Patterns of Phulkari: Then and now

Anu H. Gupta and Shalina Mehta

Abstract--- *This study explores the patterns of embroidered textile craft of Punjab. Being embroidered by women in their leisure time, it is an important part of Punjabi culture. Phulkari has been so densely interwoven in the lives of women that these two seem inseparable. Learnt through the teachings and experience of the elders, a girl used to embroider her own world, dreams and aspirations onto a canvas of khaddar. The designs and motifs were innumerable. With the change in this form of textile, women still embroider it for economic gains. Womenfolk paints the geometrical motifs of phulkari using a needle and thread with an unlimited colour palette. This study reveals the patterns of the old phulkari versus the new one.*

Keywords--- *Phulkari, Motifs, Design*

I. INTRODUCTION

EMBROIDERY is a form of ornamentation which is the richest mode of expressing emotions and aesthetics (Chattopadhyay, 1975) through the usage of needle, thread and fabric (Townsend, 1907). In the Indian subcontinent, embroidery has been practiced for centuries not only to adorn textiles for temples, houses, clothing and drapes for animals, but it also has a symbolic and traditional purpose (Paine, 1990; Harvey, 2002; Crill, 1999). In rural tradition, it is featured as integral part of a dowry, and was regarded as symbolic of an ethno-linguistic group and its ritual tradition (Dhamija, 2004). A sparingly embroidered sheet of phulkari and heavily embroidered bagh is an important piece of trousseau for the Punjabi woman.

Skilful and artistic decoration of textiles is an ancient art of undivided Punjab and now of two Punjab's located in India and Pakistan. Phulkari reveals the innate artistic sensitivity of the Punjabi women and their desire to combine utility with finesse. It is also referred to as embroidery of flowers. Most Punjabi women were primarily engaged in household chores that were hectic and mundane. One of our elderly respondents, nearly seventy years of age, narrated her routine, vividly depicting what life was for her:

"We got up at four in the morning, operated chakki (grinding equipment/machine made up of two round stones for grinding grains or pulses and operated with a wooden handle), filled water from the hand pumps and taps, as these were

usually outside in the courtyard and took care of domestic animals. This was followed by baking chapattis (unleavened flat bread), cooking meals and finally going to the fields to give food to the men folk working there. After finishing the household chores, we sat for spinning; weaving or embroidery may be for an hour, two or more. Women were involved in many creative activities like making khes (cotton wrap or a sheet used while sleeping) and durries (flat woven rugs). Embroidery was a quintessential flair for every Punjabi girl. It was used as a surface ornamentation on phulkaris, baghs, bedspread, khes etc. Embroidered bed sheets, pillow covers, table covers used to be a part of dahej (trousseau) and girls used to embroider these since childhood so that she can prepare and collect good quality articles to be taken along when she will get married. Her qualities of knowing embroidery, stitching, cooking and other household work proved her as a good homemaker and this was given importance while arranging a matrimonial alliance".

It is this narrative that provides the landscape on which present research is configured. Phulkari is not merely a beautifully embroidered cloth, but was an essential component of the life of an average Punjabi woman. The primary focus of the present paper is to examine the journey of design on this fabric. It presents empirical documentation of patterns used in the past and the changes that these designs have undergone in the last two decades in particular after the tradition of Phulkari was revived and commoditized. This study is based on primary data collected from various villages and cities of Punjab. The data was generated with the help of qualitative methods using tools of quasi-participant observation, case history method along with focused group discussions and narratives. Interviews of the old women, artisans, shopkeepers and middlemen were conducted over a period of three years.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev (A.D. 1469-1538) in his recitations gives prominence to embroidery regards it as an integral part of feminine duty. He recites in his scriptures -"Kadh kasida pahreh choli tan tu jane nari" implying that a woman establishes her feminine identity only when she knows how to embroider her own costumes (Hitkari, 1980). Historically, embroidery was perpetuated and formed as a part of social rituals. Wearing of symbolic phulkari embroidered odhini (head scarf) by the women of the household was part of the rites de passage of the Punjabi household (Chattopadhyay, 1975; Das, 1992; Dongerkery, 1951; Banerji, 1955; Naik, 1996; Dutta, 1985). It was this ritual component that sustained historical tradition of embroidery.

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Dhamija (2007) mentions that under the guidance of her grandmother and mother, with a lot of hard work and continuous practice of working with embroidery first with cotton yarn and then gradually with the silk floss, finally a girl embroidered her ritual odhini. There was a custom amongst the upper middle class families to give fifty phulkaris and baghs in dowry as many of these went as a gift for the ladies of the bridegroom's family (Pal, 1955).

