

APPAREL [ZARDOZI WORK]

As an art form that is regal, zardozi work wins hands down. Zardozi is a Persian word which literally means 'sewing with gold string.' Zardozi originated in India since the early days of the *Mahabharata* and is the main edifice of Persian culture. **Bindu Gopal Rao** takes you into the world of zardozi.

Zardozi: A tale of timeless tradition!

It is the art of spinning motifs from real gold and silver threads which was initially seen on bedcovers, curtains and ornate fans of the royals. With the passage of time, this trend graduated to embellishments on ensembles. Real threads were used to hold gemstones on fabrics. Zardozi is popular in the Middle East, India and Pakistan. Zardozi is an embroidery form with a rich heritage and lineage and the richness essentially comes from the gold threads used in the embroidery stitches.

THE HERITAGE OF ZARDOZI

Zardozi came to India gradually but prospered during the Mughal reign with its Indian base in Lucknow and Chennai. Zardozi inspires traders and designers alike, simply because of its versatility and the fact that it instantly transforms a garment and alleviates it a notch higher. Designer Pam Mehta says, “the gold/silver thread stitches of zardozi help in creating patterns, lattices and wonderful designs. The metallic richness used on rich satins, silks and velvet creates awesome designs and is widely used by designers to craft formal Indian wear and rich upholsteries.” Zardozi attained the peak of its popularity in the 17th century under the patronage of the Mughal emperor, Akbar. Under the rule of Aurangzeb, the

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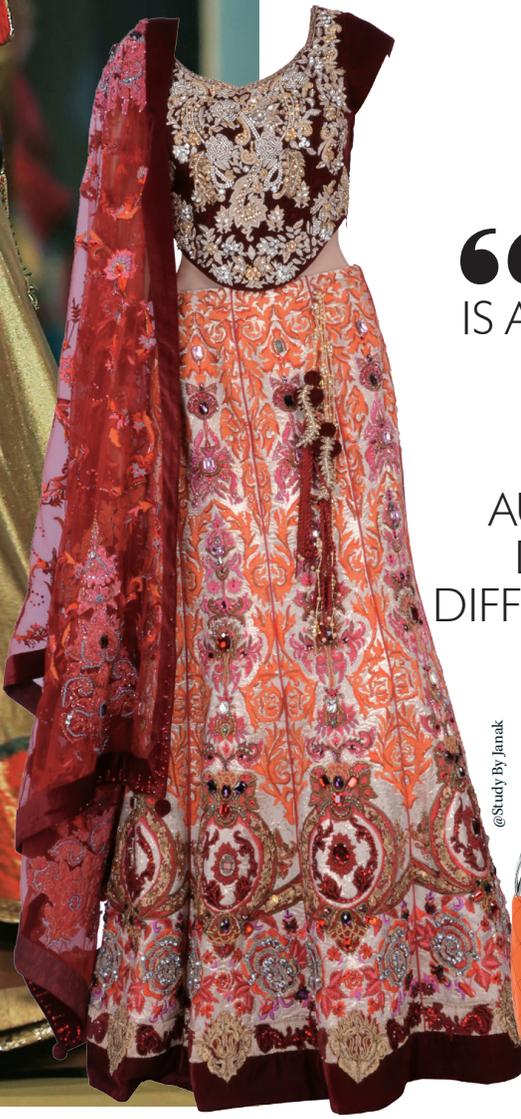


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royal patronage stopped and this led to the decline of the craft. "Since the cost was high and raw materials were quite rare, the craftsmen could not carry on with the embroidery on their own. Many craftsmen left Delhi and went to the courts of Rajasthan and Punjab in search of work. With the 18th and 19th centuries bringing in industrialisation, the craft suffered another setback. It was only after gaining independence in the year 1947 that the Indian government undertook steps to promote zari embroidery," says Garima Vashisht, Pattern Engineer, Fit technologist and Faculty at the Institute of Apparel Management, Gurgaon.

"The original embroidery of zardozi, known as *kalabatun* was done with pure silver wires coated with real gold. The silver and gold wires have been replaced with synthetic threads now but the art remains the same," says Vandy Mehra, Group Director of Study By Janak.

