

A Stitch in Time:

An Inquiry into *Phulkari* in Punjab



DISCOVER INDIA PROGRAM

2015-16

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report entitled “*A Stitch in Time: An Inquiry into Phulkari in Punjab*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Learning comes from experience beyond the four walls of the classroom. Furthermore, India, with its rich culture, has a lot yet to be discovered by the mainstream society. The Discover India Project (DIP) is a course, which is an amalgamation of experiential learning and cultural awareness. We would like to thank FLAME University for having provided us with this unique opportunity at the undergraduate level of study.

At the outset, we would like to thank the artisans for welcoming us with open arms and answering all our questions patiently. Along with their hospitality and warmth, they also gave us the most personal viewpoint of *Phulkari* that we could possibly get. In particular, we would like to thank Mrs. Amritpal Kaur Sandhu, who took the time to teach us the art form.

Furthermore, our research would have been impossible without the contribution of the people that we met on field. We express our gratitude towards the scholars and NGO heads, who gave us valuable insight into our research: Dr. Gurupdes Kaur (Krishi Vigyan Kendra), Ms. Niharika Sophia Michael (Nabha Foundation, Sangrur), Mr. Dalwir Singh (Umeed Foundation), Mr. Robin Gupta (Meher Baba Charitable Trust), Professor Anu H. Gupta (Panjab University), Dr. Prabhjot Kaur (Government Home Science College, Chandigarh), Professor Prabhdeep Brar (University Institute of Fashion Technology) and Professor Beenu Kapoor (BBK DAV College). We are also grateful to Ms. Sabina from 1469 and Mr. Shivcharan from Phulkari Punjab Government Emporium, who provided us with information regarding the commercial state of *Phulkari*. Additionally, we would like to thank Ms. Tanisha Manchanda and Ms. Jaspreet Kaur for facilitating our interactions with artisans and helping us overcome the language barrier. Apart from these, we would like to extend our gratitude to Sajid Mansoor Qaisrani and Kalsoom Akhtar (Sungi Development Foundation, Islamabad, Pakistan).

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our mentor, Dr. Santosh Kumar, for having provided us with his guidance and feedback throughout the process of DIP. We would also like to thank the DIP Committee, especially Dr. Deepa Bapat and Ms. Jaya Pujara, headed by Dr. Neeti Bose. Furthermore, we would like to thank Dr. Shweta Rana for helping us in the preparation of this report.

ABSTRACT

Phulkari is an embroidered textile, which has strong ties with Punjab. In the past, womenfolk practised the art exclusively. The knowledge and techniques required for the same were passed on from grandmother to granddaughter and the hours of leisure spent in embroidering a garment together promoted strong family ties. *Khaddar* served as the Punjabi equivalent for the pages from a girl's diary, for on it, she embroidered the world as she saw it, her dreams and her aspirations. The motifs employed were symbols of the girl's thoughts, visions and emotions. The craft also served as the ultimate personalised gift reserved for momentous occasions like the birth of a child or the wedding of a loved one.

In the twenty-first century, *Phulkari* has not remained unaffected in the tug-of-war between traditions and technological advancements. It is no longer practised with the sole intention of fulfilling the personal needs of the embroiderer. Mass production, through mechanisation, has led to monetary benefits, with reduction of cost and time invested becoming the main priority. The folk art has been robbed of the very characteristics which once made it appealing: motifs that cater to personal taste rather than the popular one and its ability to reflect the sentiments of the embroiderer. This deterioration is the reason behind the attempts made by various stakeholders to revive the traditional art.

This report aims to present our understanding of the following: the art form of *Phulkari* in Punjab, with a focus on its significance to stakeholders, its evolution, the impact of commercialisation in present times, and the initiative taken by the civil society and development sector organisations, to revive and sustain the traditional practises.

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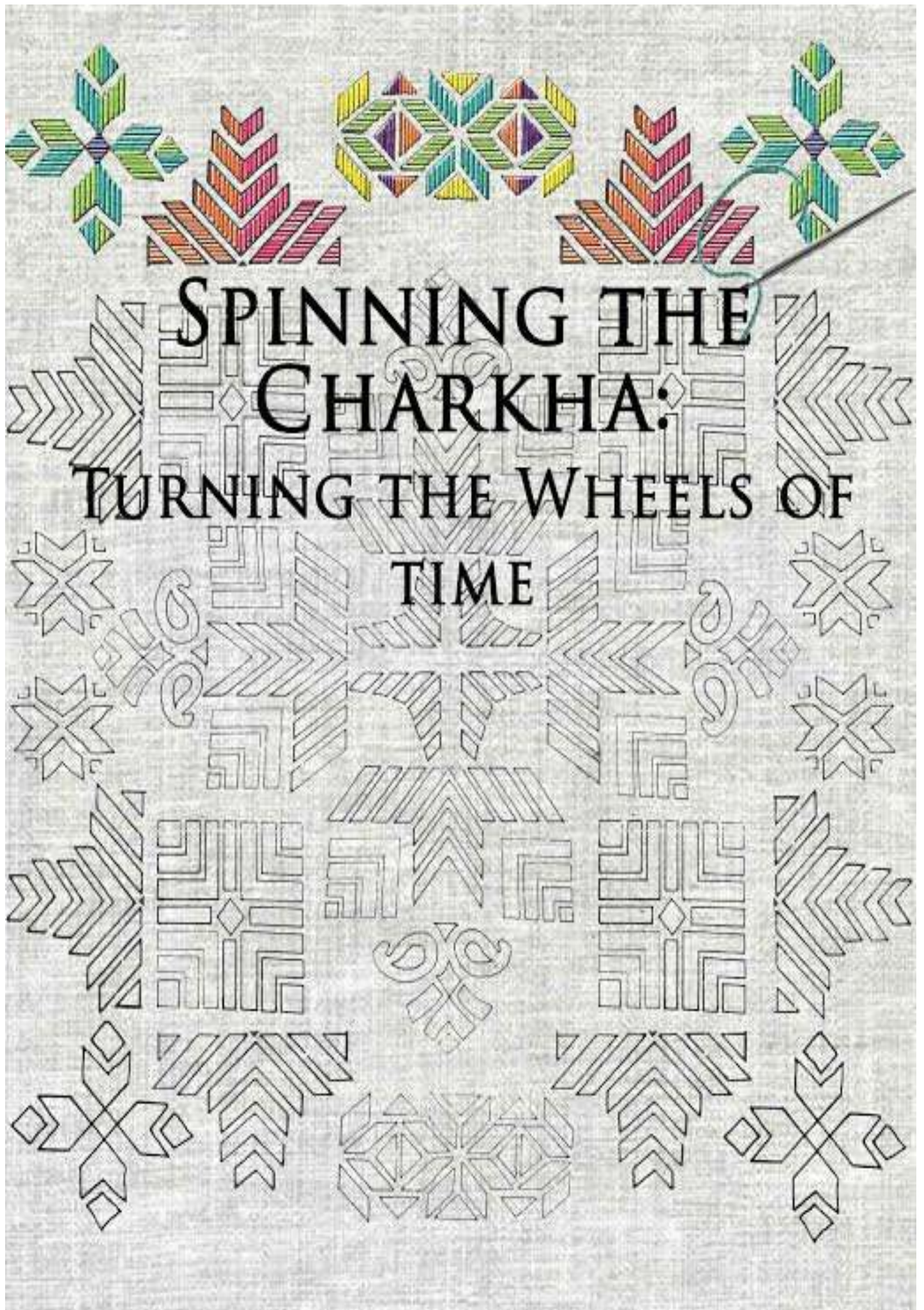
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**SPINNING THE
CHARKHA:
TURNING THE WHEELS OF
TIME**

1.1 Introduction

India is a recognised goldmine of handicrafts. The textiles and embroideries produced stand out in particular because they perform more than their basic function of clothing; they are pieces of art. They convey whether they were made during times of splendour or hardship, triumph or disaster, or out of elation or melancholy. The motifs employed reflect the thoughts, opinions and contemplations of the embroiderer; the colours used represent her emotions, sentiments and feelings; and the thread, cloth and stitch used are representative of her passion. *Phulkari* is one such embroidered textile. Centred in the North and the West of India, in the recent times, it has been known to flourish primarily in the region of Punjab.

With the passage of time, the embroidery has undergone a transformation. It is no longer restricted to the domestic life of women. The painstaking processes of hand-dyeing, intricate stitching, and other labourious elements have been replaced by faster and more efficient techniques. The shift in focus has not only led to the deterioration of the quality of the final product, but also the loss of human touch in its entirety, which is usually found in any traditional art form.

1.2 Research Topic

1.2.1 Research Statement

To study the art form of *Phulkari* in Punjab, with a focus on its symbolic and socio-cultural significance, along with its transition

1.2.2 Aims and Objectives

The following are the aims and objectives of our research:

1. To study the history of *Phulkari* with a focus on its origins and evolution
2. To study the art form of *Phulkari*
3. To understand the transition in the art form from traditional times to modern commercial times
4. To explore the initiatives undertaken to revive the traditional practises by the government, NGOs, and other individuals

The study of any subject would be incomplete without first understanding its background. In doing so, one can hope to better understand the chain of events that have taken place and their effect on the research topic. The present should always be viewed in the context of the events from the past. Therefore, the origin and evolution of *Phulkari* is one of the main aims of this research. This includes understanding the variation in traditional *Phulkari* in contemporary times and using it as a lens to view the transition in the society.

The second aim of the research is to study the art form of *Phulkari*. This entails studying the technique of embroidering, the significance of the motifs used, the types of *Phulkari* present, and the significance of the art form to the people of Punjab. The technique is an important aspect of the research because in experiencing the process that goes into making pieces of *Phulkari*, the interaction with the art form is heightened. It is also easier to appreciate the effort and time that goes into beautiful embroidery. The motifs used in *Phulkari* often convey the social position and the emotional state of the person practising it and hence, make for an interesting study.

Like other art forms, *Phulkari* too has been commercialised. The technique of making a *Phulkari* has been mechanised. Commercialisation has not deprived the artisans of employment opportunities, but it has replaced hand embroidered pieces with easily available and economically priced, machine-made pieces.

Phulkari as an art form is aesthetically appealing, primarily because of the vision and thought put into it, before its creation. This form of beauty moves people, not only in figurative terms, but also in other social and economic terms, due to its intrinsic value. The importance of traditional *Phulkari* and the pivotal role it plays in the lives of the people explains the necessity for its revival, therefore, making emphasise on the people working towards it an important aim.

1.3 Geographical Overview

Known as “the land of five rivers” (as the name suggests), Punjab geographically encompasses a large cultural expanse. From the endless stretches of golden yellow mustard fields to the lush grasslands of sugarcane, from the authentic *sarson da saag* and *makki di roti* to the delicious Amritsari *kulche*, and from the heart-warming hospitality of the people to their respect and humility, Punjab has several shades, just like *Phulkari*. Out of the major

cities where *Phulkari* is practised, the ones we visited are Patiala (where mostly *Phulkari* flourished), Chandigarh (where predominantly *Phulkari* is marketed and sold) and Amritsar (where *Phulkari* is thought to be influenced by East Punjab).



Map 1: Placing Punjab in India

In order to understand why *Phulkari* flourished in Patiala, it is important to have some knowledge about the history of India, with regard to the Partition in 1947. Before the Partition, *Phulkari* was practised mainly by the Bahawalpur community, which lived in Pakistan. During the Partition, thousands of people from this community migrated to India. An entire separate township, called Tripuri, was created for them by Maharaja Yadavindra Singh, the ruler of Patiala. Furthermore, at least one woman from each household practised *Phulkari*, making it immensely popular here (P. Kaur 29).

Punjab has its own roots deep in the fertile soils of culture and tradition. Like other cities in India, Chandigarh is fast moving and is affected by liberalisation and globalisation. Yet, it retains a balance between its heritage and modernity. This balance is depicted in *Phulkari* as well, which makes Chandigarh an important place for an inquiry into the commercialisation of the art form. Furthermore, due to greater development of Chandigarh in comparison to other cities in Punjab, the education system of this place (referring to different universities and colleges) proves to be of great support. This is because their research into this art form, served as a rich source of information for our inquiry.

Amritsar is an important place of reference for an inquiry into *Phulkari*. The primary reason for this is its geographical proximity to East Punjab (presently part of Pakistan). Therefore, one can infer that before the Partition, Amritsar would have been at the centre of the entire state of Punjab, making it a crucial point for the prosperity of *Phulkari*. However, during the Partition, the migration of people from Pakistan to India and vice-versa affected Amritsar to a great extent, extending its effect on *Phulkari* too. This led to some form of a downfall of the significance of the art form in this place. In this region, *Phulkari* has more economic than cultural significance. Its commercialisation is the major area of study here. In order to better understand the geographical overview, it is very important to understand the history and evolution of the art form over time.

1.4 Historical Overview

In order to grasp the true essence of the embroidery, the word *Phulkari* should be divided into two halves: *Phul* meaning “flower” and *Kari* meaning “work”. As a whole, the word *Phulkari* means “flowering work” (Steel 71). Taking into consideration this etymology, one can assign this name to any work of embroidery. However, this specific name is restricted to one particular type of work employed for the decoration of textiles by the women

of Punjab (Naik 103). One important element of *Phulkari* lies in the fact that rather than being performed by a particular community, it can be observed as being specific to a particular location (in this case, Punjab).

Types of embroidery, with similar motifs, along with few different adaptations, are prevalent in different parts of India, like Gujarat, Rajasthan and Bihar (Naik 103). The women of Pakistan also practise this embroidery under a different name, called *Jisti* (Bilgrami 2). This indicates towards the commonality of the existence of *Phulkari* in and around north-western India (and Pakistan, after the Partition). This motivates the study of history and evolution of *Phulkari*, over the ages. The total period of its existence can be divided into two major parts: period prior to the colonial rule, and period during and after the colonisation, primarily since major commercialisation of this embroidery style began only during the colonial period.

The idea about the origin or dawn of *Phulkari*, as a pure art form, is unclear, due to lack of evidences and documentation. There are various theories with regard to the origin of *Phulkari*. Before talking in specificity about the art form in India, it is important to discuss its presence elsewhere in the world. Certain studies conclude *Phulkari* to have descended from Iran, where it was known as “*Gulkari*”, consisting of two words *Gul* meaning “flower” and *Kari* meaning “work”, which is the same etymology as that of *Phulkari*, along with a strong resemblance in rendering (Naik 103). An extended version of this theory also suggests that *Gulkari* was brought to Lahore, Pakistan, from the lands of Persia, along with the migration of Muslim Persians (Nigam 12).

There also exists an account, which mentions the art form being brought, during the migration of Swati (a Pashtun tribe, originally located in and around Swat valley). In this case, the most common consensus attained can be in assuming that, during the fifteenth century, Swat tribe, which resided in the Malakhand district of the Kyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on Afghan-Pakistan border, was forced to migrate southwards, due to the attack by Mughals. It was during this migration that they brought *Phulkari* to India. This theory is supported by an evidence of the presence of this tribe in Mansehra valley, near Punjab, which was situated close to the Silk Route from China, which not only influenced the use of silk thread, but also opened their doors to the use of a tremendous range of colours (Nigam 13). Another theory developed on similar lines was that *Phulkari* was brought to India,

specifically Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat, from Central Asia, along with the migration of *Jat* tribes (peasants from Central Asia). This theory also explains the use of cotton thread in older times, which was then replaced by the use of silk floss, introduced later (Kaur and Gupta 36).

