

Design Resource

Zari Zardozi - Kolkata, West Bengal

Needle Embroidery

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/zari-zardozi-kolkata-west-bengal>



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Introduction

Embroidery is an art of decorating fabrics with fine thread works. Apart from threads and needles, the craft also fixes materials like pearls, beads, quills, and sequins, etc. Historically, the embroidery threads were made out of silk, gold, or silver, sewing elaborate hand-stitched clothing, boots, and hats. The origin of embroidery is recorded to the start of 30,000 BC, where the Orient and Middle Eastern parts of the world were involved in heavily mend thread works. Later in the 1100s, the religious artifacts adopted this style for incorporating small seed pearls onto vellum, followed by beadwork clothing in the coming decades. Thus, it was considered a symbol to evaluate one's economic status with the range of embroidery work done on their clothing and religious objects. This was very prevalent in the cultures of ancient Persia, India, China, Japan, Byzantium, and medieval Europe.

Handicrafts form the basis of the cultural setup of any country. The state of West Bengal from India has always been famous for its handlooms and handicrafts. These handicrafts of the region make use of simple raw materials like wood, clay, thread, sponge wood, bamboo, conch-shell, cane, etc. However, ornaments made from copper, brass, and silver have also gained a place in the category as it is rooted in their traditional culture. Here the common motifs are mostly inspired by nature and religious deities. Kolkata-based Zari Zardozi embroidery, chic Baluchari sarees, and Tasar textiles are famous worldwide for their style and elegance. These items enjoy a strong world market as it comes with distinguished features and is contiguous. Many generations from the interiors of the state have been practicing Zardozi embroidery for decades. Eventually, designers from across the country, recognizing its grandeur, started sourcing the art, thus reviving it. Though there was a significant fall in its popularity post-independence, in the last 50 years, it gave a comeback at various prestigious Fashion Weeks. Now the Zardozi fabrics are widely found in weddings, festivals, and other celebratory events. The word 'Zardozi', a form of metal embroidery, is derived from Persian terms, 'Zar' meaning gold and 'Dosi' meaning embroidery. Tracing back to its history, this embroidered clothing paved its way into India from Persia through trade. Here the art was more used to decorate walls of the royal tents, scabbards, carpets, wall hangings, and head plates for regal elephants. Now there are many regions in India like Lucknow, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Delhi, Kashmir, Mumbai, Ajmer, and Varanasi that actively practice the art. Today Zardozi products available in the market range from various forms of garments, accessories like purses, belts, shoes, headbands, to even home furnishings. In Chakmadhu, the Howrah district of Kolkata is well known for its authentic Zardozi embroidered sarees and purses. Various manufacturing centers functioning at the place offer training programs and workshops for local people, providing an opportunity for them to master the art and make a living by selling it even on international platforms.

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Both men and women are involved in zari zardozi work.



Craftsman working on a floral motif with zardozi design.



Beautiful zardozi work.



Frame of a window screen designed with floral motifs.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials that are used for Zari Zardozi are as follows:

- **Reel of Thread and Woolen:** These are the basic materials for making a zari zardozi embroidery.
- **Needle:** It is used to sew in the beads and precious stones to the fabric.
- **Bobbin:** It is a spindle to which the thread is wound and attached to the sewing machine for the stitching or embroidery purpose.
- **Pirn:** It is a wooden reel used in spinning the thread.
- **Scissor:** It is used for cutting off extra fabric and thread.
- **Beads and Golden Strips:** These are used as decorative materials to add embellishments to the fabric.
- **Tracing Sheet:** It is used for tracing an intended design onto the fabric.
- **Metal Holder:** It is used for pulling out the thread that goes back and forth of the fabric while making embroidery.



Golden beads are used for decoration purposes.

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Needle for pulling out the thread that goes back and forth of the fabric while making embroidery.



Thread used for the designing purpose.



Fabric glue is used for sticking glitter stones.



Nakshi strips for making embroidery designs.

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Making Process

Firstly, the craftsman sits cross-legged and arranges all the raw materials and tools beside him/her for easy accessibility to start with the Zardozi embroidery. They sit around the wooden framework locally called Adda. Here the tools include curved hooks, needles, gold wires, metal stars, round sequins, glass, plastic beads, and threads. Once ready, they start drawing the indented design to a tracing sheet, and holes are made along with them with a needle. Mostly the patterns are geometrical and contemporary in nature, forming complex motifs. Secondly, the design is traced out to silk, satin, or velvet fabric, which is stretched tightly over the wooden frame, using bamboo or wooden spars to achieve uniform tension. Now to perform the embroidery work, the craftsman pushes different types of needles into the fabric along the pattern traced. Once stitched and knots are made under the fabric to firm the stitch, golden beads and strips are also incorporated into the design using needles and threads for added beauty. Depending on the expected detailing and number of artisans working on a piece, the time taken for its completion ranges from a day to 4 days.

