

MUGHUL ERA HERITAGE: ZARDOZI WORK IN MULTAN

DR. WARDAH NAEEM BUKHARI

Lahore College for Women University

Lahore

E-mail: wardahbukhari89@gmail.com

TAYYBA NAEEM

Govt. Associate College for Women Muzaffarabad,

Multan

Abstract

Multan is famous for Zardozi work along with embroidery tradition not only in Pakistan but also abroad. There are many centers where women practice different stitches and styles of embroidery for getting a skill and also for earning. According to a study in 1920, embroidery was declared as a popular pastime of usually the women living idle in household. Embroidery, now considered as an art, has been the work of people without employment. Women across the world have been embroidering different home based articles ranging from cushion covers, bed sheets, tea-cozies, wall hangings, arm chairs, garments and much more. In Pakistani culture women wear heavy zardozi embroidered dress on their wedding day and it takes months to prepare that dress. In the Mughul era, Zardozi work along with embroidery flourished and improvised on many levels. Mughuls, being famous for extravagance and being conscious of their appearance, had a very colorful and skillful wardrobe with all the embroidered items including gold thread embroidery called Zardozi.

Key Words: Mughul, Multan, embroidery, art, business, Zardozi, skill

Introduction

In ancient times, the most used thread to do embroidery and embellishments were gold and silver thread. The use of silver is known in saris and embroidery of all natures. The embroidery done with the metallic thread is called zari. The origin of zari work goes back to France where the romance gold lace manufacturing was initiated. Metal

embroidery seems to be the most ancient one since many of the specimen have now been retrieved with the embroidery of gold metallic nature.

A vast collection of texts describes the ancient origin of using metal wire for embroidery to decorate the fabric. Zardozi, the form of embroidery which uses silver and gold wires, is specific to a community of highly skilled people known as “Zardoz”. The Zardoz community in Delhi relate a popular myth to the date of origin to this craft, the earliest evidence of which dates back to the Vedic age. The myth follows as: “There was once a king who experienced severe headache due to the fluttering of a mosquito which had found a way into the king’s head. All possible treatments failed. Finally, the head hakim told his associates that he had a dream where the saint advised him that the only cure of the pain is that the area of pain is hit him with a shoe. The advice was acted upon and a special shoe solely for hitting the king was made. It was decorated with pure gold and silver threads. The king was hit with the shoe, killing the mosquito and relieving the king of the pain. The artistic outlay on the shoe was appreciated by the king and he desired to patronize the work. He was followed by other emperors and noblemen”¹.

In the Vedas, there are many references found regarding gold embellishments. This embroidery was done on the delicate cloth of muslin. Megasthenes mentioned once that the ‘king wore robes stitched in fine muslin with beautiful embroidery in gold and silver’. The zari done on cotton clothes later was done on silk cloth. The silk cloth embellished with gold embroidery was then the dress worn by sultans and royal families².

Embroidery has been integral part of the culture of India. There is hardly any society which did not have such a rich connection with needle work. Embroidery was been common to poor and rich alike. The royals including Mughuls were famous for their elaborate embroidered clothes, whereas rural areas also had many skillful craftsmen who would wear colorful embroidered clothes. Embroidery has been popular in India due to dowry as well as mostly all the dowry items were embroidered³.

The wardrobe of Akbar, one of the famous Mughul rulers, has been described as “His Majesty pays much attention to various stuff; hence Iranian (Persian) and European and Mongolian articles of wear are in abundance’. The patterns and designs used by the artists in Mughul and imperial era now have become an attraction for many travelers who visit Fatehpur, Gujrat, Agra, Aḥmedabad and Lahore. In 1663 a French traveler named Francois Bernier traveled to the imperial workshop in the court of Aurangzeb and explained his experience in the words that “There are besides some large halls which are the *karkhanas*, that is to say the

places where the craftsmen work.’ Although Aurangzeb was known for his simple living yet he used to wear elaborate clothes on public appearance and different festivals and gatherings. The imperial workshops started to shrink as the skillful craftsmen started leaving for a better earning to different parts of India and amalgamated their craft with local traditions hence creating a fusion of embroidery culture⁴.

Gujrat has been a famous hub of embroidery during 17th century. The main specialty of the kind of embroidery done in Gujrat was chain silk embroidery and the cotton one. The artists in sub-continent drew different kinds of traditional figures on different garments. The culturally rich patterns of lotus, snake, elephant and peacock were the symbol of India. In north-India the patterns were inspired mostly by Persia. The mango figure is the most used figure with several modifications and inspirations. Locally known as kairi, the raw mango patterns have been essential part of embroidery done on shawls and local outfits. Cashew-nut (godambi) pattern famous in South Kashmiri embroidery is also very popular in other regions. In Kashmir the local flora iris is favoured to be embroidered on woolen shawls and traditional dresses known as phirin.

India is famous for its embroidery all across the world. Every region has its own different appeal to offer. The inspiration taken from everyday chores and figures mostly take the shape of embroidery. In Kathiawar, Gujrat, Punjab and Bengal the local figures are very popular however Kashmir, Delhi and Lucknow have their own specialty which is gold and silver embroidery mixed with silk thread. This embroidery is done in a delicate form also known as chikan-kari. Kashmiri shawls are vital part of the Kashmiri culture and all these shawls have intricate embroidery done.