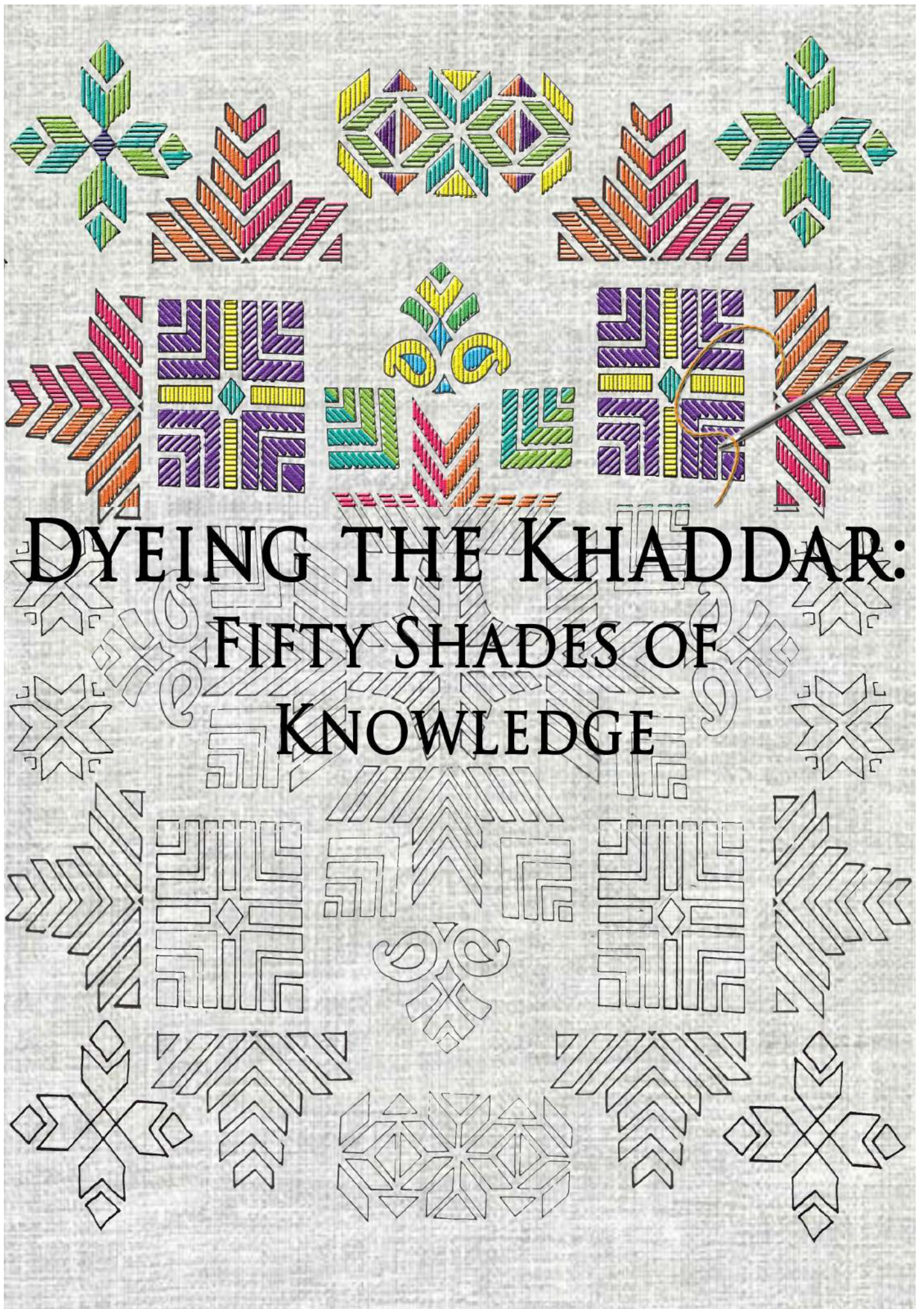
Furthermore, there are mentions of *Phulkari* in “*Harishcharitra*”, by Bana Bhatt, during seventh century A.D. The embroidery has also been found to be mentioned in the *Vedas*, *Mahabharata* and *Guru Granth Sahib* (Kaur and Gupta 36). The history of the art form is said to have been traced down as far back as the Greek rule (Malik 265). However, the most convincing theory sought out with this respect, is *Phulkari* being dated back to the fifteenth century, since the earliest articles available, belong to this period (Kaur and Gupta 36). Therefore, to aim at focusing on the various aspects, based on which each of these theories came into being, becomes extremely important.

The extreme original form of *Phulkari*, as stated by Flora Annie Steel (Crane and Johnston 73), in her paper “*Phulkari Work in Punjab*”, existed in Rohtak, prior to the conquest of Muhammadan tribes. The conquest resulted in the modification of the style. Furthermore, during the colonial rule, the work of *Phulkari* was presented in various fests and seminars, resulting in its demand. However, during this period, it faced tough competition from British clothes, which were comparatively cheaper, primarily because the cost of their production was lower compared to the traditional style of producing it. This resulted in the degradation of the art form. It was during this time, the first *Phulkari* revival movement began (Steel 72).

According to Flora Annie Steel, “Intending purchasers should remember that *Phulkari* work is true art, in so much that it must be the outcome of love and leisure, not haste and greed; and they should be prepared to pay for the art.” (Steel 72). The people of Punjab must have been of the same opinion because major commercialisation of the embroidery began in times of famine and hardships, during the later part of the nineteenth century, forcing the women to sell their work in order to make their ends meet. Herein, *Phulkari*, instead of growing as a traditional art form, carried out by women only for personal household purposes, was now considered as a source of their livelihood.

This affected various aspects of *Phulkari*, not only in terms of the motifs, colours, designs and patterns used, but also, the cloth on which the embroidery was carried out, along

with the thread used. Commercialisation also caused changes in the process and technique of the embroidery, in order to make it more cost effective, and reduce the time taken to finish it. In fact, the changes in the cloth and threads used, were also aimed at lowering the cost of the entire product. Therefore, the report enables the reader to understand all the ways in which commercialisation affected the original traditional art form. Furthermore, one important focus of this report is to highlight every specific difference between the traditional art form and the present day commercialised product sold in the markets. Lastly, the report encompasses the study of evolution of the commercialised product, considering different time frames, from the moment commercialisation gradually began.



**DYEING THE KHADDAR:
FIFTY SHADES OF
KNOWLEDGE**

2. Literature Review

2.1 Types and Social Significance of *Phulkari*

After discussing in detail the history and evolution of *Phulkari*, it is now important to examine the social significance of it in the life of the people (in accordance with the different types of *Phulkari*). Therefore, it is necessary to mention that *Phulkari* has varied usage – not only as a protective wrap for winters and a cover for the upper body, but also as a gift during wedding ceremonies. The tradition of giving a *Phulkari* as a gift started since *Phulkaris* and *Baghs* were embroidered for daughters by their grandmothers. They were important as all the maternal relatives were expected to give one piece of *Phulkari* to the daughter at the time of her marriage. As this tradition went on for more than a century, the art of *Phulkari* became integral to the rituals of marriage. The wedding dress, one of the *Phulkari* pieces, was gifted to both the bride and groom from the opposite sides. *Khaddar* (the cotton fabric on which *Phulkari* is embroidered) was traditionally part of a Punjabi's everyday life and specially was one of the parts of the trousseau of the bride. The number of *Phulkaris* received by a bride during her wedding varied from five to fifty-one pieces. This was considered to be a measuring unit for the socioeconomic status of a family. Along with the number of *Phulkaris* received, the intricacy of the design or the heaviness of the *Phulkari* was also considered to be an important determinant of the prestige of the family (Gupta and Mehta 181). This is one important aspect of the social significance of this art form.

The process of embroidering *Phulkari* also gave the women a chance to socialise. Women from different religions got together to embroider, blurring religious boundaries. All the girls and women in the village sat together and helped each other in weaving or embroidering. Learning how to spin and make *Khaddar* also became a socialising event for young and unmarried girls as they sat in groups and spun cotton throughout the night, therefore, making socialisation an important aspect of *Phulkari's* significance. (Gupta and Mehta 181).

More than the use of *Phulkari* in ritualistic practises (specifically marriages) and as a catalyst for the process of socialisation, it also was a medium of expression for the women. *Phulkaris* and *Baghs* have innumerable designs, each displaying imagination, originality, and the portrayal of the knowledge of colour blending. Women embroidered *Phulkari* pieces, and

along the way, gave names to their pieces, based on the patterns employed by them. It was not necessary for these pieces to look similar, since while embroidering them, each woman had her own imagination and style. There was no necessity for them to generalize their styles; rather, each piece of Phulkari was appreciated for its individuality and uniqueness. The most common kinds of *Phulkaris* can broadly be divided into the following types: *Thirma*, *Chope*, *Suber*, *Salomo*, *Vari-da-Bagh*, *Bawan Bagh*, *Darshan Dwar* or *Darwaza*, *Sainchi Phulkari*, *Til Patra*, *Nilak*, *Shishedar Phulkari*, and *Suraj Mukhi* (Kaur and Gupta 38-40). Giving a brief overview of some of these types, it can be said that, *Thirma*, one of the rarest of them, is characterised by being embroidered over a white background. Exclusively made by Hindus, it forms an important part of the dowry of a woman originating from North-Western Punjab. Another type of *Phulkari*, called *Sainchi*, is produced in east and southeast Punjab. *Sainchi* too plays an important role in Punjabi weddings – exclusively the bride carries it during her *phas*, when she walks around the holy fire (Beste 8-9).



Figure 1: *Thirma*



Figure 2: *Sainchi*

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that there exists a *Phulkari*, known as the *Nazar butti*, which is wholly devoted to the purpose of keeping the evil eye/spirit away. In order to make this possible, a small portion or part of the embroidered piece is left unembroidered. However, it is important to mention that this type of Phulkari is usually embroidered on black or dark blue cloth (Naik 108). Additionally, another kind of *Phulkari* called *Chope* is characterised by always being started on the event of the birth of a girl child. It's prepared by the girl's maternal grandmother and finished over a long period of time, till the girl is ready to marry. Lastly, *Bawan Bagh*, as the name suggests, is

characterised as being a mosaic of fifty-two different patterns, closely embroidered on one piece. This rare piece of work is used by designers and embroiderers to showcase their skills and ability (Rond 10-11).



Figure 1: Nazar Butti



Figure 2: Chope



Figure 5: Bawan Bagh

2.2 Technique

After reviewing the literature on the social significance of *Phulkari*, in accordance with its different types, it is now important to discuss, in detail, the technique of producing *Phulkari*. The techniques of making this embroidery art form were passed down by word of mouth, therefore, leading to variation in the embroidery from family to family, and region to region. The commonly used technique, however, is the darning stitch, with other stitches like herringbone stitch, running stitch, Holbein stitch, or buttonhole stitch being used for the borders (Kaur 32-40).

With time, there have been changes in this embroidery form and Anu H. Gupta and Shalina Mehta have noted these by documenting the reflections of the artisans who have seen the art form change. Patterns, designs, and techniques have changed with time and there is no better way of understanding this source than by interacting with the artisans. The technique of making *Phulkari* used to be entirely organic. Cotton was a local resource that urban and rural women used alike. For *Phulkari*, hand spun, hand-woven *Khaddar* prepared on looms, either by the women or by professional weavers, was used. Along with this, soft untwisted silk floss thread called *Pat* was also used (Gupta and Mehta 180-184).

Colours that were used for dyeing were extracted from parts of plants like leaves, flowers, barks, and roots (Gupta and Mehta 180-184). The process of dyeing the cloth began with soaking the cloth in a decoction of tamarisk (a form deciduous tree) that functioned as a dye resist. Then, the cloth was dipped in *manjheet* solution (*manjheet* is a creeper, the roots of which, were grinded into coarse powder and boiled for a few hours to obtain different shades). The solution contained some alum and a few grains of wheat. The solution was boiled until the grains became softer. The cloth was then soaked for a few hours prior to its drying (Lal and Sahai 11). From pure cotton, today the art form has moved on to chiffon, georgette, silk, and polyester. From traditional motifs that were embroidered on fabrics by counting threads, the art form now employs motifs that are patterned on printing blocks, then printed on fabric, and then embroidered. From making motifs that were based on imagination and the environment, without the aid of any pattern books, now commercial ideas of motifs are made on the basis of ideas from other art forms, including other embroidery forms (Gupta and Mehta 180-184).

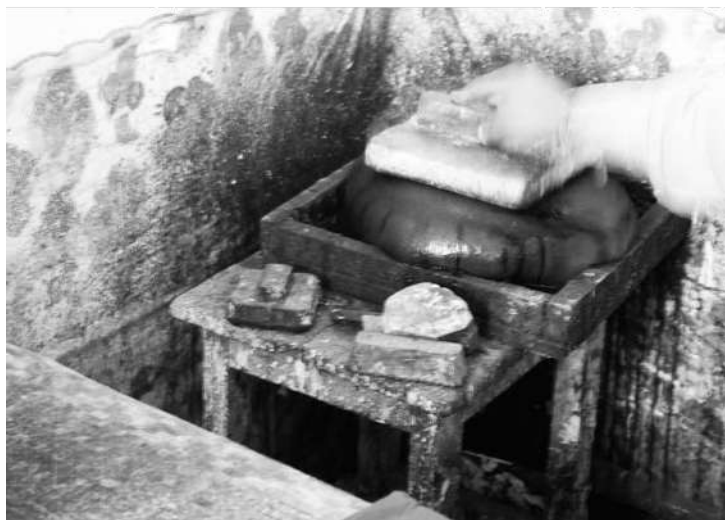


Figure 6: Technique of Soft Rubbing

The process of embroidering begins with first embossing the design (pattern) on the fabric. A widely used technique is that of soft rubbing. In this method, fabric is rubbed over the design of existing embroidery. Then, the surface of the cloth is rubbed over by a metal pot, smeared with a little hair oil to produce an embossed pattern on the fabric (Morrell 57). Another technique widely used is hand painting, in which the designs are simply traced onto cloth for embroidery. In the contemporary era, screen-printing is extensively used for *Phulkari* as it is less time consuming and easily available to the masses. Screen-printing uses

a stencil technique, in which all the parts of the stencil are held together by a fine mesh. This technique is considered to be one of the simplest and most decorative methods of colouring fabrics (Goyal 6).

Block printing is an addition that has been made to the traditional form of *Phulkari*. This technique makes it easy for the women to stitch the cloth on already printed designs provided to them. As the importance of *Phulkari* diminished over time, many people took to block printing as a commercial option. The women, who are unable to come up with their own designs, seek the help from the shopkeepers who prepare these designs and sell it for as low as three rupees. Thereby, women do not have to exercise their imagination, and therefore, this tremendously reduces the time taken to finish one *Phulkari* piece. The designs made from block printing are from temporary colour dye. This dye can be washed off in a single wash, and therefore, does not spoil the natural embroidery art of *Phulkari*. The method of doing *Phulkari* has undergone numerous changes. For example, there has been change in the usage of frames in doing *Phulkari*; the stitching technique from top to bottom has changed and is now done only on the borders of the *dupatta*; and the use of machinery in doing the embroidery has reduced the time frame of making *Phulkari* (S. Gupta). However, it is not known when this method was adopted by the embroidery practitioners and why women shifted to this method, resulting in the lack of information with regard to the time period and cause of the same.



Figure 7: Block Printing

Besides the technique of the art form, the way in which this art is treated by the artisans itself has changed. Previously, work was done in a *trijan*. The *trijan* refers to a group of women who engaged in embroidery together after their household work. They sang folk songs, songs about brides, and songs about grooms. In this manner, pieces could take between a month and a year to complete. This enjoyable sentimental communal activity moved on to become one automated with machines or prepared individually specifically for economic purposes. This transition in the contemporary times is not without consequence on the art form itself. The work is now done more for economic purposes, and therefore, not done as a socially or culturally significant activity. Contemporary *Phulkari* is no longer done on the wrong side of the *Khaddar* as it used to be before and the original art form is rare and moving away from villages to museums (Gupta and Kaur 36-43).

2.3 Motifs

Having discussed the techniques employed in the creation of *Phulkari*, it is now necessary to examine the different motifs and their symbolic significance. In order to understand the reason for the importance of a discussion on motifs, it is necessary to know that the types of *Phulkari* and *Bagh* are in fact named after the most prominent motifs embroidered over them, which makes this a very significant aspect of our research. The popular motifs employed in *Phulkari* can be broadly categorised as geometric motifs (as a result of the use of darning stitch, since it is straight and angular), floral motifs (including designs of sunflowers, jasmines and lotuses), fruit and vegetable motifs (including designs of oranges, pomegranates, pears, muskmelons, cauliflowers, chillies and bitter guard), jewellery items (including designs of earrings, bracelets, nose rings and pendants), household items (like rolling pins, brass urns and pitchers), as well as bird motifs (including designs of peacocks, parrots, sparrows, crows, owls, hens and pigeons) and animal motifs (including designs of cows, buffaloes, goats, camels, horses, elephants, snakes, fish, tortoises, rabbits and lions) (Gupta and Mehta 180; Maskiell 366; Naik 105).