Women who stitched phulkaris had easy access to cotton that was a local resource (Banerjee, 1982) and spinning cotton and weaving clothes for personal and other domestic use was common among both rural and urban Punjabi women (Nanda, 1950; Tandon, 1961). Soft untwisted silk floss thread called as pat was used which came from various places like Kashmir, Bengal and even from Afghanistan and Turkistan but were dyed locally. Principal centres of dyeing, however, were Amritsar and Jammu (Das, 1992). Women could obtain the silk embroidery thread and needles by giving grains or hand-spun threads to the village store or

to the peddlers, as barter was accepted mode of exchange (Maskiell, 1999). The colours for dyeing were extracted from leaves, flowers, barks and roots. Initially the process of making Phulkari was purely organic without any chemical being used either for dyeing or for strengthening the thread or the fabric (Gillow and Barnard, 1991).

Bright colours were the custom for embroidery floss, with golden yellow, crimson, orange, green, and white predominating on a dyed base of madder-red, chocolate-brown, indigo-blue, and black as the most common colours. A close look at the embroidered product shows that in the ethnic imagination colours used for embroidery were earthen and artisans did not experiment with colour combinations (Hitkari, 1980; Grewal and Grewal, 1988). These girls and women with years of practice could embroider freely without any reference to pattern books (Pal, 1955). Naik (1996) mentions Punjabi women to be genius in creating motifs just by multidirectional (warp way and weft way) usage of darning stitch.

There were dozens of phulkari patterns consistently inspired by nature or from products in day to day usage. Innumerable patterns also developed a complex vocabulary to differentiate them. Phulkari with a blue base was termed as nilak, whereas thirma was a kind in which the fabric was left un-dyed to form a white ground and embroidered with a coloured thread like red (Neelam and Amarjit, 1988; Michelle, 1999). Hitkari (1980) adds that women of the eastern and western Punjab stitched Phulkaris with geometrical as well as figured designs including lozenges, squares, triangles, animals, plants, jewellery and humans either counting the yarns or tracing the complicated designs in outline with black ink and then filling them in with darning stitch.

Stylized karela (bitter gourd), mustard flowers, golden yellow marigold, jasmine buds, lotus, flowering trees, stylized images of men, women and a range of other motifs were embroidered on the base (Dhamija, 2007). Railway train, motor car, lorry or even ratha (chariot) was embroidered out of sheer curiosity. One can also find birds, domestic and wild animals in different sizes that are placed at different angles on

phulkaris. Sometimes several ornaments usually worn by the women like hansali, tika, karda, ponchi, singar-patti and guluband were also embroidered (Aryan, 1983). Figurative phulkaris were referred to as Sainchi (Morrel, 2000).

All over placed geometric designs are commonly used for baghs with shapes like triangle, square, rectangular, vertical and horizontal lines intelligently incorporated to produce complicated patterns. Further appropriate application of colours helped to depict flowers, birds, animals, vegetables, utensils and even domestic activities (Naik, 1996). There are a variety of baghs named such as reshmi sheesha (mirror), ghunghat (veil for covering face) bagh, vari da bagh, bawan bagh (bagh with fifty two motifs), surajmukhi (sunflower) bagh have been prepared on the basis of utility and motifs. Many baghs were named after the motifs embroidered on them as kakri (cucumber) bagh, genda (marigold) bagh, chandrama (moon) bagh; and many according to the number of colours used as pancharanga (five colour) or satranga (seven colour) (Naik, 1996; Crill, 1999).

Initially Phulkari was a home-craft, a leisure time activity, crafted with passion for personal use or to gift it to near and dear ones and was never meant for sale (Steel, 1888). During colonial rule, these became part of gift basket locally described as Dali that were presented to the British and other high officials on Christmas and also as gesture of gratification. The local craft of embroidered phulkaris were also shaped into ladies coats to be worn over saris during winter in the cities as referred by Hitkari (1980). The beauty of the design and its aesthetic value continued to enchant the connoisseurs of these invaluable pieces of craft. During the colonial era, phulkari was often showcased in various international exhibitions across the world and was regarded as a treasured item when given to westerns as gifts. It is at this juncture that a domestic craft acquired commercial attributes as heavily embroidered pieces were brought by traders to be sold to the affluent at a heavy price.