Flowchart:

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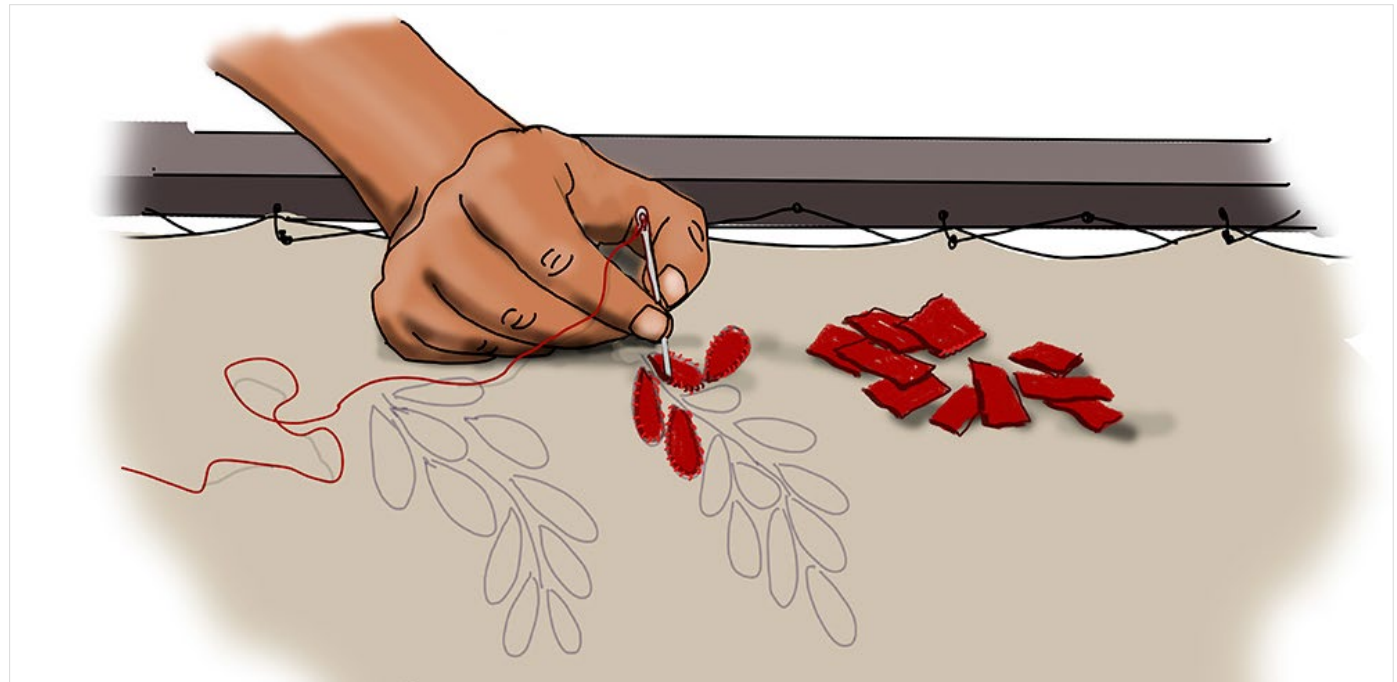
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According to the measurement, the wooden frame is set and the cloth is fixed to the frame.



An intended design is traced on a carbon paper.



Stones being stitched to the cloth.

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Golden strips being fitted rightly to the cloth using a sewing needle.



The hand placed above the cloth works with the needle while the one kept below the cloth pulls the thread and makes knots.



Adhesives being applied to the traced design.

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Beads are placed over the adhesive.



Cloth decorated with beads and zari work depicting the floral design.

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A look at a completed Zari Zardozi work.

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Products

Though Zari embroidery can be done on all range of clothing products, its application is mainly found in sarees and salwar kameez. They are very much in demand in the domestic as well as international market. The cost of Zari Zardozi sarees starts from INR 1000 and can go up to INR 20,000 depending on the design and type of thread used.



Zardozi neck pattern for the dress materials.



Beautiful Zardozi design for the blouse material.



Attractive design with different motif work.

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Video



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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Srikanth B. at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

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You can write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

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