Apart from these, certain *Bagh* pieces have themes, such as Mughal gardens, as a result of its very etymology/ nomenclature. Since it is important to understand the different motifs, their significance, and their evolution over time, it is necessary to identify the popular motifs and their significance, along with comprehending how they have developed over time (Gupta and Mehta 180; Maskiell 366; Naik 105).

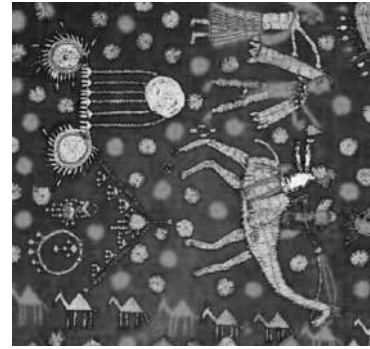
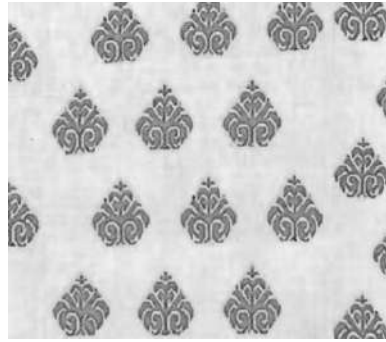
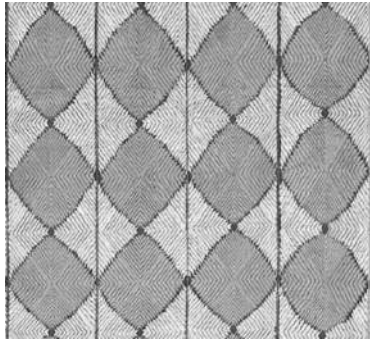


Figure 8: Geometric Motifs

Figure 9: Floral Motifs

Figure 10: Jewellery Motifs

The significance of certain geometrical patterns, discussed by Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta, in their paper Phulkari and Bagh Folk art of Punjab: A Study of Changing Designs from Traditional to Contemporary Time, is as follows.

Triangle: The triangle, being representative of the holy trinity and also the number three, is the symbol of the past, present and the future.

Circle: A circle representing the sun, moon and earth symbolises divinity and also the fact that they have neither a beginning nor an end.

Square and Rectangle: The square and rectangles are used to represent equality, peace and conformity.

Curved Line: A curved line represents water and zigzag lines symbolize excitement or lightening.



Figure 11: Household Items, Birds and Animal Motifs

There is also specific symbolism attached to the natural elements. The fruits and flowers symbolise good luck, the beauty and freshness of nature, creativity, fertility etc. while animals and birds signify peace, joy, pride, beauty, strength, etc. However, one very important aspect in the discussion of the motifs is its transition over time. Since these deep meanings and symbolisms were attached to the traditional work of older artisans, the products of *Phulkari* and *Bagh* were more than just a *dupatta* for sale; it was a representation of the artisan's thought, ideas and emotions. With the change in time, the motifs have become very specific to floral and geometric patterns, as a result of its response to the market demands. This makes it extremely necessary for us to understand the transition of these over time (Kaur and Gupta 36-38).

2.4 Colours

As one now knows that the basis of a *Phulkari*, lies not only, in the kind of cloth and thread used, but also in the motifs employed in preparing a piece, it is also important to understand that each colour used in producing a *Phulkari* (either that of the cloth or of the thread) has a very significant role to play in terms of not only enhancement of the aesthetic appeal of the art work, but also, its symbolism and deeper meaning. Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta have discussed the significance of the colours used in *Phulkari*. The symbolic significance of each colour is discussed below:

Red: The most widely used base fabric colour in *Phulkari* is red. It has been known for the expression of the feelings of happiness, love, passion, desire and excitement. This colour also conveys prosperity. Apart from these, red is used to depict the vitalizing and energizing sun, which nurtures the brightness and freshness of blossoming flowers. Power and energy can almost be considered as synonyms of the colour red, therefore, resulting in the depiction of Mother goddess in this colour.

Yellow: The vibrancy and brightness of yellow is representative of happiness, liveliness, success and fertility, and is abundantly used in *Phulkari* as well as *Bagh*. The colour is also associated with wheat and mustard, which are widely grown crops in the Punjab region, therefore, indicating towards the influence of the surroundings of the embroiderer on herself. The shades of this colour resonate power, enlightenment and supernatural feelings.

Orange: The use of orange colour is symbolises cheerfulness, creativity, produces a mystical effect on the mind and suggests wonder. It is also a symbol of affordability and economical prices.

Green: It is a colour that best represents nature and freshness. Its purity depicts a holy and a clean environment, therefore, infusing the mind with a calm and restful effect.

Blue: The colour blue is mostly associated with water and the sky. The colour is representative of truth and nature. This is not a very commonly used colour in *Phulkaris*.

White: The colour white is symbolic of purity, peace and is often used to represent simplicity and honesty. As discussed earlier, this colour is used as the base colour in ‘*Thirma*’, which is one of the rarest types of *Phulkari*.

The embroidered *Phulkari* and *Bagh* pieces, along with expressing the deeper meaning attached to them, also portray the creativity, purity and sincerity of artisan by indicating the simplicity of their lifestyle. By doing this, it provides the viewer with an image of the rural Punjab, along with all its liveliness and devotion. Lastly, they also showcase happiness, prosperity, energy, fertility, peace of mind and harmony. On closely observing this information, one can say that there are clear mentions with regard to certain colours being used more than the others. However, the reasoning behind the same is not explained in detail, resulting this to be one of the many elements of our research on field.

On going through the other research papers, written on *Phulkari* and *Bagh*, it was brought to our notice that, on interviewing present day artisans, the most common answer with regard to the above question about the preferential use of some colours over the others, stated the colours of cloth which are used more, have a characteristic of complimenting all the other colours of the threads, therefore, generating a greater aesthetic impact on the viewer. For example, all colours of threads looked good on shades of red. The least used base colours were black, brown, blue and green. However, it is interesting to see that there were single-coloured *Phulkaris/Baghs* too. A sample of this was the golden/yellow coloured *Baghs*. Herein, the intricacy of the work enriches the density of the embroidery, resulting in the creation of an effect, wherein the embroidery covers the most of the cloth, with the cloth only performing the function of bordering the motifs. To quote, “Harmony in the blending of colour and vibrancy of patterns made the *Phulkari* unique.” (Gupta and Mehta 181).

2.5 Revival

In India, craft has always been a manifestation of culture and creativity, as well as a commercial product. This duality is a source of strength; it is the reason craft and over ten million craftsmen have survived into the millennium (P. Kaur 29). However, with the increase in commercialisation of *Phulkari*, the demand for machine made *Phulkari* has risen, leading to economic problems for artisans involved in the production of handmade *Phulkari*.

According to Professor Prabhjot Kaur, *Phulkari* in Punjab has become an endangered art form. One of the major reasons can be traced to the structure of the craft. The *Phulkari* craft sector is unorganized. Artisans are often subject to exploitation by middlemen, who form a bridge between the artisans and the markets. The other factors are: the lack of fashion designers' support, poor remunerations as a result of the women belonging to the unorganised sector, high cost of labour, existence of stiff competition from migrants and so on (P. Kaur 30).



Figure 12: Phulkari Mela (KVK, Patiala)

In order to put an end to this disparity, external organisations such as the government and NGOs have stepped in to protect the artisans and revive the art form. Government organisations such as Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) and National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) play an important role in supporting the artisans and revival of *Phulkari*. KVK, set up by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, aims at promoting the art form by developing novelty items through value addition. Through vocational training programs, KVK has empowered rural women by securing a place for the sale of their work in

the urban milieu. KVK has also helped women to form self-help groups that receive financial aid from NABARD to set up Rural Marts for the direct sale of their products (Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Patiala).

Phulkari Punjab Government Emporium is another initiative taken by the government to support the artisans and revive the art form. The Emporium has been set up by the Punjab State Government to provide a means of livelihood to the artisans by selling their products. It is affiliated with Punjab Small Industries and Export Corporation Ltd (PSIEC). PSIEC has been recognised as an export house and a nodal agency for the preservation of handicrafts. Along with other things, it played a vital role in starting several training centres to preserve the heritage of crafts of Punjab. It has trained over four hundred women and made them self-reliant. Apart from training centres, PSIEC holds exhibitions, craft bazaars and fairs to promote the craft and culture of Punjab (“Phulkari Workers Get Peanuts”).

Along with the government, several NGOs also contribute towards reviving the art form and empowering women. One of them is the Nabha Foundation. It was established in 2003 to meet the need for holistic development by fastening the rate of transformation of Nabha, Punjab. Nabha promotes women empowerment and has trained around eight hundred women in *Phulkari*, along with securing retail “trend setter industries”, stores, private boutiques and popular designers that have repeatedly placed orders with the *Phulkari* artisans (“Phulkari”).

Meher Baba Charitable Trust, Bassi Pathana, is another NGO that empowers women in villages by making them self-reliant, along with preserving the traditional craft of *Phulkari*. Here, women are trained in marketable skills, such as *Zardosi*, rug making, *Phulkari*, machine embroidery, and garment making. The NGO runs a women empowerment enterprise, ‘*Phulkari Makers of Bassi Pathana*’, where women are given commercial knowledge about finishing, packing, and marketing their products. Around five hundred women have gained employment either by working from homes or at local boutiques or they have opened their own garment boutiques (“About Us”).

Umeed Foundation, Sangrur district, was established in 1997 to render assistance in healthcare, women empowerment, and skills development in Punjab. Umeed Foundation has formed numerous self-help groups under the Umeed Mahila Manch. Umeed supports about

four hundred and five SHGs, with about five thousand eight hundred and fifty six members. In 2010, Umeed formed an affiliation with Aiyana, Delhi. Aiyana was launched as a fashion brand with an aim of reviving the long forgotten handicrafts of Punjab through contemporary designs and product formats. Its main objective is to create traditional skills in crochet and *Phulkari* embroidery as a sustainable enterprise, which would provide fair incomes to women with excellent artisanal skills. Aiyana assists Umeed Foundation to provide aid to over hundred artisans across five centres in Sangrur (“Umeed Foundation”).

Along with these, based on our contacts established with the Sungi Development Foundation, Pakistan, we were also made aware about the revival program executed by them, for the revival of *Phulkari* (known under the name of *Jisti*, in Pakistan). In correspondence with the evaluation report of Sungi’s *Jisti* Craft Program, it was made clear that the main objectives of this program, along with the revival of the art form, was to promote and enhance the craft skills, entrepreneurship and marketing skills among the artisans. They intend on doing this, by reducing the reliance of the village based independent SHGs on Sungi for the aspect of marketing their finished product (Bilgrami 1).



Figure 13 and 14: Jisti Craft Program (Sungi Development Foundation)



PAT:

THE THREADS OF
EXPERIENCE

3. Research Methodology

After looking into the subject of Phulkari, in detail, and thematically distributing and analysing the topics, to gain a perspective on the art form, it is now important to discuss in detail, the research carried out by us, on field. Herein, we will discuss in detail our preliminary research and methods employed on field, by giving a brief overview of all our primary sources. The research was primarily qualitative in nature. This is a result of various reasons. Firstly, the span of time under which the study was conducted was very brief, resulting in lack of the attainment of credible quantitative data. Secondly, due to the time restriction, the sample size taken into consideration was relatively small, leading to specifically qualitative findings. Thirdly, the aims of the research required dependency on the opinions and anecdotes of the respondents, in order to understand the interconnectedness of the causes for the transition of *Phulkari*, resulting in the persuasion of only qualitative emphasis. However, it is due to the qualitative nature of the data, that we received certain amount of flexibility in terms of the conduction of interviews. This allowed us to change the questions in accordance with the expertise of the person being interviewed.

Sampling was done location-wise because it was important to conduct our research in Patiala, Chandigarh, Amritsar and Sangrur. The rationale behind this will be elaborated further in this chapter. In each of these locations, it was our aim to collect data from various groups of respondents, so as to get an all-round perspective. For the interviews that had been scheduled, especially those of scholars and NGO officials, a fixed set of questions was prepared keeping in mind their area of expertise. For many of the artisans however, we relied heavily on snowball sampling, because we were unable to establish prior contact with them and fix appointments. Before going into further depth about our research on field, it is necessary to provide details on our preliminary work.

3.1 Pre-Field Research

In preparation for work on field, secondary sources were relied heavily upon to provide the requisite knowledge on *Phulkari*. Initial attempts to find credible sources resulted in a few articles, which revealed basic information with regard to the raw materials used, the demographic information of the embroiderers and a broad timeline of *Phulkari*'s rise to popularity.

Once the elementary knowledge on the topic was attained, finding detailed scholarly articles, which addressed the areas of research that we were interested in, was focussed on. An attempt to interact with the art form for the first time, before going on field, was made by visiting the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad. This particular museum was chosen as a result of coming across a source quoting Anne Morrell on her belief that, the pieces of *Phulkari* showcased at Calico Museum are exemplary and of the finest quality (Harris, Jennifer). Furthermore, various contacts were established with numerous scholars and different NGOs who have done work on *Phulkari*, so that they could provide us with their personal insights on the research topic.

Our preliminary studies on the handicraft shaped our research going forward on field. It was through most of our secondary sources that we were able to determine many aspects, such as, the places visited in Punjab, the respondents interviewed and the shops visited.

3.2 Primary Sources

On-field research was conducted in Patiala, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Bassi Pathana and Sangrur over the span of seven days. In Patiala we hoped to observe the continuity of the tradition of *Phulkari* not only as a craft meant for sale, but also as a token of affection passed through generations of women in the family. It is also the commercial centre for the embroidery and a significant number of government institutions are based out of Patiala. Nabha Foundation, a NGO that plays an important role in the revival of *Phulkari*, is based in Sangrur. We therefore felt it was necessary for us to visit it. In Chandigarh, we wished to interact with a professors and shopkeepers who would facilitate our research. It was our intention that in Amritsar, situated in West Punjab, we would be able to research the influence of the partition on the craft.

3.2.1 Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews of either formal (mostly in the case of scholars and officials) or personal (in case of artisans and shopkeepers) nature were conducted on five categories of respondents with the intention of collecting information, with regard to the aims and objectives of the research.



Map 2: Places visited in Punjab

The groups of respondents were as follows:

a) Artisans – This sample consisted of people who interact with the art form on daily basis, as a result of being either partially or wholly dependent on the embroidery for their income. They were the main source of information on the process involved in making *Phulkari*, since they are the ones that produce *Phulkari* on daily basis. Other details, like the significance of motifs used, the effect of commercialisation, and the changes that the handicraft has undergone over the years, were also provided. This group of respondents supplemented our research with information on the social significance of *Phulkari* and its impact on the daily lives of the people.

b) Shopkeepers - This sample consisted of people who financially benefit from the sale of *Phulkari*. They provided valuable insight into the differences between traditional and modern pieces of *Phulkari*. They also facilitated the understanding of the prevalent trends and preferences in the market, enabling us to analyse the causes for the transition in *Phulkari*,

over time, along with the manner in which the art form transformed.