This textile tradition of phulkari making was virtually reduced to a lost art by the turn of the twentieth century. After the partition of Punjab during Independence movement, and trauma experienced by women in particular during that period –the domestic craft was literally lost (Brijbhushan, 1990). Development agendas drafted by independent nation states of India and Pakistan encouraged rampant mechanization of goods and services resulting in the loss of local traditions patronage of handicrafts (Pal, 1955).

Revival of ethnic handicrafts came with the growth of a confident democracy in India and rise of remedial classes both in India and Pakistan and desire to reclaim ownership of a lost heritage. A definite role was also played by the couture culture that came as part of the western tradition and proclaimed norms of modernity. Designers started rediscovering the beauty and value of traditional handicrafts and redesigned these using innovations in colours, fabrics and usage

The demands of the market redefined the use of the traditional ceremonial phulkari dupattas into cushion covers, wall hangings, bed spreads, kurtas, curtains etc. for the market (Kaur, 2011; Jaitly 2012). It is not only the diverse ways in which phulkari embroidery is being used to decorate commercially viable products, but also the traditional use of fabric and design that has experienced near transformation. Phulkari is now being done not only on traditional cotton, but also on lighter fabrics like chiffon, georgette, silk and polyester.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

It is stated in the beginning that Khaddar (rough cotton fabric) was used in everyday life in Punjab and was traditionally part of the trousseau of a bride. The numbers of phulkaris given at the time of the wedding were commensurate with the socioeconomic status of the family. It could be as little as five to fifty one. Numbers as well as heaviness/intricacy of the design of phulkaris and baghs were considered important in the social milieu of the community.

Phulkari had varied usage, especially as a protective wrap in winters. Women from a village in Punjab said that in winters whenever they went to gurudwaras (place of worship for the followers of Sikhism) or went for a social visit, women would drape it to cover the upper part of their bodies. Punjab women traditionally wore ghagras (ankle length gathered skirt) and blouse. Ceremonial value of these wraps was further complimented by its importance during customary fasting and prayers undertaken by married Hindu women for the long life of their spouse.

Kinship defined patterns of gift giving in the context of phulkari. Phulkaris and baghs were embroidered for daughters by their grandmothers – nani (maternal) or dadi (paternal), mother or girl herself. Maternal relatives in a patrilineal society are expected to gift goods to the daughters and grandchildren and it was mandatory for all maternal relatives to bring at least one phulkari. Given this normative perspective, few phulkaris were bought by nanke (maternal relatives), which were referred to as nani diyan phulkarian (embroidered wraps brought by maternal relatives), those given by the mother in the native lexicon were called as maa diyaan phulkarian and those given by paternal grandmother as dadi diyan phulkarian.

The popularity of phulkari was sustained for more than a century as it became integral to one of the most important rituals of marriage. Maternal relatives of both the bride and bridegroom customarily bring wedding dresses for the bride and the bridegroom. These would always have phulkari-embroidered garments. Bride's trousseau would generally have dresses with phulkaris and mulmul dupatta (light weight cotton scarves). If there were 21 dresses, then there used to be 21 mulmul dupatta and 21 phulkaris along with 21 ghagras. Significance of additional wrap of phulkari was to maintain a woman's modesty.

Religious boundaries blurred when women from different religions got together to embroider. Women respondents in the course of interviews told us that everyone in the village irrespective of the religion, whether Hindu, Sikh or Muslim embroidered phulkari. They sat together and helped each other in weaving or embroidering. We did not come across any evidence to suggest that phulkari had any ceremonial value during wedding ceremonies among the Muslims but there were several stories to supplement that wearing and embroidering of phulkaris was as popular among Muslim women as it was among the Hindu and Sikh women in both rural and metropolitan parts of Punjab.

Hand spun, hand woven khaddar was used in phulkari making as suggested earlier because of its ready availability and cost effectiveness. Learning to spin cotton was part of primary socialization of a girl child. Unmarried girls used to sit in groups (called as trinjan) and spun cotton throughout the night. This khaddar was made on looms that use to be present in the average village household. However, many women preferred to give it to a professional weaver locally called julaha. Usually two or two and a half widths were joined together along its entire length to form a complete base for phulkari. Some women joined two strips of the woven fabric and others opted to join two and a half strips, depending on the desired length and width desired for the wrap.

The fabric was usually dyed at home, but it was also given to a professional dyer called lalari. Two types of embroidery thread were used: pat (untwisted silken floss) and white cotton yarn. Pat was considered a pure thread (suchha dhaga). It was available in the form of skeins (lachhiyan/ guttiyan) and being an expensive yarn was sold per tola (traditional South Asian unit of mass). The yarn was usually bought in bulk to embroider many phulkaris or baghs by the elder women of the house. White yarn was available in the form of spools and was not a glossy yarn. Other than white cotton yarn, white pat thread was also used.

