



Phulkari: Origin Redefined

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Punjab is a happening place and 15th largest state in India. People of Punjab are said to be very hard working. Punjab is known for Sikh temples, lush green farms Maake di roti te Sarso da Saag and Bhangra. The folk music of Punjab is very popular all over the country. The spinning wheel plays a significant role in the life of women and needle work of Punjab is unique, it has beautiful names because of its association with beautiful aspects of life. The traditional Punjabi embroidery art is Phulkari.

The phulkari word means growing flowers. This embroidery form, true to its name includes only floral motifs in bright colours. The rich smells and the colours of the land of five rivers are cocooned in this art. There is sanctity to the art form as the



canopy over Guru Granth Sahib; the religious book of the Sikhs is of phulkari. The artisans involved in embroidery work in Punjab are very keen in creating several kinds of embroidery stitches on shawls, cardigans, scarves, table covers, cushion and bedspreads. Phulkaris were originally made by Punjabi women for their own personal use. They used to design embroideries on their garments for ceremonial occasions.

Bagh

The phulkari with very intricate floral patterns is called Bagh that means garden. It is primarily used on the odhanis and dupattas. When the girl gets married, phulkari formes a part of her bridal wardrobe. If a son was born to her, her mother would start preparing a vari da bagh, a gift she would present to her grand daughter-in- law. This art form now became a significant craft of Punjab, with a huge market both in India and abroad. The bagh was considered a symbol of marriage and among the wealthy families, sometimes up to fifty-one pieces of various designs were given to the bride. She in turn, wore them for auspicious and ceremonial occasions. In some parts of Punjab, it was custom to drape the new mother with a bagh on the eleventh day after the birth of the child after maternity.

Origin of Phulkari

The origin of Phulkari can not exactly be traced. Some scholars feel that the art of phulkari came from Iran where it is known as **Gulkari**. Reference of Punjabi

embroidery though goes back to 2000 years back to the Vedic ages. Some say that the art was brought by Gujar nomads from Central Asia whereas some say that the Muslim Persians who settled in Kashmir are responsible for it. It is also said that the jats, Punjab who are agriculturists, introduced the art of Phulkari wherever they went.

Fabric

The cloth used in starting by the women was home-spun and dyed khadi known askhaddar, which was produced in the village by local jullaha. It was strong ,long lasting, and cheap and served the purpose of keeping the wearer warm during winters and at the same time, counting of threads wear easy while stitching. The embroidery was worked in silk thread from Kashmir, Afghanistan or Bengal, although the best quality silk was Chinese. To keep the embroidered part clean while working on the cloth, the finished portion was rolled and covered with a muslin cloth.

Colour

A wide range of colour combinations are used to make these figures and artistic designs. Some prominent colours used are yellow, red, golden, green, magenta and blue. Apart from these colours there are so many colour options that add life to the phulkari garment.

Designs

Some of the most common designs and patterns are figures of vegetables, fruits, and animals, birds, leaves, rivers, sun and moon. Furthermore, sun-shade pattern, coriander design, jasmine picture, and rainbow pattern are most popular patterns of Phulkari. Satrangas are seven-coloured motifs and panchrangas are five-coloured motifs while the most common and beautiful motifs are based on the wheat and barley stalks that grow all over Punjab.

Stitches Used

The embroidery is done from the reverse side of the fabric with the silk yarn which gives a shaded effect to the fabric. Smaller stitches are finer, delicate and have an awesome look. Only one single strand is used at one time. The stitches are done vertically, horizontally and even diagonally, to create special effect of light and shade.

Variations

There are a variety of phulkari styles used for different occasions and purposes.

- **Chope**

This variety is usually presented to the bride by her grand mother, during a ceremony before the wedding. It has straight, two sided line stitch and

appears the same on the back. Only the border is embroidered and the centre is left plain. It is usually red in colour and worn as a veil.