Respondents	Contribution	Research Tools Used
Scholars	Shed light on the history, significance of motifs, colours and types, position of artisans in the present times and the evolution of techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Interview • Panel Discussion • Personal Interview
Artisans	Shed light on the social, cultural and economic importance of <i>Phulakri</i> in their lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused Group Discussion • Personal Interviews • Case Studies
NGO Workers	Shed light on their efforts to revive the art form and women empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Interviews
Shopkeepers	Shed light on the difference between handmade and machine made <i>Phulkari</i> and the important role of the artisans in the sales of handmade <i>Phulkari</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Interviews
Others	Shed light on the importance of the support and motivation from family for artisans to embroider <i>Phulkari</i> and earn recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Interviews

Table 1: Respondents and Research Tools

c) NGO Volunteers – This sample consisted of people working in organisations, which seek to revive *Phulkari*. They provided information on the various issues faced by the artisans as well as the possible methods of alleviating them.

d) Scholars – This sample consisted of academicians that have studied *Phulkari* and, are well versed in various aspects of this handicraft. Their superior understanding of the past and present circumstances, with regard to the subject, contributed to the collection of fairly detailed data.

e) Designers – This sample consisted of people involved in creating the patterns employed in the creation of *Phulkari*. They imparted their knowledge on the motifs used and their significance. They were also able to provide us with some input on the preferred colours and patterns, which cater to popular taste.

3.2.2 Focused Group Discussions

The tool of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was employed to extract the experiences, beliefs, attitudes and needs of the participants. The moderator used only semi-structured, open-ended questions so as to provide the participants ample leeway for conducting a discussion of their experiences in detail. This tool was beneficial in understanding the impact that *Phulkari* has on the lives of these artisans practising it.



Figure 13: Focused Group Discussion with Artisans of Sukhmani Self-Help Group

3.2.3 Panel Discussions

This technique of data collection was employed on a group of scholars from the Department of Home Sciences, Chandigarh. Herein, the questions asked were open-ended, so that the participants did not feel restricted (as a result of subjectivity) while voicing their opinions. This form of data collection tool helped us to attain multiple in-depth perspectives.



Figure 14: Panel Discussion at Government Home Science College

3.2.4 Audio Visual Documentation

While trying to understand the art form of *Phulkari*, interviews, process of embroidering and sample of the embroidery were documented either visually or in audio. This was done with an aim of making the research multi-dimensional, not only in terms of the process of documentation, but also in terms of the manner in which the research is presented. The importance of including audio-visual material is to provide a holistic portrayal of all the findings from the field research.

3.2.5 Observations

In the scholarly articles and other secondary sources, which were used as a reference for the preliminary data, we found certain gaps. It was only when we went on field that these

gaps were supplemented from our personal interaction with the stakeholders by being able to personally prod the respondents to provide detailed examples.

3.2.6 Libraries and Archives

While on field, the library resources of the Department of Home Sciences, Chandigarh were exhausted, in order to attain all the information, which was not available on web or in print, under our scope. The sources found there were very helpful in supplementing few of the gaps we faced in our literature review, prior to going on field.



Figure 16: Archives and Library Access



Figure 15: Museum Visit with Professor Prabhdeep Brar

3.2.7 Museums

Most of our information about the evolution of *Phulkari* was provided by literature or by scholars. It was only in the museum that we saw rare and old pieces of the handicraft. This gave us an opportunity to correlate the information we had with actual examples, enabling us to write in-depth analysis of the transformation.

3.3 Limitations of the Research

Just as every coin has two sides, we can claim that although we have put our best effort into making this research authentic, there is no guarantee of the research being entirely flawless. Since the research was conducted over a short span of seven days, the group faced a time constraint, which resulted in them prioritising the respondents and places visited. In

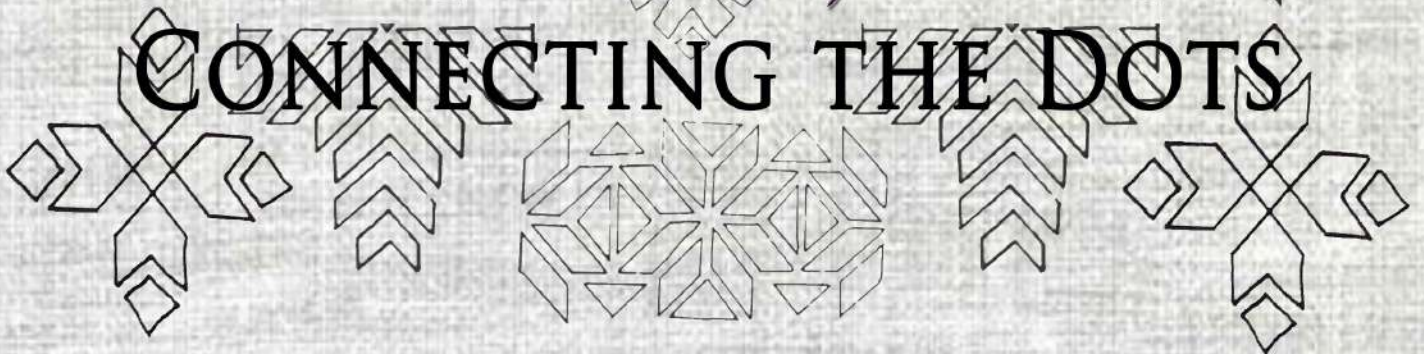
doing so, a few scheduled interviews were skipped over, and with it, information that would have contributed to our research. Also, the respondents constitute a very small and selective sample. This could be the result of the existence of gatekeepers. Herein, many interviews of the artisans in particular were a result of government officials or NGO workers pointing out who could and could not be interviewed, therefore, resulting in the inferences being representative of only a part of the Punjab region.

Studying the art form in isolation was never the aim. Factoring in numerous personal experiences of respondents added great value in our understanding of what the embroidery means to the people of Punjab, and why is it important for it to be preserved. At the same time, however, it was noticed that many of the opinions expressed were often the result of personal biases held by the interviewees. Not being experts in the field of research, it was difficult for us to ascertain the credibility of these opinions, especially when they contradicted themselves in a few instances.



EMBOSSING:

CONNECTING THE DOTS



4. Observations and Analysis

4.1 Variety is the Spice of Life: Types and Social Significance

A piece of *Phulkari* can easily be personified to represent a Punjabi: the tough *Khaddar* representing the toughness of a Punjabi woman, the threads representing the dreams and aspirations of one, and the colours symbolising their vibrant nature. A piece of *Phulkari* has several emotions and sentiments attached to it, and hence, is an integral part of the Punjabi culture. While researching *the* handicraft, we realised that there were several different types of *Phulkari* and *Bagh*, having different social significances, which we believe was an important part of our study.

Types of <i>Phulkari</i>	Significance
<i>Vari Da Bagh</i>	Draped around the bride after marriage ceremony
<i>Chhope</i>	Wrapped around the bride-to-be during the <i>choodha chandhaava</i> ceremony
<i>Suber</i>	Worn by the bride at the time of <i>phas</i>
<i>Til Patra</i>	Made for domestic use, also given to servants during the time of marriage
<i>Thirma</i>	Forms an essential part of a girl's trousseau
<i>Nilak</i>	Used during festive occasions apart from marriage
<i>Sainchi</i>	Expresses creativity of women embroiderers as it depicts everyday scenes
<i>Darshan Dwar</i>	Used for offerings in temples and religious places after one's wish is fulfilled

Table 2: Types and Significance of *Phulkari*

We came across the different types of *Phulkari* and their social significance on field. Herein, it is important to mention that the different types of *Phulkari* (with regard to the different names) were chiefly talked about, by the scholars. However, even though the artisans used the different types of *Phulkari*, for different purposes, they did not refer to the *Phulkaris* as different types. Rather, they clubbed all of them, under the wider category of a *Phulkari* and differentiated them, based on the motifs. For instance, if the main motif is the

sunflower, then scholars call it *Suraj-Mukhi Phulkari*; whereas, artisans refer to it as *Phulkari* with *Suraj-Mukhi* on it. Similarly, if the *Bagh's* central motif is the cucumber motif, then the scholars call it *Kakri Bagh*; artisans would say it is *Bagh* with *Kakri* motifs. While the artisans simply named the *Phulkari* or *Bagh* after the main motif, the scholars have divided the *Phulkaris* and *Baghs* on the basis of not only these motifs, but also the kind of base cloth used, the social class associated with it, and its significance. Professor Prabhjot Kaur from Government Home Science College, Chandigarh, in her interview, mentioned the different types of *Phulkari* and *Bagh* that exist within Punjab.

The professor mentioned, '*Tilpathnam*', which is a *Phulkari* of low quality (in terms of the cloth used) with less embroidery. From our secondary sources, we came to an understanding that, '*Tilpathnam*' is also called *Til-Patra*. Herein, small dots are embroidered on an overall field of inferior quality of *Khaddar*, as the words '*Til -Patra*' precisely mean 'sprinkling of sesame seeds'. This type of *Phulkari* was designed with less embroidery (small motifs sparsely spread across the cloth) on it, in order to make the *Phulkari* more durable and convenient for daily use. It is gifted to domestic helpers and labourers, during holy occasions, such as marriages (Kaur and Gupta 40).

She also mentioned '*Subath*', which is given to the bride, by the grandmother of the groom, on the occasion of marriage. On reading further about this kind of *Phulkari*, we understood that the '*Subath*' or '*Suber*' *Phulkari* is used in an important marriage ritual, called the '*Phera*' ceremony. *Suber*, like *Chope*, is a type of *Phulkari*, which is bigger than the others, in terms of length. It is embroidered with bright red, orange and golden yellow thread and is symbolic of care, love, harmony, and passion (Kaur and Gupta 38).

Furthermore, Professor Prabhjot Kaur mentioned that along with being gifted *Suber* by the grandmother of the groom, the bride is also gifted *Chope* (also spelled as '*Choppe*' or '*Chhope*', in certain papers) by her own grandmother, during a marriage ceremony, called the '*Chudal Ceremony*'. On further investigation of secondary sources, it was also found that '*Chope*' is a large cloth of *Khaddar*, in different shades of red, wherein, the lengthwise fringes are embroidered with tiny triangular themes, which continue to reach out into the centre of the fabric. As discussed earlier, the length and width in a *Chope* is bigger in size than in any other type of *Phulkari* or *Bagh*. The surface does not look covered, as a result of the predominant use of running stitch. It is due to this reason that the needlework is alike on both sides of the cloth.

After understanding the basic characteristics of *Chope*, it is now important to discuss this type in brief. *Chope* is used by newly wedded brides, wherein the bride is wrapped in this kind of *Phulkari* after her last bath before the wedding (Kaur and Gupta 38). There are different sub-categories in *Chope*. The most predominantly occurring one is ‘*Chope di chidi*’, which is characterized with bird motifs. In the studies of Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta, it was found that, the needlework for *Chope* is simple apart from the weaving of birds. However, everyone could not master this form of embroidery as the start and finish points coincide. Herein, the embroiderer is required to ensure that the starting point and finishing point are the same. This is the most common sub-category of *Chope*. ‘*Chatrion-wali*’ *Chope*, another sub-category within *Chope*, is characterized by triangular forms, shaped and arranged to form umbrella motifs.

As explained by Professor Prabhjot Kaur, in her interview, ‘*Shishedaar Phulkari*’ (just as the name suggests) incorporates the use of mirrors in the embroidery form. With reference to our secondary sources, we can say that this type of *Phulkari* was mainly practised on a base cloth dyed either red or brown. One primary reason for this could be the aesthetic impact that is created as a result of contrasting colours. The used of dark colours like red and brown, enhance the appeal of the light, shiny mirrors. However, this type of *Phulkari* is most commonly practised in the southeast parts of Punjab, which is present day Haryana (Kaur and Gupta 40).

The professor also spoke about ‘*Sainchi*’, which is a type of *Phulkari* that incorporates almost all the motifs. This type of *Phulkari* has designs of humans (engaged in different activities), birds and animals. This was the only type of *Phulkari*, wherein the motifs were first traced with black ink and then embroidered on. Further research revealed that, this type of *Phulkari* is famous in the districts of Bhatinda and Faridkot of Punjab. (Kaur and Gupta 37).



Figure 19: Sainchi

As discussed above, in the literature review, ‘*Thirma*’ is a type of *Phulkari*, which uses bright coloured threads on a white background. The outcome is such that, the white background looks like the outline for the motifs embroidered. Furthermore, the use of white colour in the base cloth is a symbol of ‘purity’. This form of *Phulkari* is primarily draped by the widows and older women of the society (Kaur and Gupta 40).

Another type of *Phulkari* discussed by Professor Prabhjot Kaur is ‘*Vari da Bagh*’. What stands out in a *Bagh* is that, unlike other types of *Phulkari*, the motifs here are stitched very close together, leaving no space in between, thus, covering the entire base cloth. Professor Prabhjot Kaur mentioned that, *Vari da Bagh* is a particular type of *Bagh*, which consists of golden embroidery on red coloured *Khaddar*. On further research, it was also brought to our attention that, this type of *Phulkari* could also be embroidered on an orange coloured *Khaddar*, with either golden or orange thread; however, the embroiderer is expected to ensure that only a single *Pat* goes into embroidering this type of *Phulkari*. ‘*Vari*’ technically means ‘the clothes and jewellery given by the in-laws to the bride to be’. It is primarily due to this reason that, *Vari da Bagh* is gifted to the bride by her mother in-law either before marriage or when she enters her new home after the wedding ceremony as a token of love (Kaur and Gupta 39).

The professor also listed ‘*Neelkad*’ as a type of *Phulkari*, which, like *Tilpathnam*, is also inferior in quality. The embroidery is done on a black or dark blue *Khaddar* cloth. This *Phulkari* is considered to be the first step of the girl, into the process of learning of the art form, since a significant number of girls start learning *Phulkari* by doing ‘*Neelkad*’. In addition to the information that the professor gave, we also read that the dark coloured cloth is embroidered with a bright yellow or red thread, to create beautiful floral motifs. This type of *Phulkari* is primarily used for daily purposes. One cause of this could be the inferior quality of *Khaddar* used, giving the wearer, maximum flexibility to work wearing this *Phulkari* on daily basis, without any concern of ruining it (Kaur and Gupta 40).

Another type of *Phulkari*, ‘*Darshandwar*’, according to the professor, is a special kind of *Phulkari* made to give as an offering to *Gurudwaras*. From our secondary sources, we learnt that the name literally means ‘a gate from where one can see God’. Therefore, this type of *Phulkari* is offered to God by people, once their wishes are fulfilled (Kaur and Gupta 39). Herein, the base cloth used is always red and the most commonly embroidered motifs are of animals, birds, flowers, humans and plants (Personal Interview, Prabhjot Kaur, 2015).

Other than the above-mentioned social significances (in specificity to the different types), *Phulkari* is also used during auspicious occasions such as *Karvachauth* and *Diwali*. Furthermore, *Phulkari* is also given as dowry in marriages. In some weddings, it is used in a ritual, where ‘*Naai Toi Batna*’ is applied on the bride or groom, after which they take a spiritual bath under the canopy of this *Phulkari* (Personal Interview, Amritpal Sandhu, 2015).

While *Baghs* have been listed as types of *Phulkari*, it was on field that we realised that, the words *Bagh* and *Phulkari* cannot be synonymously used. Like many *Phulkaris*, different types of *Baghs* too are named after the main motif embroidered and the technique to embroider them is the same as *Phulkari* too. However, it was interesting to notice that the artisans always made sure that they spoke of *Phulkari* and *Bagh* separately and never as the exact same thing. They also never considered *Bagh* as a type of *Phulkari*. The artisans mentioned that, while *Phulkaris* are sparsely embroidered, *Baghs* are heavily embroidered, and the base cloth is almost not visible in the later unlike in the former. In terms of the time taken to make each of them, the artisans also stated that, creating a *Phulkari* took about a month while creating a *Bagh* took at least three months, since the more work goes into a *Bagh*, compare the *Phulkari*, as a result of the change in their densities. It is due to this difference in the efforts of creating *Phulkari* and *Bagh*, that *Baghs* are more costly than *Phulkaris*.