The fabric to be embroidered with zardozi is stretched firmly over a frame to make

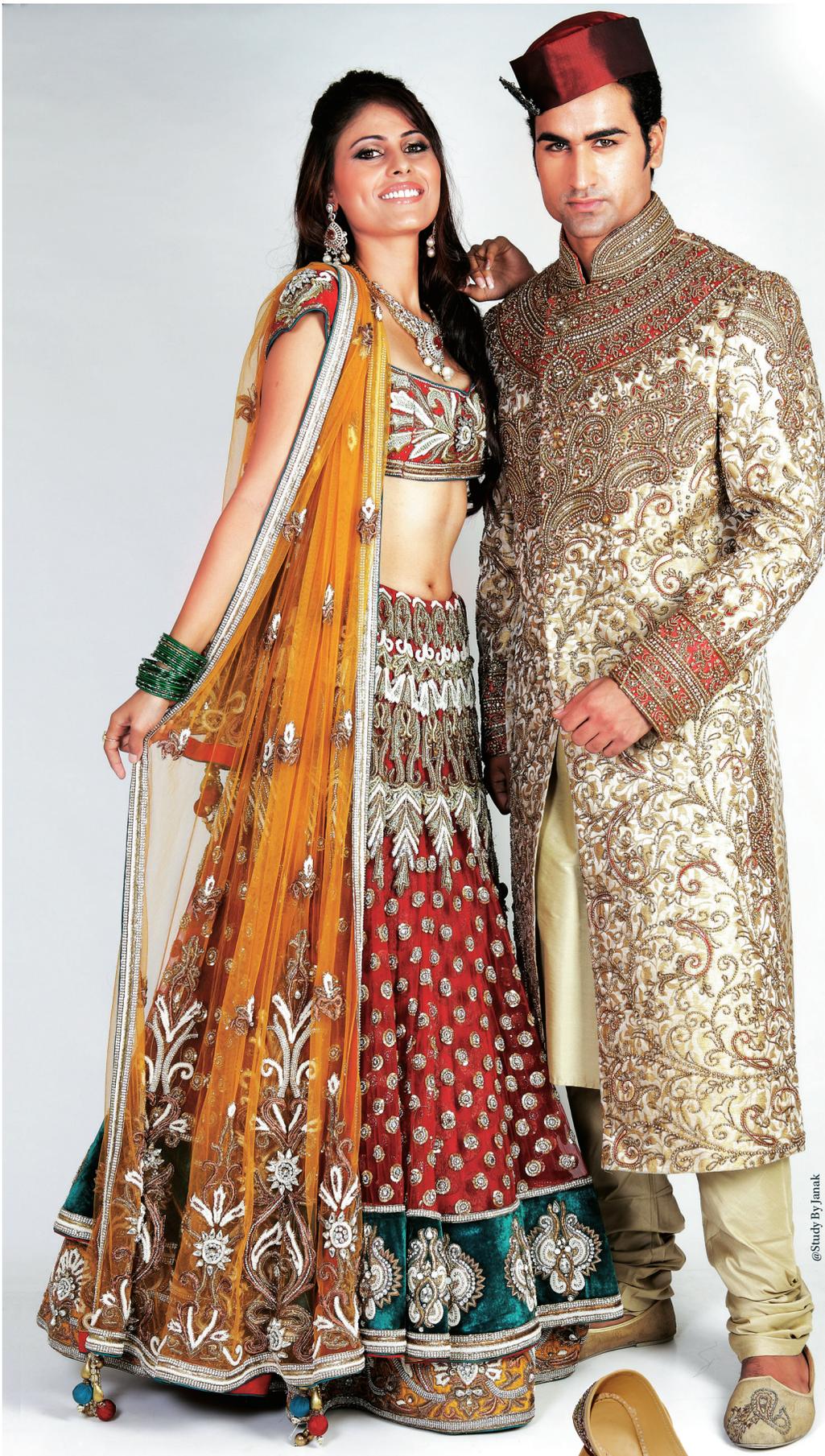


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elaborate designs using gold and silver threads and studded pearls along with other precious stones thereby making it appealing and unique. This process is widely used in the textile industry to create rich traditional wear.

CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS

The art of zardozi is not only limited to real gold/silver zari; designers now use a lot of *resham* or synthetic fabrics like *'badla'* or even beaten copper wires. The art of zardozi has been a part of traditional Indian handicrafts since decades and has witnessed a lot of changes over the years. Original zardozi was made from the alloy of silver and gold. Zardozi thread uses *salma*, *sitara*, *dabka*, *kora*, *kator* and *tikena* as well. These embellishments are stored for later usage as well. "It is not difficult for a textile industry to make an outfit look contemporary yet traditional as creativity and fashion sense together do the trick," says Mehra. Pure zardozi gives a royal feel to the apparel. Prominent designers have used it for their wedding collections. "You can use zardozi work on a variety of cloth types. Zardozi work has been used in a variety of apparels like *lehengas*, coats, jackets, *kurtis* and *sherwanis*. You will find zardozi done with





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coloured plastic wires so as to increase the life and reduce the cost of the work done," says Monica Gupta, Co-founder, www.craftsvilla.com.

Zardozi is in fact, now even used in western and contemporary outfits by a number of international designers and labels.

COMMUNITY CONNECT

Zardozi is popular and widely used in textiles and interior designs and today, several families in Varanasi, Agra, Lucknow, Rampur and Bareilly have revived this old craft to supply exquisite zari-embroidered bridal outfits and *salwar-kameezes* to boutiques around the country. Mughal patterns and Persian motifs are used by communities to develop extremely beautiful fabrics and textiles. Zardozi embroidery work is mainly a specialty of Lucknow, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Delhi, Agra, Kashmir,



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element and then it is integrated into the basic design by pushing the needle into the fabric,” explains Vashisht.

CHALLENGES FACED

Zardozi is a delicate art and skilled craftsmen are dwindling in number. Creating multiple authentic designs is difficult and mass production which is possible in machine work, is impossible in authentic handwork. Also, since it is labour intensive and time consuming, the cost of production is high and consequently zardozi work is expensive. Zardozi is a beautiful work of art that requires a lot of aftercare and attention. “Since the younger

generation believes in instant gratification, they generally do not prefer zardozi as it takes too long to stitch; at times, a single ensemble can take upto months to finish. Zardozi seems like a dying art that needs to be revived by our younger generation,” opines Sanya Dhir, Brand Director, KBSH. While crafting zardozi work, one tug at a loose thread can make the entire design go wrong and apart from that, zardozi work is very intricate work; thus even while crafting it, one must make sure that it is intricately stitched. Painstakingly done by hand, zardozi was becoming a thing of the past until a number of designers revived the technique. “Interestingly, it is one of

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Mumbai, Ajmer and Chennai. Zardozi work’s commercial usage is not only in the garment industry but many other beautiful items are also crafted and embellished with zardozi, like tablecloths, cushion covers and bed covers. The process of working on zardozi embroidery starts with the craftsmen sitting cross-legged around the *Addaa*, the wooden framework, with their tools. “The tools include curved hooks, needles, *salma* pieces (gold wires), *sitaaras* (metal stars), round-sequins, glass and plastic beads, *dabka* (thread) and *kasab* (thread). The second step in the process is to trace out the design on the cloth; if possible, on fabrics like silk, satin, velvet, etc. The fabric is then stretched over the wooden frame and the embroidery work begins. A needle is used to pull out each zardozi



those unique forms whose look and stitch cannot be replicated by machines and hence its original form prevails without distortion. However, this serves as a deterrent to both saleability and the cost factor. Hence, it is used less and costs are high,” says Manish Saksena, Co-Founder and President, LimeRoad.com. The real challenge is to create embroidery in a set of pretty motifs. However, it is impossible to take away from the fact that zardozi is the most exquisite and elegant art form that adds to apparels and accessories alike.

HOW TO PRESERVE ZARDOZI WORK

- For zardozi work, it is recommended to opt for dry cleaning only.
- Embroidery is intricate and extremely delicate. Thus, embroidery must be protected against snags.
- Store garments with metal embroidery like zardozi, *pitta* work and metal sequins in a dry cupboard or the metal may rust and stain the clothes.
- Your storage bags should be made of cloth and not plastic, so that the clothes can breathe.
- Avoid spraying perfume on zardozi.

Zardozi is a royal heritage passed on from one generation to another. Few other works of art on cloth can match the regal splendour and the resplendence of zardozi work. ♣