- **Meenakari Bagh (Ikka Bagh)**

This bagh, often made of gold and white coloured pat is decorated with small multi coloured enamel work (meenakari) or to diamond playing cards shape.

- **Thirma**

This Phulkari from the north of Punjab, shared by Hindu and Sikh traditions and highly appreciated and is identified by white khaddar called thirma, symbol of purity. Thirma as a symbol of purity was often worn by elder women and widows but, at times, this choice of white coloured khaddar was also made for aesthetical reasons.

- **Vari-Da-Bagh**

Vari-Da-Bagh Symbolizes Happiness And Fertility. This Bagh Was Gifted To The Bride By Her In-Laws When She Was Entering Their House, Her New Home, On The Wedding Day. This Is Also Done On A Red Cloth. It Is Covered With Lozenge Golden Yellow Embroidery, With Smaller Ones within the Border. The Bride Was Wrapped In This Bagh By Her Mother In Law When She Was Receiving The Keys Of Her New Home, Thereby Meaning That The Bride Was Becoming Responsible For The Maintenance Of The House.

- **Surajmukhi**

Surajmukhi, the sunflower, refers to the main pattern of this phulkari. From a technical point of view this type of phulkari is unique as that mixes in comparable proportions holbein stitch (used to make chope phulkari) and the regular darning stitch is also used.

- **Ghunghat Bagh**

Ghunghat bagh or sari- pallu (covering for the head) has a smaller border on all four sides. In the center of each side a large triangular motif is given, which covers the head . It is worn as a veil.

- **Bawan Bagh**

In a Bawan Phulkari, Bawan meaning 52, the cloth was divided in 52 squares , each of which was filled in different motif. And refers to the mosaic of 52 different patterns which decorate this piece (the number of patterns can be at any times more or less than 52). Bawan bagh was infact a display of samples used by professional embroiderers to show their skills and the patterns for their clients .

- **Darshan Dwar**

This is usually used for presentations or for decorating the walls of home, when the Granth Sahib is brought therein. It is also done on a red cloth with the motifs of arched gates facing design of humans, animals, birds, flowers etc.

- **Chamba**

Chamba Phulkari is a hybrid having a series of stylized leaves, wavy creepers and flowers.

- **Suber**

This is worn by the bride during marriage. It contains five motifs, one in the center and one in each of the corner.

- **Mirchi Bagh**

Mirchi, as the name suggests, has chilies in red, orange or green usually on brown base.

- **Belan Or Paratha Bagh**

Belan and parantha symbolize the rolling pin and leavened bread.

- **Chamba Bagh**

Chamba is a hybrid Phulkari having a series of wavy creepers, stylized leaves and flowers. It came into vogue earlier this century.

- **Kaudi Bagh**

Among their patterns, these bagh include chains of small white squares representing stylized cowries. Used as currency in the old times these shells have now lost all of their value and using them as ornaments. Also the shape of these shells can remind of female genitals and make them become symbols of fertility. Kaudi phulkari were often worn by women wanting to increase their chance to become pregnant.

- **Sainchi Phulkari**

Sainchi Phulkari is having the scenes from rural Punjab and it depicts Punjab culture very beautifully with colourful embroidery work.

Relevance in Today's World

Phulkari embroidery now thrives as a cottage industry. Also many beautiful old Phulkaris and baghs continue to be passed down from one generation to another. It is worked on curtains, bedspreads, cushion covers, wall hangings, chiffon saris, kurtas, shirts, dupattas and shawls even in today's fashion world people are using

phulkari motifs on their western costumes and accessories like handbags, jewellery and footwear. The stitch-art form of Punjab is simple yet stunning, its floral magnificence capturing the spirit of the land in its weft and warp also silken thread tells rituals of Punjabi people and their folk-art. Phulkari has even developed variations that are not time consuming. The fabric is skilfully embroidered with such perfection that the end result presents a piece of visual excellence.

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