Figure 20 and 21: *Bagh* (left) vs. *Phulkari* (right)

Further differentiation between *Phulkari* and *Bagh* was drawn, on the basis of the cloth used for both these; based on our interaction with the artisans, we understood that, in

present times, the base cloth used for *Baghs* is normally always *Khaddar* while, the base cloth for *Phulkari* is cotton, georgette, chiffon, etc. One reason of this could be the difference in their densities, which in turn affects the weight of the *dupatta*. Since *Baghs* requires the whole cloth to be filled, it is very important that the cloth used is *Khaddar*, which is more thick and sturdy (to hold and carry the weight of such heavy embroidery), compared to the other cloths used for embroidering *Phulkari*, which is sparsely embroidered over the cloth. One of the artisans, Manpreet Kaur, also mentioned a difference in the motifs used; she said that in *Phulkari*, there is only one motif called the ‘*Punjabi butti*’, which is altered to create several different patterns, while the motifs on the *Baghs* are different from one another even though each *Bagh* might have only one motif embroidered on it throughout (Personal Interview, Manpreet Kaur, 2015).

On researching further into this distinction, it was brought to our notice that there are other notable differences between *Phulkari* and *Bagh*. Firstly, the borders or the *Pallas* of the *Phulkari* have distinct designs compared to that of its centre, and are often more ornamental than the rest of the shawl. On the other hand, in a *Bagh*, there is no concept of a *Palla*, and, the entire cloth is embroidered, in a manner wherein, there exist no gaps in between, leaving it looking like a carpet with a velvety sheen. Secondly, the geometrical designs on a *Phulkari* are made up of vertical, diagonal or horizontal needlework, unlike *Bagh*, wherein, the overall floral pattern is geometrical, and the name of the *Bagh* is a consequence of its main motif. Thirdly, the patterns on a *Phulkari* are dispersed so that wide areas of the base cloth can be seen, and sometimes, space is left within the *butti* too, so that the base outlines shows the details of the *butti*. However, in a *Bagh*, the entire cloth is covered by motifs. Lastly, while *Phulkari* means ‘flower-work’, *Bagh* means ‘garden’, implying that though the technique employed in embroidering both these are the same, their nomenclature and etymology differs to a great extent. Furthermore, it was also brought to our attention that the term *Phulkari* was more commonly used in the Eastern region of Punjab, while the term *Bagh* was more frequently used in the Western part of Punjab (Personal Interview, Prabhjot Kaur, 2015). Thus, from this, it can be inferred that eastern Punjab or present day Pakistan region had more practitioners of *Phulkari*, while western Punjab or present day Punjab of India had more practitioners of *Bagh*.

Thus, from our observations on field, and our understanding of the secondary sources, we can explicitly say that, while *Bagh* is a kind of *Phulkari* (in terms of the techniques

employed in producing them), the two are very distinct and their names cannot be used synonymously, for the end products shows variation and cannot be mistaken to be one another (Mehta 111).



Figure 22: Showcasing different types of Phulkari

4.2 Embossing Emotions: Techniques used in *Phulkari*

After discussing in detail the different types of *Phulkari* and *Bagh*, their nomenclature and their significance, it is now important to examine the technique employed in embroidering these *Phulkaris* and *Baghs*. This is because, on looking closely, one realises that the nomenclature of the different types of *Phulkari* and *Bagh* is primarily based on the chief motif embroidered and its social and cultural significance, with no importance given at all to the technique used in rendering these motifs. Based on our close observations on field, we can say that the reason for this is that, even though these *Phulkaris* and *Baghs* employ different motifs, the stitch used to embroider these motifs remain the same, therefore, resulting in many types of *Phulkari* using the same technique. One other reason for investigating the technique of making *Phulkari* is our direct contact with this subject matter on field. According to our tentative observation, the same stitch can be produced using different methods, which makes it very important for us to look into the reasons and consequences of the same. Furthermore, there is a transition in the technique of producing

Phulkari, over time, which makes it extremely necessary for us to examine the changes in the process of embroidering it.

On our close interaction with the artisans on field, wherein they made an effort to teach us the process of making *Phulkari* by performing it for us, we observed that one stitch could be embroidered using multiple methods. For instance, the darning stitch (commonly used in *Phulkari* over time), generally used to fill spaces enclosed by parallel lines, can be produced using two methods. These are: embroidering this stitch in a fashion, wherein, both sides of the cloth are filled simultaneously and one space (enclosed between parallel lines) is filled at a time (wrap way), and embroidering this stitch in a fashion, wherein, only one side of the cloth is filled, and all the spaces (within one motif) are worked upon together (weft way) (Naik 103-116). In the first method, the needle moves across the cloth in a circular manner (wherein the needle, on the surface of the cloth, passes from one edge of the area, enclosed by parallel lines, to the other, where it enters the surface beneath, coming up again from the same edge where it began), therefore, also filling the bottom side of the cloth. In the second method, the needle moves across the cloth, in a manner of uneven running stitch (wherein the needle, on the surface, passes from one edge to the other, but instead of coming back to the same edge from beneath, it keeps moving towards the other edges of the motif), therefore, working on the motif as a whole, rather than just one part of the same (Personal Interview, Amritpal Sandhu, 2015).



Figure 23: Weft way of Stitching Phulkari

These different methods of embroidering one particular stitch were brought to our notice by not just one, but many artisans, implying that these techniques have been passed on to them over generations, and the remaining technicalities of the rendering of these motifs have become highly personalized. During our interaction with these artisans, it was brought to our notice that most artisans used the second method (wherein, only one side of the cloth is embroidered). On our asking why, they explained that the first method (wherein both sides of the cloth are embroidered) is more time-consuming and employs more amount of thread (silk floss) to fill the same visible spectrum of the *dupatta*, compared to that in the second method. Furthermore, the use of greater amount of thread is directly proportional to the weight of the *dupatta*; therefore, implying that more the thread used, heavier the *dupatta*. Hence, when viewed in terms of the convenience of the wearer, the use of the second method by the embroiderer is more preferable, since the amount of thread used is comparatively less. Moreover, on analysing the use of both the methods, we realized that working on just one side of the cloth results in greater finishing and perfection of work on the back side of the cloth, leading to the rise in the comfort and convenience level of the wearer, since the wearer now would not have to worry about threads being pulled from both, inside and outside the cloth.



Figure 24: Finishing of the Phulkari created using Weft-way Method (backside of the cloth)

One of our analyses with regard to the different methods employed in producing stitches can be stated by saying that it is interesting to see that neither the scholar nor the artisans talk

about the exact methods of stitching or embroidering in detail. Furthermore, even though different names have been given to the different stitches, there are no names given to the different methods of producing those stitches, or to the sub-categories of these stitches themselves. After analysing in detail the different methods of generating a particular stitch, to embroider motifs, it is now important to discuss in detail our observations and analysis with regard to the general technique of producing *Phulkari* and *Bagh*. As discussed earlier, in the Literature Review, along with the motifs and colours used, the technique of production and raw materials used in the production of *Phulkari* have also gone under immense transformation.

From our referral of the secondary sources and our interaction with the scholars, we learnt that earlier *Phulkari* was embroidered on the reverse side of the cloth (Graham and Dhamija 113-124), which has now changed to it being embroidered on the front side of the cloth itself. This is because even though the task looks simple in appearance, working on the wrong side of the cloth requires greater skill, attention, eyesight, and practise, on part of the embroiderer, which is more difficult to cultivate now, as a result of the influence and impact of education and technology. Along with the practise of embroidering the wrong side of the cloth, the women also embroidered motifs, with the use of the technique of counting threads to produce *Phulkari* and *Bagh*. Herein, due to the bold and coarse nature of handspun and hand-woven *Khaddar*, the women were able to practise *Phulkari* and *Bagh*, without actually drawing, tracing or block printing the motifs, onto the cloth; they merely counted the threads of the *Khaddar*, in order to establish the position of the motif and its shape and size. Since *Phulkari* today is practised over a range of other cloth materials like, chiffon, georgette, cotton, silk, etc. this age old technique of counting threads is no longer used by the artisans.

Furthermore, on our interaction with one of the old artisans, named Savitri Devi (age: 80 years old), we came across an old technique of creating *Phulkari*, one that is not discussed in any of our secondary sources. Furthermore, none of the interviews taken by us, neither the scholars' nor the artisans', except hers, shed light on this sort of a technique. According to the explanation given by her, an embroiderer is required to start working on the plain piece of cloth only from the edges, and never the center. This is because, the design that is required to be embroidered is not drawn, traced, or printed on the cloth; rather, the embroiderer does not even decide the motif initially. Herein, the embroiderer is required to use the length of her hand to count the space of the plain cloth, and divide the available place into different

sections, called ‘*dabbi*’ The number of sections, per hand’s length, depends upon the density of work (closeness of the motifs), she wants to/is required to produce. After mentally imaging the number of *dabbis*, the embroiderer is required to mark the divisions with her thread, in order to create a basic grid, within which each motif will be embroidered. It is only after this process that the motif to be embroidered is decided, and then created in each of these *dabbis*. It is due to the embroidery of these grids, that the nature of this form of *Phulkari* is highly geometric in nature. Furthermore, the embroiderer, in the process of filling the entire cloth, moves from the edges towards the center, in order to maintain uniformity and homogeneity (Personal Interview, Savitri Devi, 2015).

From our interactions with most of today’s young artisans, we can deduce that these techniques, both counting of threads and measurement and calculation of motifs, are no longer used. They have been replaced by the techniques of either drawing the motif over the cloth on which the embroidery is carried out, or the tracing of the motifs (by the technique of soft rubbing, explained in detail in the Literature Review), or block printing (also explained in detail in the Literature Review). Another technique for embossing designs on plain piece of cloth, to be hand embroidered on, is done through mechanic printing. This process of mechanic printing has not entirely replaced the technique of soft rubbing, but occurs simultaneously with it.



Figure 25: Embossing Motifs

Furthermore, apart from the change in the technique of embossing motifs on the plain piece of cloth, the technique of dyeing the cloth also changed over a period of time. The entire process of hand-dyeing the *Khaddar* is now replaced by the use of already dyed chiffon, georgette, silk and polyester cloths. A firm evidence to support this is that one of the artisans, named Amritpal, was herself shocked when she got to know about someone hand dyeing the cloth at home even today, in place of buying of ready-made cloth in the market. This change in the type of cloth used, not only changed the manner in which these cloths were dyed, but also methods used in producing different stitches along with the general techniques employed in creating *Phulkari*. Moreover, the type of thread used also changed over a period of time: from the untwisted silk floss, to the twisted silk thread. In order to understand the reason behind these changes, it is important for the reader to have a basic understanding of the technicalities of the process of embroidering *Phulkari*. This will enable the reader to understand that these changes were a result of the change in the level of convenience to both the producer of *Phulkari* and to the user of the product. For instance, use of twisted silk thread in replacement of the untwisted silk floss has greater advantages like increased life and durability of the thread, resulting in not only the ease of embroidering the *Phulkari* for the embroiderer, using this thread, but also in the increased life span of the *Phulkari* and *Bagh* itself, when viewed with respect to that of the user.

Additionally, with the advent of technology, *Phulkari* today is produced entirely with the aid of machines, wherein, no human hand is required to stitch the plain cloth, into generating a work of art. The primary reason for this transition is the change in the purpose of production or creation of *Phulkari* and *Bagh* from a mode of expression of the thoughts, ideas, and feelings of a woman, to a product for commercial sale. As the purpose of producing *Phulkari* changed from expression of emotions to profit maximization, the primary aim changed from creativity to cost minimization. This resulted not only in an attempt to reduce the time taken to produce *Phulkari*, by mechanizing the whole process, but also to diminish the cost of human labour, leading to depersonalization of the art form. It is interesting to see that this bit of commercialisation has advanced to a level wherein, *Phulkari* today is being digitally printed not only on clothes, but also on other commercial products like pencil stands, paper folders, etc. When this transition is analysed in detail, with reference to the responses of all the artisans and scholars, one can trace the cause of this being education and technology (Personal Interview, Charan Kaur, 2015).



Figure 26: Learning to embroider

From our interaction with certain artisans, we analysed that even though they largely had a very optimistic perspective towards the education of young girls and women, they firmly believed that this was the primary cause for the depersonalization of the art form, since it was due to this that the young girl, no longer had the time, energy, and patience enough to learn the art form from her mother or grandmother, in manner which was originally passed down through generations. Education, in the process of providing a wider scope to women in general, ended up hindering the passing down of *Phulkari* through the generations, not only in terms of technique, but also in terms of the motifs, ideologies, and significance. In continuation, it is believed that this situation was further worsened by technology, wherein the easy access of technological tools like television and cellular devices is seen to have obstructed the sparingly occurring interest of young girls to even attempt to learn the art form willingly (Personal Interview, Charan Kaur, 2015). The use of technology and machinery to produce *Phulkari* furthered the diminishing of interest to learn the embroidery form among the young girls, since they no longer had an incentive to learn something that could be easily produced using machines.

When all the responses of the scholars and artisans together were evaluated superficially, it was brought to our notice that the transition in the technique employed in generating the art form was discussed to such details, only by the scholars and the secondary sources (wherein, certain aspects of the topic were again missed out on, for example,

calculation of the motifs). Contrary to this, when artisans were asked with regard to this, they had a very simple and straightforward answer in association with the transition in the technique, which is “change from traditional to machine-made *Phulkari* and *Bagh*”. Furthermore, when all the recorded response of the scholars, artisans and shopkeepers were observed collectively, along with the references to our secondary sources, it was found that the terms “handmade *Phulkari*” and “traditional *Phulkari*”, and “machine made *Phulkari*” and “commercial *Phulkari*”, were interchangeably used, with a sharp distinction being drawn between handmade and commercial *Phulkari*. However, on field, we discovered that commercial, traditional, handmade, and machine-made are four different terms. Commercial *Phulkari* refers to all pieces made to be sold, traditional *Phulkari* refers to pieces with motifs that were traditionally used in the past, handmade *Phulkari* refers to those pieces stitched by hand, and machine-made refers to pieces made with the aid of machinery. Therefore, we came to the conclusion that since even handmade *Phulkari* is sold in the markets today, it has the potential to fall under the category of commercial *Phulkari* (Personal Interview, Prabhdeep Brar, 2015). Consequently, there can be no stark distinction drawn between handmade *Phulkari* and commercial *Phulkari*.

4.3 Darning One’s Dreams – from Weaver’s choice to Consumer’s: Motifs

After discussing in detail about the types and significance of *Phulkari* and *Bagh*, it is very clear that motifs refer to the patterns embroidered on cloth. The study of motifs was an important aspect of our research for multiple reasons. To begin with, it is these motifs that raise the status of mere dyed fabric to a beautiful work of art. Besides being beautiful in their form, motifs also serve as a form of expression for the women creating them. They represent the world around them, as seen through their eyes, along with the manifestation of their thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions. Expression in the form of motifs makes them symbolic of the social, cultural, and geographical background of the embroiderer. Therefore, they represent the society at that particular time, when the *Phulkari* was made, enabling us to study not only the transition in the art form, but also in the societal structures and organizations. In a society where women were supposed to be humble and shy, motifs provided an outlet for a woman to express herself, through the vibrancy generated on the piece of cloth. Finally, as discussed earlier, it is known that different pieces of *Phulkari* were assigned names by artisans, and sometimes by scholars, based on the motifs employed. It is this aspect of motifs that makes it a crucial factor in the study of this art form.



Figure 27: Flower Motif

After understanding the rationale behind studying motifs in detail, it is very important to now discuss each and every motif in detail, in terms of the deep meaning attached to all them, in order to comprehend their significance and relevance. Two of the most important motifs used in the ancient traditional *Phulkaris* are that of the spinning wheel and churning of the buttermilk. According to the scholars, spinning of the wheels and churning of the oceans (in Hindu mythology) have a very special significance, primarily due to the varied interpretations of this motif. The wheel motif is supposed to project the wheel of creation, steady preparation, and ultimate union with God, attained as a result of purity and satiety with life and beyond. This is because it is through these wheels embroidered on the cloth that the creation of the threads of unity is generated. It is believed that if one follows this spiritual tradition, the consequence is the transformation from their nature (associated with raw cotton) to them being cultured (sublimated harmony of perfection) (Gill 43).

