or pencil. This line acts as the base for the designs which are to be mirrored on either side of this central line.
- **Butter Paper:** This is a transparent paper used for transferring designs onto the fabric.
- **Solution of Kerosene and Chalk Powder:** It is used to trace the design on the fabric. This solution is rubbed on the perforated tracing paper so that it seeps through the holes to trace the design on the fabric.
- **Needle (aari):** They are used to prick holes on the butter paper along the marked lines of the design.

Various types of needles also used for weaving and embroidery purpose depending upon the design and the thread.

- **Frame or Tapestry (adda):** Wooden frame is used to stretch the fabric so that it does not move while the craftsman is working on it. It also helps to keep the fabric clean and gives the cloth a uniform tension, making the stitches even.
- **Scissors:** It is used to cut the threads in accordance to the design.
- **Fabric:** The surface on which the zari embroidery is to be done. Usually a closely woven fabric is chosen to take the weight of the threads. Various types of fabrics like silk and velvet are used depending upon the demand.

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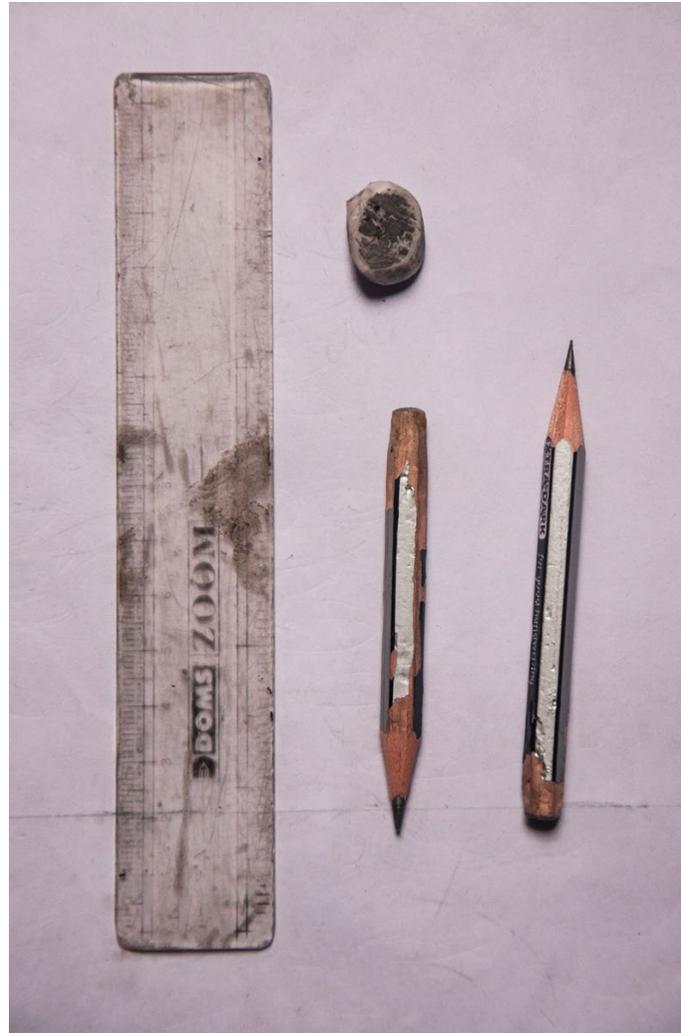
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- **Metallic and Embroidery Threads:** They are used for knitting the designs on the fabric. The most commonly used metallic thread is Purl. It is a flexible hollow tube like thread which are made by spinning fine wire tightly around a needle used to define outlines and fine lines of a design.

- **Sequins, Beads and Crystal Stones:** They are used for embellishing the embroidery giving it an antique look.



Pencil and rulers are used to mark the measurements.



Cut out stencils used to make the design.

