

Zardozi

Origin: North and East India

The name of this technique is derived from two words: zar (gold) and dozi (the work, i.e., sewing). Zardozi is an extravagant form of embroidery characterized using gold or silver wrapped-threads and can incorporate pearls, beads, and precious stones embellishments on silk, satin, or velvet fabric base. Designs are often created using gold and silver threads.

There are many varieties of zardozi: one form, called *tilla* work, is created by twisting gold and silver-wrapped thread into tiny spirals which are tacked down (couched) to hold them in place.

The process of zardozi turns gold or silver alloy into a flattened wire (*badla*), which is usually wrapped around silk or cotton thread. This composite thread is flexible and available in two main colors – golden or silver. The embroidery is still done entirely by hand.

Zardozi was a favorite form of embroidery for palace furnishings and animal trappings in India during the 18th and 19th centuries, and is still used to decorate special occasion garments, although the expense of the materials has led to modern forms of this embroidery often using imitation gold and silver, copper wire and silk thread.



Photograph of two zardozis (gold lace makers) at Delhi in India, taken by Shepherd & Robertson in c. 1863, from the Archaeological Survey of India Collections. This image is reproduced in 'The People of India', vol IV, (no. 187). The accompanying text states "The photograph shows a man at work, with his assistant, who may be required occasionally, but who for the present is looking on. The workman is seated on a rude stool, which has a rest for his right hand. The treadles of his simple loom, worked by his feet, are seen below, and the cross pieces above are the heddles and strings which hold his materials for the pattern he is working, and which is effected by skillful manipulation...Thus are woven some of the most wonderful and beautiful fabrics in the world. Tissues of gold and silver, plain and figured, with and without a mixture of silk or cotton in flowers and patterns; gold and silver tissue lace of all breadths and patterns, used for trimming scarves, and for bridal dresses; larger scarves of muslin and tissue combined, as those of Benares; and that wonderful cloth of gold called *kumkhab* or *kincoab*, which is without parallel in the ornamental manufactures of the world.

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shisha_\(embroidery\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shisha_(embroidery))
2. <https://colouricious.com/homemade-craft-ideas-textile-art-techniques/colouricious-craft-projects/hand-embroidery-s-hisha-mirrors/>
3. <https://www.shopyesness.com/our-fabrics/cut-work-embroidery/>
4. www.livehistoryindia.com
5. www.heritage-india.com
6. Wikimedia commons