Furthermore, this motif is a symbol of love and ecstasy (the emotions felt by the Creator, while creating this world and everything that is in it). Moreover, the process of churning of the buttermilk early in the morning (which is considered to be the time of devotees, called *bhaktas*) is symbolic of the earliest movement of the earth as a celestial body, and the churning of the oceans (representative of unequal distribution of resources according to Hindu mythology). Lastly, the rhythmic music generated from the process of

churning of buttermilk and spinning of the wheel, is considered to generate the same impact as that of meditation, leading to self-enlightenment of one's spiritual destiny, as an existential being (Gill 43).

Moving on to the symbolism attached to other motifs, it is important to discuss the representation of chariots and elephants, which are not only aimed at symbolizing the celestial movements, but also the existence of balance, good fortune, and prosperity. It is very interesting to see that every specific fruit, bird, and animal embroidered has its own specific significance attached, conveying some particular message to the viewer. The following table explains in detail the symbolism attached to each of the fruits, birds and animals, which were used in the process of creating *Phulkari* (when *Phulkari* was still a medium of expression of thoughts, ideas, emotions and creativity) (Goyal 25).

Fruits	
Pomegranates	Connotation of fertility and richness
Mangoes	Sign of Prosperity
Birds	
Peacock	Symbol of love and fertility, sometimes, denote the absent lover
Parrot	Symbolizes the notes of love
Crow	Signifies good news and well being
Cock	Symbol of rebirth and awakening of life
Sparrow	Signifies spring
Owl	Symbolises the arrival of unpleasant news
Animals	
Camel	Signifies successful love
Horse	Manhood
Serpent	Emblem of wealth, protective power and the healer or the earth
Dog	Symbol of faithfulness, however known to bring news of death
Elephant	Symbols of good fortune and prosperity (reason being that the Earth rests on their head)

Table 3: Motifs and their Symbolic Significance

As one observes the transition of *Phulkari* over time, one can observe that the *dupattas* made earlier were densely ornate compared to the *Phulkari dupattas* produced in today's time, which are usually associated with border work (Personal interview, Sukhvinder Kaur, 2015). However, when one looks deeply into the understanding of the differences between *Phulkari* and *Bagh*, the above explanation seems faulty, since *Bagh* (as explained earlier) is defined as closely embroidered work of art. However, in this case, it is important to clarify that the *Phulkari* made in earlier times, differs from *Bagh*, in terms of the density and place of motifs. Even though *Phulkaris* at that time were denser, they were not as dense and closely placed as that of *Bagh*. One primary way of distinguishing between them was that in *Bagh*, the density of work was to such an extent that the motifs became the primary elements of the cloth with the base cloth remaining only in form of borders to these motifs. Therefore, from our observations, we can analyse by saying that today's *Phulkari* is associated with mainly the border work, in contrast to earlier *Phulkari*, which was comparatively denser (but not as dense as *Bagh*) (Personal Interview, Prabhdeep Brar, 2015).

In observing the *Phulkari* pieces of today, one can starkly differentiate the old *Phulkari* from the new one, primarily on the basis of the motifs employed. The ancient traditional *Phulkari* was dominated by motifs involving, human figurines, trees, plants, animals, birds and other elements of nature, wherein each of them had a specific significance and symbolism attached to them (as explained earlier). However, one can analyse to say, that this is no longer the case today. All the traditional action-oriented motifs have been replaced by floral and geometric patterns of the present time, as a result of commercialisation of the art form. This is because *Phulkari* is no longer aimed at expressing the thoughts and emotions of the artisans; rather, it is more concerned with meeting the market demands, in order for it to be sold extensively in the market (Personal Interview, Prabhdeep Brar, 2015). However, one can observe some shapes of traditional *Phulkari* being incorporated in the present day floral and geometric motifs: an example of this would be the triangle (symbolic of the holy trinity, representative of the number "three" which is a symbol of the past, present, and future, and the nature of universe in terms of spirit, mind and body), which is used to embroider the motifs of flowers (Kaur and Gupta 41).

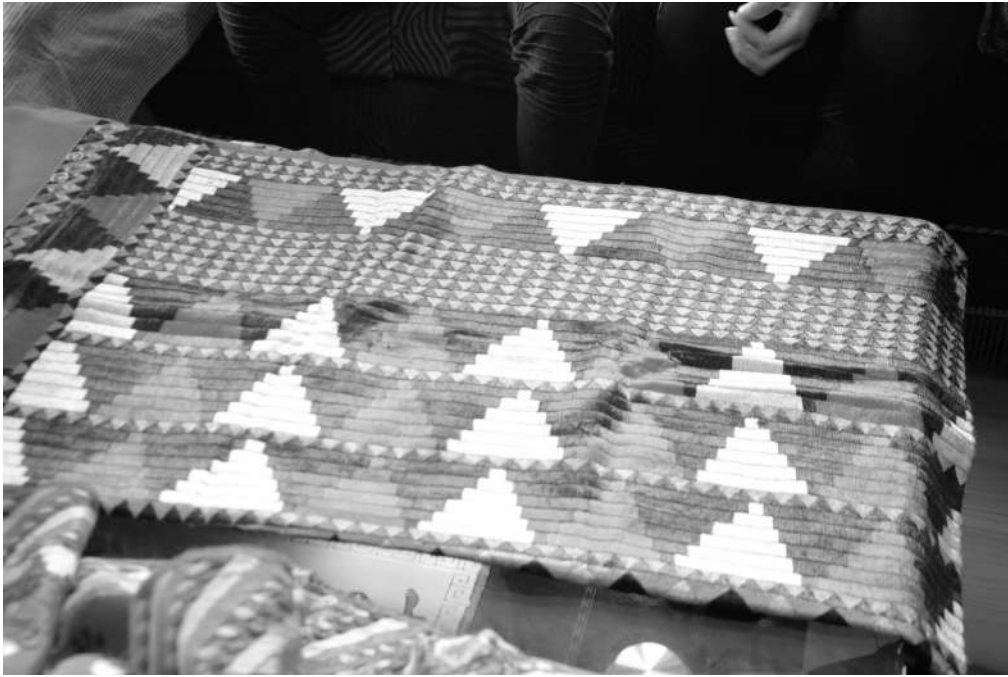


Figure 28: Triangular Motifs

The changes that have arisen in terms of motifs are primarily because of the differences in terms of to whom the designs are aimed at catering to. Previously, patterns were embroidered based on personal will and were influenced only by personal biases, preferences, and society. The motifs of the past differed from woman to woman. Even when comparing the same motifs embroidered by two different women, there used to be noticeable differences. This was the result of an embroiderer's interpretation playing a decisive role in how the motifs looked. Another reason for the lack of uniformity is the varied levels of skills possessed by different women (Personal Interview, Anu Gupta, 2015). In more recent times, commercialisation of the art form has subsequently led to the trend of purchasing *Phulkari* from shops rather than spending time and effort on creating one's own piece. The result of this, as discussed earlier, is that the forces of the market dictate which motifs are employed. Therefore, we see that the change in the purpose of the *Phulkari* itself has influenced the purpose of the motifs as well.



Figure 29: Phulkari, as part of women's trousseau (depicting the manner in which it is worn)

Since *Phulkari* is no longer created as a part of a woman's trousseau and considered more of a cultural commodity than an important part of life, the motifs have changed accordingly. This has led to a change in what the motifs mean as well. Before, much could be gauged about the maker of the *Phulkari* based on the motifs. Now, all it gives information about is the tastes and preference of the market, excluding the embroiderer from the picture. The predominant geometrical patterns lead us to believe that they are in-fashion and well sought-out unlike the human figures or train motifs. The artisans employed in the handicraft are provided with cloth that already has tracings on it. In this manner, their expression is restricted. Even in the case of artisans that practise *Phulkari* purely as a means of expressing their artistic talent, pattern books are referred to. Consequently, the scope of producing an entirely original product is very limited. Therefore, in conclusion, it is appropriate to say that, mechanisation of the process of creating *Phulkari* is the result of the desensitisation of the public, which no longer seems to respect the creative process and the thought put in by the embroiderer. Not only does this reflect the change in the role that the embroidery form plays in a consumer's lives, but also, the manner in which the consumer expects the *dupattas* and bedspreads to match everything, instead of looking for a unique piece, which would connect with them on a personal level.

One of the major analyses, with regard to the subject of motifs, is the differing and conflicting response of the artisans and scholars. During our pre-field research, we came across various secondary sources, which explained the significance behind each and every motif and colour used by the embroiderer, in detail. On establishing contact with these

professors, and interviewing them, we realised that there were deep meanings attached to the motifs and the colours used. Thrilled by this information, on asking the artisans or practitioners about the significance of the motifs and colours used by them, it was shocking to know that, they did not attach a specific, deep meaning or symbolism to the motif and colour; they only embroidered what best sold in the markets. Furthermore, on interviewing the elderly artisans, who also did not attach specific symbolism to every motif and colour, we came to an understanding that, just as art critics and historians attach deeper meanings to every brushstroke of the artist, scholars attach deep symbolism, based on the cultural context, to every motif and colour. Therefore, one can conclude by saying that while scholars attach deeper meaning to each and every motif embroidered, present-day artisans are of the opinion that motifs are based purely on aesthetic value and have no other depth whatsoever.

4.4 Tale of the Tints: Colours used in the art form of Phulkari

Colour	Significance
Red	Signifies feelings of happiness, love, passion, desire and excitement Depicts sun, flowers, power and energy
Yellow	Signifies happiness, liveliness, success and fertility Represents wheat and mustard, feelings of power and enlightenment
Orange	Signifies cheerfulness and creativity Symbol of affordability Suggests wonder
Green	Signifies nature and freshness Depicts a holy and clean environment
Blue	Signifies water, sky, truth and nature Not widely used
White	Signifies purity, peace, simplicity and honesty Mostly used as a base colour in <i>Thirma</i>

Table 4: Colours and their Symbolic Significance

Along with motifs, colours play an important role in *Phulkari*. Initially, *Phulkari* used to be an organic process. This included dyeing the hand-woven base cloth with colours obtained primarily from vegetables (Naik 105). They were restricted to red, white, black, and blue. Red *Khaddar* was primarily used in the creation of *Phulkaris* meant for auspicious

occasions like weddings. White, on the other hand, was reserved for the use by widows, much like in most parts of India. The pieces, that had a blue or black base, were worn by womenfolk on a daily basis. Once the *Khaddar* was ready, embroiderers then carefully chose *pat* that would stand out and compliment the colour of the base. The popular shades of *pat* were red, orange, green, white, golden yellow and deep blue (Naik 104).



Figure 10: Observing Colours

Having overcome the need to dye one's own cloth, artisans today instead take trips to the market and choose from amongst the numerous options of coloured fabric sold. There is not a hue that is not available. Rows of shelves, holding threads of every imaginable colour, are seen in shops. With options such as these, it is no wonder that there is such diversity in the choices of colour employed by the embroiderers. For commercial *Phulkari*, like with most other aspects, the colour combinations of the pieces are decided with the sole intention of catering to popular taste.

4.5 Commercialisation of *Phulkari*

Each element of *Phulkari* has undergone change because of commercialisation, thereby making it a significant point of analysis in this report. However, prior to discussing commercialisation in detail, it is important to mention that all information with regard to the history and evolution of *Phulkari* before commercialisation was procured from secondary sources and no significant information could be obtained about the same on field. Therefore, the focus of our observation and analysis under this theme would be commercialisation. The term ‘commercial’ is often associated with machine-made products. However, from our on-field research we discovered that it is not the same with *Phulkari*. An important finding of our research was the fact that commercialisation is not only associated with the sale of machine-made *Phulkari*, but, also handmade *Phulkari*. Commercialisation of *Phulkari* has a long history that can be traced back to the colonial era. Traditional *Phulkari* has not only simply been reduced from a girl’s diary to a commodity, but has also undergone changes to meet the demands of the urban milieu.

Traditionally, *Phulkari* was made by women for domestic use only. Women took painstaking efforts to dye, trace and stitch intricately, sitting in the shade of trees. The motifs embroidered on *Khaddar* and cotton conveyed the thoughts and aspirations of a girl. She treasured her *Phulkari dupattas* and carried it like her diary to her new home after marriage. Hence, *Phulkari* had no commercial value; it had an emotional value (Lal and Sahai 10). The shift to commercialisation took place for three important reasons. According to Professor Anu H. Gupta, with the advent colonisation, handmade *Phulkari* was both gifted and sold to the British. *Phulkari* was also exported to England for sale. Cotton, which was an important raw material for *Phulkari* was provided by the farmers to the settlements of weavers who spun cotton yarn into cloth by hand in exchange for agricultural produce (Dhamija 118). In the colonial era, cotton became an important raw material for the East India Company. Raw cotton was spun into finished cloth in the factories of England and exported to India. This resulted in a loss of markets for the Indian weavers. Now, *Phulkari* was embroidered on imported cotton. During the first half of the nineteenth century, *Phulkaris* were popularised through display at several European and North American International Exhibitions. During the late nineteenth century, merchants exported *Phulkari* to London and New York to be sold and used as exotic draperies. Thus, *Phulkari* was not only inherited and gifted, but was also sold in both, India and England. In India, *Phulkari* was purchased by the wealthy landowning

families (Dhamija 111). A gradual increase in the commercialisation of *Phulkari* was marked by the Partition. After the Partition between India and Pakistan, most Hindus from Bahawalpur (now in Pakistan) and other cities, settled in Patiala and Bassi Pathana. Their poor economic conditions forced them to sell their long cherished *Phulkari dupattas* to support their families in the midst of suffering caused by the Partition (Personal Interview, Gupta, 2015). An eighty-year-old artisan, Savitri Devi, had learnt *Phulkari* from her grandmother and aunts in Pakistan. After the partition in 1947-48, she was forced to migrate to India. She settled with her family in Patiala, Punjab. She continued with the embroidery, but due to her family's poor economic conditions, she began to sell her work in the market. The market demands, not her thoughts and emotions, gave shape to the *Phulkari* pieces. Today, she supplies her work to Adalat Bazaar in Patiala. The market decides the kind of cloth (cotton, silk, etc.), threads, colours, designs and motifs. Although she does not receive enough returns, she wants to continue doing *Phulkari*, as it is a tradition passed down from the women of her family (Personal Interview, Savitri Devi, 2015).

With changing times, a drastic change has been noticed in the commercialisation of the art form. The influence of fashion and trends has largely been responsible for this shift. This is marked by the change in colours, fabric, threads and alteration of motifs. Initially, colours such as yellow, green, blue, white, orange and red were employed for dyeing as well as embroidery (Kaur and Gupta 40). However, now various shades of these colours as well as other colours such as black, brown, grey, and multicoloured cloths are extensively used to make *Phulkari dupattas*. Initially, *Khaddar* and cotton were used as the base cloth for embroidery. However, today various kinds of fabrics such as *chandheri* silk, chiffon, georgette and net are used for embroidery (Personal Interview, Rajrani, 2015). *Khaddar* is not much used for making *dupattas* anymore. This is mainly because woollen shawls and the practise of veiling becoming obsolete have replaced heavy *Khaddar chaddars* with lighter fabric (Personal Interview, Anu Gupta, 2015). Similarly, the untwisted silk thread has been replaced with more durable threads to sustain the *dupattas* for longer periods of time (Personal Interview, Prabhjot Kaur, 2015). NGOs such as Meher Baba Charitable Trust (MBCT) and Nabha Foundation play a vital role in not only training women in *Phulkari*, but also coach them to work with different kinds of threads, fabrics and designs to produce work that can meet the market demands. They also receive special training in marketing making *Phulkari* a full-fledged commercial business of the women.



Figure 31: Machine-made Phulkari

In contemporary times, the increased market demand for *Phulkari* has been met with the growing sale of machine-made *Phulkari*. This is largely due to the fact that machine-made *Phulkari* is less time consuming and cheaper than the traditional one. However, it is also true that customers prefer handmade *Phulkari* to the machine-made ones due to the cultural significance attached to traditional *Phulkari*. Further, the commercialisation of *Phulkari* is not only in terms of the sale of *dupattas*, but also various other commodities such as *Phulkari* bed sheets, files, bookmarks, table runners, *potlis* as well as motifs printed on stoles, skirts and T-shirts, which are sold by many shops such as 1469 and Punjab Government Emporium in Chandigarh. Many NGOs such as Umeed and Building Bridges teach artisans to embroider *Phulkari* over modern day products. Although, commercialisation has made *Phulkari* a mere commodity, there are many women in Punjab who associate deeply themselves with the art form. There are many others who take up the practise of *Phulkari* to earn a livelihood. The craft has changed, but it still seeks a special status in the lives of Punjabis.