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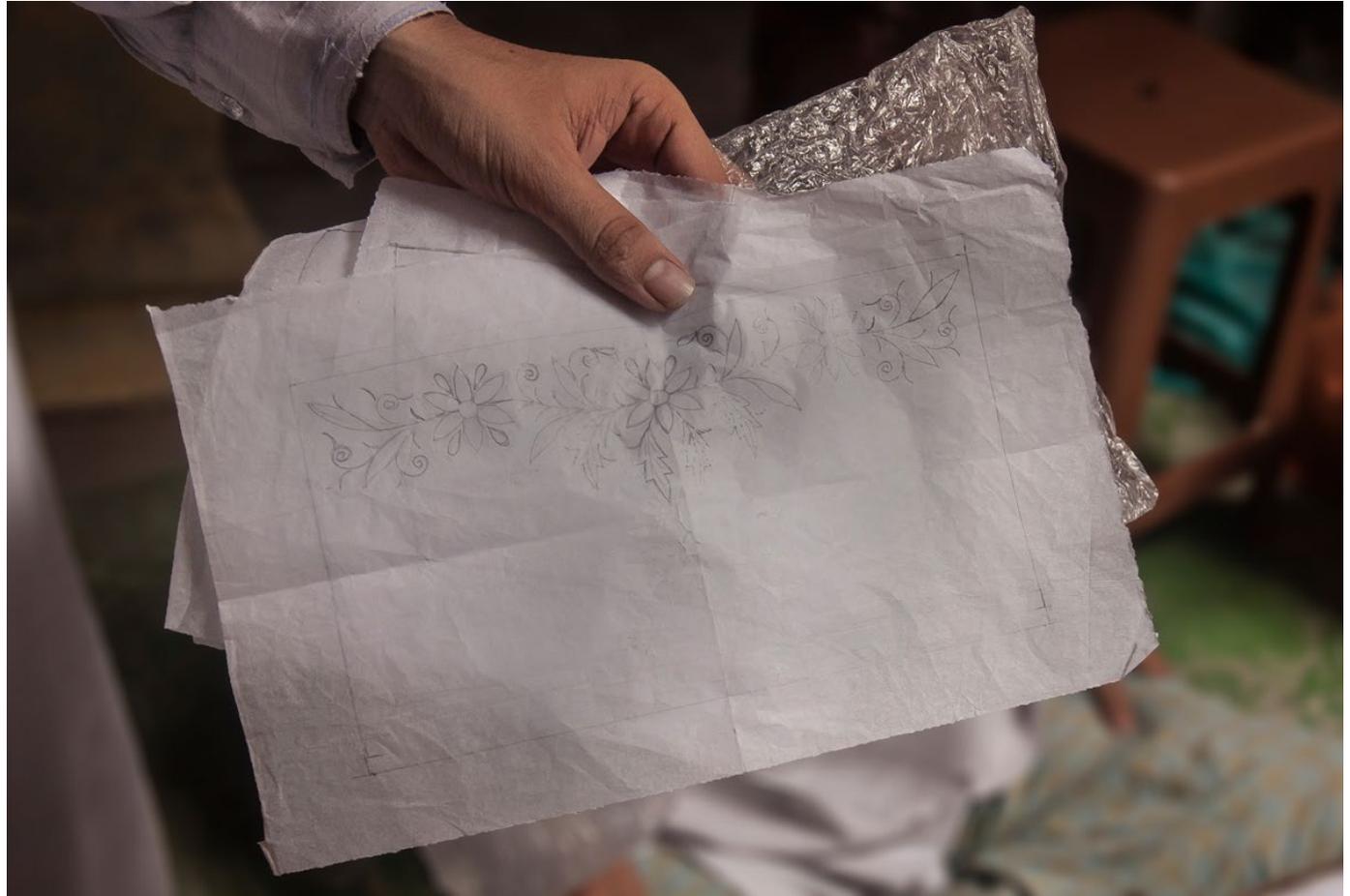
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Tracing sheets used to trace the design on the fabric.

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Wooden frame used to attach the cloth for embroidery.



Zari thread used to embroider the design.

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Tools used in embroidery work.

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Making Process

The process of zari embroidery starts by manually positioning the tracing the design by the eye, but for a more precise placing, the center of the tracing paper is determined by folding the paper and then marking this folded line with a scale and a pencil. This perpendicular line at the center acts as a base for as symmetrical design, which has to be mirrored on either side of this line. Basically a dressmaker's carbon locally known as butter paper is used to trace the design using a pencil or a pen .After tracing the design, the paper is placed on a soft surface like foam or a felt to prick holes close to each other along the marked lines or design. Then this perforated butter paper is placed on a fabric for further tracing. After which a small pouncing pad or a small cloth dipped in a solution of kerosene and white powder(made from the dressmakers chalk) is rubbed through the holes of the perforated tracing paper .The rubbing is done with uniform circular movements so that the solution seeps through the holes to trace the design on the fabric.

Once these dotted lines are marked, the fabric is then sent to the embroidery workers for framing. The fabric is then stretched and knitted temporarily to a wooden frame (or tapestry frame) which consists of four wooden legs resting on wooden posts. This wooden frame keeps the fabric clean and gives the cloth a uniform tension, making the stiches even. It can also be made to fit any size of the fabric. The artisan then sits on the floor behind the wooden frame with all his tolls and raw materials to start the process of weaving.

In the process of zari embroidery the craftsmen uses different types of needles to pull out each zardosi element .It is then integrated into basic design by pushing the needle into the fabric. Zari embroidery includes wide range of weaving techniques using varieties of thread. While gijai (thin thread) is used for making intricate patterns, a thicker kalabattu thread is used for making the borders. Another kind of spirally twisted gold thread known as tikora is preferred for complicated designs. Floral designs which are made using sequins are called sitara.

Depending upon the design a smaller metal frame can also be used instead of wooden frame to concentrate at a particular area of the fabric. Though this needle and thread method brings out the uniqueness of this craft but it is also very time consuming as the most exclusive one can take months of hard work.

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With the help of stencil the basic shape is traced.

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Inside the shape the required design is traced on a tracing paper.



Golden beads and strips are cut and kept.



Sewing needle is inserted in the beads or golden strips.



The beads are sewed on the traced design.

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Zardozi work is mostly done on velvet fabric.

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The threads are knotted under the fabric to firm the stitch.



The beads, stones and golden strips are purchased from local market.

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Final product of Zari Zardozi craft.

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Products

Zari zardosi which originated in Persia was brought down to India by the Mughal rulers, to embellish their royal attires with this metal embroidery. In dose days this craft was confined only to the royal families, but now it is at an easy reach for the common people. Zari embroidery is widely used now-a-days to make wedding dresses because it depicts royalty. Apart from wearable garments, this embroidery is also found on variety of products like cushion covers, table cloths, wall hangings, bags, purses, bed sheets, etc. This kind of elaborate embroidery is also done by using gold threads sequins, beads and precious stones to embellish heavy coats, cushions, shoes and belts. Various kind of stitches like Salma, sitara, gijai, badla and katori are used to bring out the antiquity of the craft. These techniques are passed on from generations to generations whose preside in the areas of Agra, Delhi, Jaipur and Surat.

The chief products of zari zardosi are:

- Wedding Outfits
- Cushion Covers
- Table Cloths
- Wall Hanging
- Purse
- Bags



A purse decorated with zari work of grapes motif.



Varieties of purse with different motifs work.

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Wall hanging depicting the pattern of a beautiful peacock.



Decorative carpet embellished with zari and various types of colorful beads.

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Hand bag embellished with zari and bead work.

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