ZARDOZI EMBROIDERY
An Introduction

India is a Country of numerous customs and cultures.

All of them flourish in tandem. India has established its presence in many parts of lifestyle segment.

Right from fashion to accessories and jewelries, India has literally arrived.

What we are going to talk about is Indian embroidered garments. There is a huge demand for such garments in many parts of the world.

Indian embroidered garments are available in amazing numbers of variety.

No wonder, popularity of such garments has reached the crescendo.
Among all the existing and popular embroidered garments, **Zardozi Embroidery** has acquired the maximum fame. It is in existence since centuries.

The word *Zardozi* is a combination of two Persian words *Zar* and *dozi* that means gold and embroidery, *Zardozi* work use of gold or silver zari threads is seen.

Also known as metal embroidery, *Zardozi* embroidery has also changed with time. For example, instead of normal threads, colorful metal threads are in vogue these days.
Zardozi embroidery is beautiful metal embroidery, which was once used to embellish the attire of the kings and the royals in India.

It was also used to adorn walls of the royal tents, scabbards, wall hangings and the paraphernalia of regal elephants and horses.

Zardozi embroidery work involves making elaborate designs, using gold and silver threads.

Further adding to the magnificence of the work are the studded pearls and precious stones.
Zardozi embroidery has been in existence in India from the time of the Rig Veda.

There are numerous instances mentioning the use of Zari embroidery as ornamentation on the attire of goods.

Initially, the embroidery was done with pure silver wires and real gold leaves. However, today, craftsmen make use of a combination of copper wire, with a golden or silver polish, and a silk thread.

This is because there is hardly any availability of gold/silver on such a large scale as before.
THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CRAFT

Zardozi is an ancient art (Persian embroidery) which has been passed down for many generations, dating back before the Mughal Empire, reaching its zenith under the patronage of Emperor Akbar in the 17th century.

Zardozi adorned the costumes of the court, wall hanging, scabbards, regal side walls of tents and the rich trappings of elephants and horses.

Intricate patterns traced in gold and silver, studded with seed pearls and precious stones enhanced the shimmering beauty of silk, velvet and brocade.
During the rule of Emperor Aurangzeb, the royal patronage extended to craftsmen was stopped.

Many craftsmen left Delhi to seek work in the courts of Rajasthan and Punjab.

The onset of industrialization in the 18th and 19th centuries was another setback. Most of the craftsmen turned to other occupation.

The art of Zardozi was revived along with many traditional methods of embroidery in the middle of this century.

Zari work was mainly done in madras and Zardozi in Hyderabad until a few decades ago.

Today, Lucknow Is home to this finest work of gold and silver embroidery.
THE DECLINE

The non availability of gold on a large scale become a hurdle in the making of zari threads.

The problem was overcome by combining copper wire with a golden sheen and gold colored silk thread.

Another major problem was the availability of skilled Zardozi craftsmen decreased, as they had taken on other jobs. But with the revival of the craft, their number began to increase.
THE RENNAISANCE OF ZARDOZI

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Today, Uttar Pradesh is home to this finest work of gold and silver as embroidery. This craft has caught on to a larger region of Bareilly such as Allampur, Faridpur, Biharkala, Nawabganj and Chandpur.

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As the craft was on decline, the number of craftsmen decreased, as they had taken on other jobs. But with the revival of the craft, their number began to increase.
INNOVATION AND SUCCESS

New designs and products have been introduced apart from the traditional ones. Some of the products are cushion and pillow covers, bedspreads, handbags, sandals and buttons.

Zardozi on kurta-pajamas and churidar-achkans (tight trousers and men’s coat) have gained popularity among the men.

Zardozi-embroidered garments have become quite popular with Indians abroad,

Zardozi also began to attract the attention of top fashion designers the world over.
MAIN CENTRES OF ZARDOZI EMBROIDERY IN INDIA

Zardozi embroidery work is mainly a specialty of Lucknow, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Delhi, Agra, Kashmir, Mumbai, Ajmer and Chennai.
THE METHODS OF ZARDOZI EMBROIDERY

Zardozi the traditional art of court embroidery is the sheer magic of nimble fingers and imaginative designs, envisaged by the ensemble of lustrous metallic wire which was traditionally the silver wire coated/plated with gold, silk threads, beads and stones.
Done with metal wire and metal pieces or sequins on velvet, satin and heavy silk bases, Zari is one of the most famous and elaborate techniques in metal embroidery.

An ancient art, dating back to Rig Vedic times, was used to adorn the dresses of Gods and Goddesses.
The original embroidery of Zari was done with pure silver wires coated with real gold known as Kalabatun.

Though silver and gold threads have now been replaced with synthetic and artificial threads, the art remains the same.
These days it is used to make exquisite evening dresses, coats, fashion accessories like purses, handbags, belts, shoes; ceremonial adornments like badges and insignia; furnishing accessories like cushion covers, wall hangings and boxes etc.

Popularly known as Aari work, Zari involves use of beads and a special needle known as Muthia which is similar to a crochet needle.

The difference between Aari and Zardozi work is in the method of embroidery and material used.
Zardozi uses **Dabka** (spring type of a thread), katoris, tikena, and sitara (sequins).

Both methods are used to create fascinating designs.

The Zardozi craftsmen sit cross-legged around the **Addaa** – the wooden framework with the tools of their trade.