Figure 32: Phulkari folders, pen stands, potlis and table runners

The handicraft industry in India is the largest employer, next to agriculture. The industry provides livelihood opportunities to thousands of artisans as well as avenues for the realization of social and cultural potentials of millions of people. The industry has been exempted from the acquisition of a permit license from the government. This industry does not have a well-organized marketing system. Thus, most artisans fall under the unorganised sector of the Indian economy. In some cases, artisans and craftsmen are free to decide their own prices if they directly sell their products to the consumers. In most other cases, they sell their products through shops, which decide the prices (Khan and Amir 24). Today, many NGOs have been established to train artisans and craftsmen in their respective art forms as well as to train them in certain marketing strategies that enable them to decide the prices for their work. Pricing strategies are an important aspect of commercialisation of any handmade product as they vary from one region to another. Due to inadequate secondary information on pricing and history of commercialisation of *Phulkari*, data on pricing has been largely extracted from primary research.

There are various factors that determine prices. These include, time, number of motifs, kind of fabric, and difficulty level. From the primary research it was inferred that

artisans usually price their work on the basis of two or more factors. For instance, Savitri Devi, an artisan residing in Patiala, prices her work on the basis of number and cost of the motifs. The cost of a single motif is determined by the quality and amount of thread used in the embroidery. Thus, if the *dupatta* contains ten motifs and each motif is worth twenty rupees, then the cost of a single motif is multiplied by ten to calculate the price (Personal Interview, Savitri Devi, 2015). Artisans such as Amritpal and Bhupinder Kaur take various factors into consideration while pricing their work. Mrs. Amritpal Kaur Sandhu prices her work on the basis of the cost of raw material (thread and fabric), motifs (number and size), and the amount of embroidery done on the *dupatta*. Thus, a *Bagh* that contains small and large number of closely spaced motifs would be priced between rupees five thousand to fifteen thousand. The variation in prices results largely due to the difference in fabric (silk as the base would cost more than cotton as the base), complexity of motifs (some motifs require more thread than others) and the difficulty level (some *Phulkaris* like *Chope* is easier to embroider than *Sainchi*) (Personal Interview, Amritpal Sandhu, 2015). NGOs such as Meher Baba Charitable Trust train artisans to calculate the prices. Along with factors like number of motifs, base cloth and difficulty level, time is considered to be an important factor. The time factor is usually considered in the case of orders placed with the artisans. Thus, if the order is to be completed within a week, the prices paid are higher than if, it was to be completed in a month (Personal Interview, Rajrani, 2015).

Shops and boutiques that sell *Phulkari* made by artisans in villages price the work differently. Labour cost, which is determined by the neatness of the work, quality and fabric, is given greater importance than other factors. Thus, neatly embroidered cotton *Phulkari* is sold for a higher price than neatly embroidered chiffon *Phulkari* (Personal Interview, Darshana Tanej, 2015). A major drawback of this pricing strategy is that many artisans feel exploited by shopkeepers. They believe that they do not make enough profits from the sale of their work. Shops sell their work at seemingly high prices, but do not share the profits in a fair manner. For instance, Mrs. Amritpal Kaur buys all the required raw material (thread and fabric) for embroidery. Thus, if, her work is worth rupees seven thousand, she receives only five thousand for that work (Personal Interview, Amritpal Sandhu, 2015). According to her, this happens because the shopkeepers do not really value the work of the artisans and tend to exploit them.

Thus, the main focus of several NGOs and government agencies is to protect artisans against exploitation by giving them adequate training in marketing skills as well as train them to price their work on various factors as mentioned above.

4.6 Human Pillars: Family Support

Having understood commercialisation, it is evident that *Phulkari* is essential to support many women and their families. It is vital to analyse how this happens. On field, we discovered that almost all women practised *Phulkari* before marriage, but that changed after marriage, depending upon if they were allowed to practise the art form by their husbands and in-laws or not.



Figure 33 and 34: Husband and daughter of Mrs. Amritpal Sandhu

We interacted with Mrs. Amritpal and her family in Patiala. Mrs. Amritpal is a practitioner of *Phulkari* and *Bagh* and has been practising ever since she was six years of age. After her marriage, her husband allowed her to continue her embroidery work, as he believes that she should do it as she is passionate about it and is talented too. On being asked how he supports her in her work, Mr. Sukhvinder Singh, Mrs. Amritpal's husband said that, since his society does not allow women to move around freely in public, he accompanies her to the markets, so that she can purchase raw materials and he also said that he supports her financially. With his support, she stands as a strong independent artisan today (Personal Interview, Amritpal Sandhu, 2015). The Punjabi society is a conservative one, wherein, mostly, the women are restricted to household chores whereas men take care of the financial aspects of the house. In a society like this, the women need the support of a man and the rest

of the family when they decide to step in and help with the financial aspects of the house, or do any activity, which is deemed as the shadow characteristics of the ideal woman.

Similarly, Rajjo, a trainee at Meher Baba Charitable Trust spoke about the support received from her husband in an interview. She said that her husband bought her a sewing machine for he felt that she learnt well at the Trust and was producing good pieces of *Phulkari*. She felt very encouraged by her husband's constant and strong support (Personal Interview, Rajjo Kaur, 2015).

While we came across such supportive husbands, we also came across certain respondents who spoke about how, due to lack of support from their husbands, they had to stop embroidering. One such case was that of a respondent from the Chhota Naag village on the outskirts of Amritsar. She practised the embroidery form with great passion before marriage and produced great pieces of *Phulkari*, but after marriage, the scenario completely changed, as her husband did not want her to continue embroidering. She had to stop her work because of this restraint. We also came across another such case in a Sohali, a village near Patiala. One of the respondents, on being asked, told us that one of her married sister's practises *Phulkari* as it is welcome in her home but the other doesn't, as she is not supported.

. The lack of support is mainly because, men feel like they are earning enough to run the family and do not need the women of the household to help with this aspect, and the women are asked to give all their time into household chores, raising kids, and basically give their undivided attention to the needs of the family which is not possible when women practise *Phulkari*, as it is a tedious and time taking process.

The status of the practitioners of an art form translates into the status held by an art form itself. Like in the case of many other art forms, practitioners of *Phulkari* too have several restraints on them, and this might have also led to the downfall of the art form.

Case Study 1: Amritpal Kaur Sandhu

With nineteen years of experience, Amritpal Kaur is an artisan for whom *Phulkari* isn't merely an art form, but an identity. She learnt this embroidery purely by observing the women of her family and perfected it through years of dedicated practise. When asked why she chose *Phulkari* over other embroidery forms, she replied, “[I]t was present in my house, in my heart, so I knew this was it.” She embroiders *dupattas*, *kurtis*, bed sheets, pillow covers and tablecloths. As a way of optimising her leisure time, she often spends it embroidering her own suits. Her work is also sold in markets.



However, she feels that considering the time and money she invests in making *Phulkari*, she does not receive sufficient remuneration. “Selling *Phulkari* to the market is just a way of passing time,” she states. Conferring with the common belief, she too believes that people who value handmade *Phulkari* will choose to buy it over machine-made work. According to Mrs. Amritpal, there has been no significant change in this form of embroidery over time, but, it is the little changes that have made *Phulkari* more prominent today.

4.7 The Threads of Empowerment: Revival of *Phulkari*

Phulkari, which served as a woman's diary years ago, has simply become a commercial product today. With the acceleration of commercialisation, the sale of machine-made *Phulkari* has been increasing in the market. Artisans producing handmade *Phulkari* face fierce competition against the large-scale production of machine-made ones, which are cheaper and less time consuming. For instance, one machine-made *dupatta* is for about rupees five hundred to seven hundred. On the other hand, one handmade *Phulkari dupatta* ranges from rupees one thousand five hundred to seven thousand (Personal Interview, Amritpal Sandhu, 2015). However, the artisans doing handmade *Phulkari*, earn as little as rupees six hundred to one thousand five hundred a month (Personal Interview, Rajrani, 2015). According to Dr. Prabhjot Kaur, before the advent of NGOs and government help, the artisans were unorganised and were extremely prone to exploitation by middlemen thriving between the artisans and the market. Due to poor remunerations and high cost labour, artisans shifted from handmade *Phulkari* to more economically feasible and less labour intensive

machine-made embroidery. Roughly, artisans involved in handmade *Phulkari* earned about rupees one thousand two hundred a month, while those involved in machine-made embroidery earned about rupees three thousand a month (P. Kaur 30).

Hence, to protect local artisans and revive the art form, the role of external organisations has become crucial. Although, these organisations differ in structures and roles, the benefits of their initiatives trickle down, directly or indirectly, to the rural artisans. Therefore, it is important to throw light on the initiatives taken by diverse organisations to support the artisans.

4.7.1 Government

The State Government of Punjab has taken initiatives to not only revive the art form, but also to support the artisans to earn a livelihood for themselves.

4.7.1.1 Krishi Vigyan Kendra

As discussed in the Literature Review, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK) are institutions set up at the district level, which were established by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, committed to organise short and long term vocational courses for improving the quality of lives of rural women. Krishi Vigyan Kendras play a crucial role in empowering women through skill training, capacity building, and entrepreneurship development along with increasing awareness about various credit facilities, financial incentives, and subsidies provided by the State and Central Government to the rural Self-Help Groups (Personal Interview, Gurupdes Kaur, 2015).

KVK, Patiala is one of the centres affiliated with Punjab Agriculture University. Dr. Gurupdes Kaur has been working at KVK for the upliftment of rural women for the past thirteen years now. According to her, the aim of KVK, Patiala is to create employment opportunities for rural artisans so that they do not migrate to cities in search of livelihood. This organisation has adopted, among various handicrafts, *Phulkari* for the empowerment of women. It has a *Phulkari* centre that trains women from nearby villages. Women are trained to embroider different kinds of motifs. Some of the traditional motifs and colour combinations have been altered so that it suits to the urban milieu. Women artisans do not only embroider *Phulkari* on *Khaddar* and cotton *dupattas*, but a large number of other

products such as *potlis* (purses), *kurtis*, bags, *pankhis* (fans), and so on. According to Dr. Kaur, such products are largely bought by people from India and abroad (mainly Non-Residential Indian's) (Personal Interview, Gurupdes Kaur, 2015).



Figure 35: Sukhmani Self-Help Group

Krishi Vigyan Kendra has adopted a cluster development approach to empower women. Women from a particular village are brought together to form Self-Help Groups. KVK has helped rural SHGs to sell their *Phulkari* products through direct sale points given at Regional Kisan Melas. KVK SHGs are offered exhibition spaces at nominal prices. Also, district level camps organised by allied departments help establish and advertise these SHGs

among the local population. NABARD (National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development) has contributed significantly towards the success of the program. KVK received financial aid of rupees one lakh from NABARD to set up a Rural Mart for women to market their products directly. NABARD has also sponsored SHG's for sale at international and national Exhibitions like SARAS (Swarozgaris), PITEX (Punjab International Trade Expo), and International Suraj Kund fair. KVK has registered its SHGs with the District Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, which has helped *Phulkari* artisans to sell their products at craft bazaars under the name of Gandhi Shilp Bazaar (Personal Interview, Gurupdes Kaur, 2015).



Figure 36: At Krishi Vigyan Kendra

Case Study 2: Bhupinder Kaur

Bhupinder Kaur is a successful entrepreneur and a socially active volunteer. She has not only contributed immensely towards the empowerment of rural women, but also made *Phulkari* a fruitful and thriving enterprise. She has received training in entrepreneurship, embroidery, block printing and other skills related to integrated home science technologies from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK). Her brilliance in the technique of embroidering *Phulkari*, production of aesthetically pleasing and neat-quality work,



and ability to understand the needs and demands of her buyers has led her to become an eminent entrepreneur. As a result of her training in KVK, her proficiency in the selection and combination of colours and motifs has increased enabling her to fabricate a greater variety of *Phulkari* for her customers. With the help of the financial support from NABARD, she has trained seven rural women and has focused her efforts on the production of *Phulkari* and *Bagh dupattas*, *sarees*, and other commercial items. Within a span of three years she has formed the 'Sukhmani Self Help Group' and boutique, '*Sukhmani Creations*', to motivate other rural women to become self-reliant. The SHG is registered with Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) and had received a grant of rupees eighty two thousand and five hundred from NABARD to sell their products directly. With the help of NABARD she has also exhibited her work in Hyderabad, Amritsar and Ludhiana. She has organised the exhibition and sale of *Phulkari* at various events such as World Environment Day, Women fair, etc. Today she has her own All India Radio talk show called '*Naari Lok*'. Thus, Bhupinder Kaur has set a new benchmark through her exceptional performance, not only in her professional life, but also, by supporting her family, friends and other rural women.

4.7.1.2 Phulkari Punjab Government Emporium

The Phulkari Emporium in Chandigarh is affiliated with PSIEC (Punjab Small Industries and Export Corporation Ltd.). PSIEC Ltd. supports creative and skilful artisans by marketing handicrafts at various showrooms in Punjab and other places in the country. The Emporium is affiliated with a number of NGOs within the state. It places orders with artisans for the production of handmade *Phulkari*. It receives financial aid from District Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles. The resources are passed on to the NGOs to buy raw materials for the embroidery. Sharing of profits is done on the basis of the Profit Make-Up Policy. According to this policy, the profits are shared equally between the artisans and the Emporium. This initiative has, not only helped women make and sell a range of products, but also earn a livelihood for themselves. (Personal Interview, Shivcharan, 2015).



Figure 37: Entrance to the Phulkari Punjab Government Emporium

4.7.2 Non-Government Organisations

Along with government initiatives, several non-governmental organizations actively train women to become self-reliant.

4.7.2.1 Nabha Foundation

One of the important missions of Nabha Foundation is women empowerment that aims at transferring knowledge, building capacity, and creating opportunities for women to become self-independent. The *Phulkari* program was started in 2007 to ensure long-term sustainable self-employment for the women artisans. The program has enabled the artisans to enhance their skills, techniques, and sense of design in the production of traditional *Phulkari* that caters to contemporary tastes. Nabha has also opened market opportunities for the sale of *Phulkari* products (Personal Interview, Namrata, 2015).



Figure 38: Focused Group Discussion at Nabha Foundation

Women receive a monthly remuneration, which is based on the quality of their work. This is a way to create a professional setting and familiarising artisans with certain work

ethics. This strategy as a part of the *Phulkari* program has encouraged more and more women to enrol.

The NGO has collaborated with local shops and well-known stores like Fabindia to sell *Phulkari dupattas* and suits. Artisans are often invited to exhibitions such as Dastakari Haat in Chandigarh and Delhi, as well as to ones in Gujarat and Kolkata to display and sell their works. Trade fairs organised by the government provide a platform for artisans to gain recognition. The Crafts Council of India has recognised Nabha for its contribution to the revival of the traditional *Phulkari* embroidery (Personal Interview, Namrata, 2015).

Case Study 3: Manpreet Kaur

Presently a twenty-two year old woman, Manpreet Kaur, is the proud recipient of the Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya award. She won this award two years ago. She started making *Phulkari* at a very young age, along with her mother and sister. She used to practise it in her leisure time after school and during breaks, which later became an important source of her livelihood. She received the award through the Nabha Foundation, where she received training in *Phulkari*. Thereafter, she became open to more opportunities, the biggest of them being winning the Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya Award. “This award has given my family and me an identity,” says Manpreet. After winning the award, several young girls have joined her in the practise of *Phulkari*. Unfortunately, machine-made *Phulkari* poses as an obstacle she faces, which is unfair competition against handmade *Phulkari*. “Machine-made *Phulkari* makes one *dupatta* within ten minutes, when it takes me about a month’s time to finish one piece.”

