

Hidden Threads: Lesser-Known Indian Embroidery Techniques

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India's rich cultural heritage extends far beyond its well-known embroidery styles like **Chikankari** or **Zardozi** — several exquisite yet lesser-recognized techniques are quietly sustaining artisanal communities and enriching textile traditions across the country.

Mukaish: Subtle Sparkle in Thread

One of the most refined among these underrated styles is **Mukaish embroidery**, also known by names such as *kamdani* or *badla*. Practised mainly in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Mukaish uses tiny metallic threads to create delicate dotted patterns on fine fabrics like chiffon, muslin, or organza.

Unlike heavier metallic works that catch every glint of light, Mukaish delivers a **soft, ethereal shimmer** — an elegant glow rather than a bold gleam. Its close association with **Mughal-era royal attire** reflects its historic sophistication, yet it remains less visible in mainstream fashion discussions compared with flashier counterparts like Zardozi.

Rabari: Storytelling with Mirrors and Motifs

From the arid landscapes of **Kutch** in Gujarat emerges **Rabari embroidery** — a vibrant textile artform practised by the nomadic Rabari community.

Characterised by bold chain stitches, geometric patterns, and the abundant use of **mirrors (shisha)**, Rabari embroidery transforms garments and accessories into vivid cultural narratives. Motifs often depict animals, birds, or symbols significant to tribal life, and each piece can be seen as a visual biography of its maker.

Unlike some urban fashion trends that lean heavily on uniformity, Rabari pieces are deeply **individual — no two are exactly alike** — celebrating the craftspeople's creativity and their communal stories woven stitch by stitch.

Crafts Deserving Broader Appreciation

While these styles may not always command the same spotlight as more commercial embroidery techniques, they embody **India's textile diversity** and the artisanal genius thriving outside big fashion circuits.

Mukaish's refined metallic threads offer designers a subtle alternative for minimalist yet festive wear, while Rabari work's energetic motifs and mirror accents lend themselves to bold fashion statements and contemporary fusion pieces.

Reviving interest in these techniques — through fashion, exhibitions, or heritage tourism — could not only broaden India's embroidery vocabulary but also support the **craft communities** who keep these traditions alive.

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