According to a legend, the famous Portuguese invader, Vasco da Gama was clad in gold embroidered robe, wearing gold embellished turban. The gold lace imported from France was called ‘French gold lace’. The industry of gold embroidery scattered to many cities in Uttar Pradesh such as Banaras, Surat and Gujrat. Gradually the craftsmen spread to the southern areas of India as well. Although the production and sales of original gold zari has declined due to availability of synthetic alternatives however there is no comparison of original gold lace with artificial one. It is difficult to find the artists who can still make the elaborate metallic lace⁵.

The word zardozi is derived from the word zar meaning gold and dozi means craftsmanship. The metallic items are used in zardozi to be stitched through a needle to form different designs and patterns. These parts of gold or silver are cut into different shapes and sizes to attain desired

design. The elements of metals used to make these elate patterns are salma, dabka and sitara. The fabric is first stretched into a frame which makes it easier to thread the needle. This kind of embroidery was the most prevalent during Mughul era and was one of the most desired embroidery. Zardozi is further classified into three forms i.e. Vasli, Marori and Dokh⁶.

Vasli

In this embroidery, the paper used is called as vaslī. It's a kind of paper which is used for miniature painting. Many layers of vaslī are combined together. The shapes desired are cut and embroidered onto fabric using a fine needle. Once the metallic pieces are put in place they are tapped with wood to give it extra sealing. Further embellishments can be added later on to make an elaborate design⁷.

Marori

Marori means a twist. Marori is a twisted piece of metal which creates exquisite pattern. The yarn is twisted which make the designing complex. The six inch long wooden bar helps to work around the fabric and the stitch. These twisted wires are used to make different designs and patterns by using contrasting colors and elaborate designs. Traditionally, the cotton threads were dyed in saffron for golden wires and white threads were used for silver lining⁸.

Dokh

Dokh is done on thick fabrics such as velvet. It is mostly done on carpets and flags. There are different metallic materials used to make dokh. The thread used is soft cotton thread. The surface that is raised is later covered with metallic thread by using 'fatila'. This kind of embroidery is considered very royal and elegant and is done using badla⁹.

Varieties of Gold Laces

There are three kinds of gold laces, one is pure gold the other one is half gold and the third one is gold look-alike. The most expensive one is real gold; the imitation and half gold are obviously not as expensive. Since the gold prices have been highly increased, there are only few customers who would like to go for pure gold lace. The trend is of half

gold or imitation which looks just like gold but is less costly. Only a highly trained craftsman could distinguish between real gold zari and imitation gold. The imitation zari, if burnt, leaves only ashes behind, while, the real zari leaves gold residuals¹⁰.

Composition of Gold Lace

Making gold thread is a very elaborate process to make the gold thread. The silver is first molded into different sizes of bars and then into thin wires. The tarkashi is put flat into a dye to make a flat thread and later into lametta. A fine silk thread is dyed into yellow color to make silver lametta. In the last step, the silver lametta is spun over the silk and joined with the film of pure gold to make kalabattu. This can be sold in market as ball or strips¹¹.

Karkhanas (factories)

The skilled artisans of zardozi work, are very dependent on the contractors and sub-contractors (in a loose sense, in this case, the karkhanedar being equal to sub-contractor). A contractor has links with the shopkeepers in the market, who are then connected to the exporters. Some karkhanedar's are have direct links with the exporters. The craft has a huge market both nationally as well as internationally, thus they are not only limited to export. The karkhanedars visit the main markets on a weekly basis to settle the dues with the shopkeepers and collect new orders. This is the main reason for the comparatively busy and intense environment of the karkhanas during the weekend, which can be felt as soon as one enters the place. The raw materials and the haberdashery including beads, cloth and thread, etc. is provided to the artisans by the shopkeepers or exporters, through the karkhanedars. The raw material may be obtained locally or internationally¹².

Zardozi Center in Multan

Abid Rehman describes the significance of zardozi in the fame of Multān. He adds that Kamangaran Wali Gali near Hussain Agahi (Khursheed Market) is famous for zardozi work. There are 50 to 60 families who are associated with the shisha cutting or kashi-gari profession. These craftsmen are also famous for the zardozi work. Rehman owns his own workshop of zardozi in the market with 25

workers under him. Each craftsman has his own specialty in tila, naqshi, zardozi and sequence¹³.



Figure 1: karkhanas; Abid Rehman; Hussain Agahi
Kamangaran Wali Gali near Khursheed Market, Multan.
Photograph by Author. August 10, 2019.



Figure 2: Working in Karkhanas; Abid Rehman.
Photograph by Author. August 10, 2019.



Figure 3: Working in Karkhanas; Abid Rehman.
Photograph by Author. August 10, 2019.



Figure 4: Karkhana (2). Kamangaran Wali Gali.
Photograph by Author. August 10, 2019.



Figure 5: Karkhana (2). Kamangaran Wali Gali.
Photograph by Author. August 10, 2019.



Figure 6: Karkhana (2). Kamangarañ Wali Gali.
Photograph by Author. August 10, 2019.

Notes and References

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