“Our heritage was dying out, but Nabha Foundation has done a lot of work for its revival. We can bring it back!”



4.7.2.2 Meher Baba Charitable Trust (MBCT)

“Hunar Se Rozgar Tak...” (From Talent to Livelihood)

Meher Baba Charitable Trust, established in 1998, runs a training centre (Krishna Training Centre) that coaches rural women in activities, such as *zardosi*, rug making, fabric painting, and weaving. The NGO has recently launched a project by the name of ‘*Phulkari* Makers’ that provides a platform to develop skills and become entrepreneurs by working in a commercial environment (Personal Interview, Rajrani, 2015). The head of this project Mrs. Rajrani trains women to be professionally equipped. The Trust has appointed a Principal (graduate from Pearl University, Delhi) who trains women in incorporating *Phulkari* with modern products (purses, fans, bookmarks, folder, table runners and bed sheets) and fabrics (net, chiffon, cotton and silk) (Personal Interview, Rajrani, 2015).



Figure 39 and 40: Commercial Phulkari Products from MBCT

Under the program, artisans receive training in *Phulkari* for six months. They are coached to alter traditional motifs and colour combinations for different products and prices. An exam is held after six months to test their skills. The Trust prepares a portfolio for each artisan containing her profile, works and certificate, which is given to them on completion of the training. In order to build entrepreneurial and marketing skills, women are then transferred to the production house. Here, women are employed to receive and work on orders for which raw material and fabric is provided by the NGO. The profit from the completion of an order is distributed equally among the artisans. Besides, the NGO gives a

monthly stipend to all the artisans. Thus, this program has not only helped women to become experts in *Phulkari*, but has also made them self-dependent (Personal Interview, Rajrani, 2015).

Mrs. Rajrani helps the artisans to showcase and sell their *Phulkari* works at exhibitions such as Dastakari Haat in Chandigarh, Delhi and Mumbai and Maitri in Chandigarh. The profits from the sale are also shared equally among the artisans.

Many trainees later became supervisors in the training centres. After receiving training from MBCT, many have set up their own boutiques. MBCT does not provide them with financial aid, but provides them assistance with regard to the location, raw materials and pricing. Many women have also trained others from their own village and have formed self-help groups (Personal Interview, Rajrani, 2015).

4.7.2.3 Umeed Foundation



Figure 41: Focused Group Discussion at Umeed Foundation

Like other NGOs, Umeed has training centres, where only women who have registered themselves with the NGO, are trained in *Phulkari* and made aware of the diversification in motifs, colour schemes, and threads. Along with *dupattas*, artisans

embroider *Phulkari* on clutches, table clothes, runners, bags and blouses. The *Phulkari* centres, in Sangrur, are mainly production units for designers in Delhi. The designs, fabrics and colours for the products are selected by the designers. The raw materials (threads, needles and fabric) are provided to women for execution, by Umeed Foundation. The packaging, branding and other formalities are carried out in Delhi. The prices for the sale of products are decided by the designers. The Foundation recovers the cost of the raw materials and receives the money to be paid to the artisans for their work (Personal Interview, Dalwir Singh, 2015).

4.7.3 Shops

Along with government and NGO initiatives, shops selling *Phulkari* place orders for traditional *Phulkari dupattas* with the rural artisans. Shops like 1469 (Chandigarh) and Phulkari Corner and Dupattas (Patiala) help artisans to earn a livelihood. 1469 has an affiliation with Building Bridges India. It is an NGO founded by Rasil Basu who is a lawyer, historian and filmmaker. This NGO empowers widows, malnourished and illiterate women through educational and vocational programs, which include sewing, weaving, *Phulkari* embroidery and handicraft production (buildingbridgesindia). 1469 places orders with the NGO and shares the profits with the artisans. According to Ms. Sabina (fashion designer at 1469), to spread awareness about *Phulkari*, the shop sells motifs printed on stoles, skirts, waistcoats, *sarees*, bed sheets and carpets (Personal Interview, Sabina, 2015).



Figure 42 and 43: Shop of 1469 and Ms. Sabina

Phulkari Corner and Dupattas, established in 1985, is a shop in Tripuri, Patiala that sells both machine-made and handmade *Phulkari*. Although there is a greater preference for handmade *Phulkari* than the machine-made one, artisans face fierce competition as the demand for machine-made work is higher, due to reasonable prices and easy availability. However, to help the artisans, Mrs. Darshana Tanej (the owner's wife) has started her own NGO by the name of Darshana Women Cooperative Phulkari and Handicrafts Society. Mrs. Tanej has gathered women from the nearby villages and trained them in *Phulkari* embroidery. The shop provides the artisans with cloth and raw materials for the production of handmade *Phulkaris*. The profits from sale are equally distributed among the shop and the artisans. Today, along with sales in Patiala, the shop exports *Phulkari* to New Zealand, Canada, England and Australia (Personal Interview, Darshana Tanej, 2015).



Figure 44: Darshana Tanej (Phulkari Corner and Dupattas)

From our visit to the NGOs and interviews with some of the important volunteers, we discovered that the main focus of NGOs, such as Nabha Foundation and Umeed Foundation, was women empowerment. Like many other kinds of embroideries, *Phulkari* was one that was taken up for empowerment. This was mainly because most artisans learnt and have been

practising *Phulkari*, since childhood. Thus, it was easier for NGOs to extensively train women in *Phulkari* than any other art form, as *Phulkari* is exclusively a women's art form. Therefore, we can say that the main objective of the NGOs and governmental institutions was women empowerment (with the aid of an art form, in this case, *Phulkari*), and not the revival of *Phulkari* itself. However, the very use of *Phulkari* for women empowerment led to the revival of the art form as a consequence.

Mrs. Namrata, a volunteer at Nabha Foundation, shifted from the health department to the women empowerment department as she believes that women did not take care of their own well-being. Their meagre earnings were spent on the family's welfare, creating problems for their own physical health. However, artisans in women's empowerment department earn enough to support both, their families and themselves. Today, she works for the empowerment of women and encourages women to adopt *Phulkari* as their means of livelihood.

Therefore, from all of the above information, we can say that, although *Phulkari* has been adopted as a means of livelihood by thousands of artisans across Punjab, one cannot disregard the fact that *Phulkari* is still an integral part of the Punjabi culture and heritage.



DARNING:
UNIFYING THE STRINGS OF
WISDOM

Conclusion

No ethnicity remains static; it evolves with the passage of time to give rise to a contemporary version of a tradition rooted in the past. If a tradition stagnates, it eventually dies out. *Phulkari* serves as an example of an art that has evolved with the passage of time and stayed relevant in the lives of the Punjabi people, even in the current day and age. In the course of our study, we attempted to unearth how *Phulkari* has remained pertinent to the Punjabi culture.

Our first interaction with the art form happened at Calico Museum, in Ahmedabad, where it turned out to be very different from our expectations. The unadorned pieces did not look anything like the decorative photographs that we had procured from our research online. At first, this was a source of confusion for us. How could something so seemingly plain have transformed into the ornate work that it is known to be today? It was this confusion that cemented our desire to study the factors that had caused this transition to occur.

Phulkari's cultural significance spans the entire state of Punjab. However, studying the entire state would be beyond scope of this scale of research. Hence, research was restricted to three important cities: Patiala, where the art form continues to flourish; Chandigarh, where *Phulkari* is sold; and Amritsar, where the embroidery reflects the influence of East Punjab. Owing to the limited amount of time at hand, small sample size, and anecdotal information from artisans, the research is qualitative in nature.

Phulkari began as an art form that served as the diary of a Punjabi girl and bore testament to her stitching and embroidering skills at the time of her marriage. After the completion of chores, the making of *Phulkari* allowed the women to sit together in groups and socialise while indulging in this leisurely activity. Scenes from their daily lives and imagination were incorporated onto cloth. The designs were their own, and the cloth was spun by them. Each piece of *Phulkari* was unique in its own right and women named them on the basis of the motifs that they created and used: *Chope*, *Suber*, and *Til-Patra* are some examples of the different types of *Phulkari*. *Khaddar*, representative of the tough Punjabi woman, paired with untwisted silk thread called *Pat*, formed the paper and ink that allowed the dreams, aspirations, and imagination of the embroiderer to flow freely. However, the

passage of time has rendered this diary into a mere pattern book reflecting the preferences of consumers as opposed to the artisans making them.

Phulkari was a part of traditional Punjabi attire. With the colonial rule, cheap British clothes crept into the scene, and threatened the Punjabi culture. While its value as a cultural piece diminished in Punjab, it was viewed as a work of art by the British. In the later nineteenth century, famine struck Punjab and forced its people to convert what was once meant for domestic consumption, into a source of livelihood. This was the beginning of the commercialisation of *Phulkari*.

In the current context, commercialisation of a textile art form is associated with the introduction of machinery, while earlier, there was only human effort. There are numerous occasions when ‘handmade *Phulkari*’ and ‘traditional *Phulkari*’ are terms that are used interchangeably. However, in the course of our study, we discovered that neither is commercialisation necessarily a product of machinery, nor is handmade work always traditional. In the current market for *Phulkari*, there exist handmade, machine-made, traditional, and commercial *Phulkari* pieces. There are women who sew *Phulkari*, with the aim of selling it, and not for personal use. Even though it has the effort of handmade work, it does not possess the personal charm that the pieces of the past did. The motifs are usually based on market demand and supplied by the shopkeepers. This makes it commercial, despite being handmade. On the other hand, there may be pieces made with machines but with motifs that were traditionally used previously, instead of newer motifs. These pieces would be machine-made, but traditional.

No matter what type, *Phulkari* pieces are still in demand for different momentous occasions, such as weddings and the birth of a child. Previously, *Phulkari*'s cultural significance had manifested itself in two ways: the process of making it and its ritualistic uses. The former aspect has been eroded entirely. Organisations such as Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Nabha Foundation, Meher Baba Charitable Trust (MBCT), and Umeed Foundation have attempted to revive *Phulkari*. However, this attempt revolves around the art form as a commercial commodity, and not as a work done for leisure or domestic consumption. The focus lies on improving the financial independence of women. *Phulkari*'s revival is usually a mere by-product of efforts made towards women empowerment. Since the focus lies on the financial activity, the effort is put into making the art more relevant and modern. Therefore,

this embroidery form has migrated from *dupattas* and shawls to items such as pen stands, ornate hand fans, folders, bed sheets, *juttis*, and bags, to name a few. The focus on keeping the art germane, even though with good intent, does not always help the artisan. The art gets richer, not the artisan. Artisans are still exploited by shops that sell their wares at high prices but pay them only a small fraction of the price, barely allowing them to break even.

Our understanding of *Phulkari* was supplemented by various artisans, NGO officials, shopkeepers, and scholars. These categories constitute the stakeholders in this art form, who provided us with multiple perspectives, regarding the same topic. Through semi-structured in-depth interviews that varied from formal to personal depending on the respondent, we discovered the difference of opinion, with regard to the significance of the colours and motifs employed. While scholars were of the opinion that each colour and motif was representative of different emotions and features of everyday life, artisans and shopkeepers said that colours and motifs were based purely on market demand or on personal taste, without any other deeper meaning attached. It is difficult to gauge whether the motifs and colours did have meanings attached before, which may have been lost with the passage of time, and reduced to a mere matter of taste and preference. The current state is a reflection of the commercialisation of the art form.

While studying the factors that had led to the transition of *Phulkari*, the group underwent a transition of its own. From a collection of people uniting for a college project, we transformed into a team seamed together with motivation, passion, and greater empathy for one another. As individuals, we developed a better understanding of a culture that was different from ours, adjusted with environments that we were unaccustomed to, and recognised the importance and difficulties of fieldwork. In a time, where daily fashion is dictated primarily by Western norms, this research project opened our eyes to the wonders that our own country has to offer to us. Armed with newfound knowledge, it is our intention to open the eyes of many others as well, and proudly display a small slice that contributes to the diverse Indian culture.

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APPENDIX

Select Questions Asked to Various Categories of Respondents

Artisans – (Unstructured/semi-structured interview)

1. What is the importance of *Phulkari* in your lives?
2. What is the significance of motifs to you?
3. How has the commercialisation of the art form affected you?
4. Do you receive help from the government or the NGO's to deal with the effects of commercialisation? If yes, what kind?
5. Is making *Phulkaris* your only occupation? Does it provide you with enough livelihood?
6. How has *Phulkari* changed since the past two generations? Are men also involved in the embroidering process now?
7. Has the cultural significance changed since the past two generations?
8. How can one differentiate between the traditional *Phulkari* work and the commercial work? How has its significance and use changed over time?
9. How do you decide the motifs for your *Phulkari*?
10. How has the incorporation of *Phulkari* in mainstream fashion affected the motifs and patterns?

Shopkeepers- (Semi-structured interview)

1. What is your purpose behind selling *Phulkari*? (Revival or commercialisation or both?)
2. Are you affiliated with any of the NGO's to help in revival?
3. What is it about *Phulkari* that makes it tick in the market? How are the pieces priced?

NGO volunteers – (Semi-structured interview)

1. When was the NGO started? What are the strategies to revive the art form?
2. How has the *Phulkari* changed through time? How has it changed? What features have been added to it?
3. How do you identify the focused groups- targeting particular sects/groups?
4. In your opinion, has the government done enough? What policies and measures are in place to help the art form and the artisans?
5. How are funds obtained?

6. How do the highly priced traditional pieces compete in the market with comparatively cheaper commercial pieces? How are the artisans benefitted?

Scholars

1. What is the history of *Phulkari* in Punjab?
2. How can one trace the evolution of *Phulkari* in terms of motifs, colours, materials, etc.?
3. How many types of *Phulkari* exist? Which of these types are practised in Punjab?
4. What is the cultural significance of the art form?
5. How do you evaluate the government intervention for the revival of *Phulkari*?
6. How has the commercialisation of *Phulkari* affected the traditional ones?
7. In addition to the challenges of globalization and market forces, which other challenges does the art form face?

Focused group discussion

1. Since when have you been associated with the organization?
2. Are you able to continue with your traditional knowledge of *Phulkari*? Or have you learnt it for the first time?
3. Has the organization organized any training programs for you? If yes, what kind?
4. Do you market the products yourself? You or the organization?
5. Who decides the prices of the products?
6. What are your expectations from the organization?

Glossary

Amritsari Kulche – type of Indian bread made from wheat flour

Buttis – motifs

Bhaktas – devotees

Chuda ceremony – a Punjabi wedding ceremony in which a set of twenty-one bangles is gifted to the bride by her maternal uncle and aunt

Choodha chadhava – same as the *chudha* ceremony

Dabbis – sections in which motifs are embroidered

Diwali – a Hindu festival

Dupatta – an essential piece of clothing worn with Indian suits

Gurudwaras – religious place for the Sikhs

Guru Granth Sahib – Sikh religious texts

Hunar – Talent

Juttis – Traditional Indian footwear

Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya Award – the award is named after Mrs. Kamla Devi who helped to revive handicrafts and established the Crafts Council of India and awards scheme

Karvaachauth – Hindu religious ceremony mainly performed by the women

Khaddar – hand-woven cotton cloth used as a base for *Phulkari*

Kurti – a traditional Indian garment for women

Mahabharata – the Indian epic

Makki di roti – a special Punjabi delicacy made from cornmeal

Pankhi – A hand fan

Pat – untwisted silk thread

Potli – a small purse

Rozgar – livelihood

Rural Mart Scheme – scheme for setting up retail market outlets to provide marketing linkages for handicraft and agro-based products

Saree – a garment elaborately wrapped around the body in various fashions

Sarso da saag – vegetable dish cooked with mustard leaves and spices

Vedas – Hindu religious text

“All that has been born must pass; it is not worth shedding tears over it. The sensitivity and creativity inbred in the Punjabi women will certainly find new forms of expression.

Folk art never stagnates, but always finds itself developing.

So let us hope that in the course of time something as unique and as fascinating as the Phulkari will exist.

Until then it remains for us to save what is left over from destruction and keep it for the new world.”

-S.S Hitkari