These include curved hooks, needles, **salmaa** pieces which are stiff gold wires twisted like springs and cut to the required length, **sitaaras** or metal stars, round sequins, glass and plastic beads,

**Dabka** – a combination of gold and silk thread and **kasab** – silver or gold-plated silver thread.
The most prevalent Zardozi elements you see on this photograph are segments of Dabka, a lengthy and flexible tightly wound metal spiral that cut into fragments and then stitched to the fabric much like a bead.

**Kora**, a heavier and darker Dabka is also very prevalent.

Wrapped around each red or green plastic jewel-like bead are segments of salmaa, a square sided Dabka that is wiry and erratic in appearance.
A TECHNICAL EXPOSITION

How the metal wire is made?
The method is called ‘Kalabatun’.

• The process starts with the melting of metal ingot to make into bars known as ‘paras’, which is drawn to a length by gently beating it after heating.

• The metal is then pulled through perforated steel plates to turn into a long wire after which comes the ‘Tarkashi’ process.

This is to reduce the wire to the required thinness like a whisp of hair using rubber/diamond dyes (moulds).

• The last stage is called ‘Budla’ when the wire is finally flattened, now done by machines and then wound on silk/cotton thread which when twisted becomes Kasab / Kalabatun.
There are two types of embroideries:

- Heavy work: Zardozi is the heavier type
- Light work: Kamdani is the lighter type

In Zardozi, the stitches are very close to each other and they are elaborately done.

The lighter type Kamdani is used on finer fabrics and it is of a simpler kind and less elaborate.

Zardozi is prepared with the use of ‘Budla’ which are thin strips of metal, which is for lighter type is done on weaving apparels such as caps, scarves, etc?
**GIZAI:**

It is a circular thin wire resembling an insect of this name.

**SITARA:** it is a small round metal piece to look like a star.

**Zardozi** is prepared on curtains, heavy coats, cushions, shoes and animal tapping.

In **Zardozi**, the design is with the twisted gold thread called **Gizai**.

Gold and silver embroidery is done using any type of stitch.

1. Laid stitch/ couching stitch,  
2. Satin stitch’  
3. Chain stitch,  
4. Stem stitch and  
5. Running stitch.
The laid/couching stitch as it is called is important and suited in gold thread.

It is generally used on cushion/masnads (small gaddis)

Gold and silver embroidery is invariably done with cloth stitched over a wooden frame.

Sometimes certain designs as leaves and petals of flowers are padded to give a raised effect.

In the Gota, Kinari is in fine shaped birds, animals, human figures attached to the cloth and encased in wires of silver and gold while the space around is covered by coloured silk.
The chain stitch resembles in counter part in kutch work and is generally used in saris.

The stem stitch and the running stitch are used for a miscellaneous type of work.

The overall effect is of enameling.

The most important feature in Gota and Kinari work is the cutting of the woven gold border into various shapes and design, which are stitched on the cloth, thus creating a variety of textured patterns in the design.
Karchobi is divided into 3 types:

• **Kasab-Tiki:** Using gold and silver thread and spangles.

• **Jhik-Chalak:** Using twisted thread called jhik and Zigzag thread called chalak.

• **Bharat-Karachi:** Using pieces of cardboard to provide a raised body for the design, the material being used as padding.
THE TRANSFER OF MOTIF/ PATTERN ON THE FABRIC

The next step was the transfer of the motif or designs to be embroidered onto the fabric. The motif was first sketched on a piece of thick paper. Its outlines were perforated with a needle and the piece of paper placed over the cloth. Finely powered charcoal tied in a Muslin cloth was passed over the design. After the entire area had been covered the design was gone over with a piece of yellow clay and then the material was stretched on a wooden frame, ready to be embroidered.

Today the method of transferring pattern to fabric is slightly different. After the perforated khaakha – the thick tracing paper – has been placed on the cloth, the pattern is rubbed with a solution of chalk and kerosene oil to transfer it onto the cloth.
THE PRESENT GLORY

For the time being, Surat and Banaras remain the principle suppliers of Zari material and Zardozi crafts.

Major handicraft shops sell these embroidered garments, which have become very popular now. Taking orders for embroidery to the customer’s specifications is a major development brought into this art by the craftsmen.

As a whole, the popularity of this extraordinary craft is quite on rise.
Zardozi embroidery is hand stitched predominately by Muslim men.

Zardozi is fashioned with a needle that resembles a very small crochet hook which is used to run up and down through the cloth, much like a sewing machine, while the cloth is pulled tightly over a large wooden frame.

Zardozi has remained as an appliqué method of embroidery. With one hand the craftsman holds a retaining thread below the fabric. In the other he holds a hook or a needle or a needle with which he picks up the appliqué materials. Then he passes the needle or hook through the fabric. After days of painstaking labor, the result is an exquisite gold veined work of art.

This kind of stitching allows the craftsman to use both hands as he works. The hand above the cloth works the needle, while the hand below the cloth ties each stitch – making Zardozi products not only beautiful but durable.
Down the ages, the craft became equally popular with the wealthy Hindu, Muslim, and European classes.

Today several families in Varanasi, Agra, Lucknow, Rampur, Bareilly, and Farrukhabad, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, have revived this old craft to supply exquisite Zari embroidered bridal outfits and salwar kameezes to boutiques round the country. But prices are considerably lower in Uttar Pradesh.

Innovative designers have added functional bags, belts, caps, cushions, and wall hangings to their stock of ready to wear and custom made Zardozi garments.

A lighter and flashier offshoot of traditional Indian Zardozi finds its way to top fashion houses around the world.