

Gold Threads and Heritage: The Story of Zardozi

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Among the many celebrated handicrafts of India, **Zardozi embroidery** stands out as a symbol of opulence, cultural heritage, and extraordinary craftsmanship. This **metallic thread embroidery**, whose name literally means “*gold embroidery*” in Persian, has embroidered its way through history — evolving from royal courts to today’s fashion and festive wardrobes.

A Heritage Rooted in History

Zardozi’s story is deeply intertwined with India’s rich textile legacy. While Indian textiles have been flourishing since the time of the **Indus Valley civilisation**, Zardozi gained prominence much later, especially during the **Mughal era** when emperors like **Akbar** patronised arts that blended Persian influences with Indian motifs.

The craft emerged from Persian traditions — the very term *zardozi* comes from the Persian words *zar* (gold) and *dozi* (sewing). Over centuries, it became synonymous with royal attire and ceremonial textiles, adorning garments worn by kings, queens and nobility with shimmering **gold and silver threads**.

Craftsmanship and Techniques

Unlike flat surface embroidery, Zardozi is known for its **three-dimensional texture and elaborate relief work** created using gold and silver threads, beads, pearls, sequins, and sometimes precious stones. Traditionally, artisans called **zardozs** worked on luxurious bases like silk, velvet or satin, using techniques such as **couching**, where thick metal threads are laid on fabric and secured with finer threads — resulting in designs that appear sculpted rather than simply stitched.

The creation of a true Zardozi piece is **labour-intensive and painstaking**. Karigars first transfer intricate motifs — often inspired by flora, fauna and geometric patterns — onto the fabric. Then, using hooked needles and tools, they build up layers of metallic thread and embellishments over days or even months to achieve the desired richness and detail.

From Royal Courts to Modern Runways

Historically, Zardozi was more than just fashion — it symbolised **power, wealth and artistic excellence**. Embroidered textiles did not only decorate clothes; they adorned **wall hangings, tents, throne canopies and even the trappings of royal elephants**.

With the decline of imperial patronage and the onset of industrialisation, the craft experienced challenges. However, post-independence India saw renewed interest and efforts to preserve traditional arts. Today, cities such as **Lucknow** and **Banaras** continue to be important hubs of Zardozi, producing garments and accessories that blend age-old craft with contemporary aesthetics.

Spotting Authentic Zardozi

Authentic Zardozi remains a **handmade luxury**, distinguishable by the complexity of its stitches and materials. True pieces feature slight variations and imperceptible irregularities — marks of human creativity — whereas machine-made imitations tend to look uniformly precise. Experts recommend buying from trusted craft societies or seasoned designers who value and preserve the craft.

Zardozi Today: Craft and Culture

In modern fashion, Zardozi continues to shine — especially in **bridal wear, festive ensembles and couture collections**. Its association with celebration and heritage makes it a treasured choice for weddings and grand occasions, bringing a timeless elegance to garments that honour both tradition and artistry.

As artisans pass down this skill through generations, Zardozi remains not just an embroidery technique — but a **living thread of India's cultural tapestry**, connecting the past with present-day style.

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