Fabric colour was always nabhi (tones of red), as every colour looks good on this base (is par har rang khilta hai). Other base colours like black, brown, blue and even green were used for making phulkari but to a lesser extent. Colours of embroidery thread were khatta (yellow/orange), gulabi (pink), hara/angoori (green) in pat and white cotton yarn. The first colour to be filled on the base was especially yellow and other colours then followed. The amount of white yarn was less in comparison with the coloured pat and filled in the end as it used to get dirty easily. There were phulkaris/ baghs with single colour too, specially the golden/yellow colour. Harmony in the blending of colour and vibrancy of patterns made the phulkari unique (Gupta, 2010).

Imagination and creativity combined together created hundreds of patterns and it is these designs that continue to witness dramatic evolution even today. One of the stated object give of this paper is to document these designs and changes that the phulkari has witnessed after its resurrection and commoditization. The next section presents varieties of these designs collected from both primary and secondary sources.

A. Traditional Designs

In the conventional discourse on this traditional form of embroidery from Punjab, following four distinct styles are recognized:

- Phulkari: where motifs are embroidered sparingly.
- Bagh: where embroidery is so close that one cannot see the base fabric.
- Chope: embroidery done on red khaddar, which is identical on both sides.
- Tool di phulkari: This was a form of phulkari, which was done on a lightweight fabric called tool.

Phulkaris and baghs had innumerable designs displaying imagination, originality and an excellent knowledge of colour blending. In a narrative from the field, one of the shopkeepers of a handloom house who used to sell the old phulkaris and baghs mentioned that local women were very innovative and would often assign names to the motifs that they designed. Some of these were defined as dabba bagh (quadrilateral) and jajahajan wala bagh (aeroplane). It was not necessary that all Baghs designed with quadrilateral designs would look similar. In view of the fact that these women designed without any drawings, the actual design following a similar design shape may look very different. Given these varied shapes and forms, each woman creating a different design would give it a unique name. One of the shopkeepers remarked that there are thousands of names, but no one knows all and there are only some phulkaris, which have specific names and are so identified by everyone.

Our survey suggests that irrespective of different names many designs were repetitive, as embroidery was generally a community activity in which women would sit together and often copied each other's design. However, there were occasions when women modified the existing designs or picked up by the women from their surroundings.

Several women doing phulkari these days corroborated creative ability of older women. They recalled how an older creative woman embroidered human and animal figures on the wrap she was embroidering using the same stitch. Another respondent said that women in her mother and grandmother's generation would often embroider these figures on the borders of the phulkari.

There was a distinct preference for geometrical designs as it was easier to embroider by counting thread on the fabric. It could be the motifs of the objects or its stylized form. Objects that were embroidered ranged from food items, vegetables, birds, animals, household articles, jewellery, etc. In Anaranwali phulkari every flower looks like a pomegranate.

Gulkherain di phulkari was a phulkari of flowers as Gulkhera means phul khile hon (blooming flowers). The shape and design of gulkherae can vary. There were many phulkaris that we came across during the fieldwork, to be referred as gulkherayan di phulkari but designs or motifs in all these were different though women embroidering these would refer to these by local textual names. Kapah tindyan di (cotton balls) phulkari, ladoo (sweet ball) phulkari etc. were some of the names mentioned by women embroiderers.

One of our respondents had embroidered rani haar (long necklace often associated with ornaments worn by the royals), where the motifs looked like a part of the studded royal necklace. Usually the body of phulkari had different motifs than those on the two end pieces as well as the edged length wise with borders. Phulkaris were overall a mixture of diverse motifs. One of the respondents showed a phulkari, which had Mirchi (chili) and gulkherae motifs in it.

Baghs were designed very differently. A single thread of the base material separated one pattern from the other (Morrel, 2000; Mehta, 1960; Shankar and Housego, 1997). Baghs had a carpeted look because of complete coverage of fabric with the silken thread and hence the sheen was immense and extremely aesthetic and appealing to the eye. In it, needle picked up every single yarn of the fabric. During the field work it was a visual treat to see different types of baghs: belaniyan (rolling pin i.e. belan) da bagh, jangir kach (diagonal lines), chal pakha (hand fans) bagh, rumalan wala (square motifs or checks or boxes made on the entire fabric) bagh, mirchian (chilli) da bagh, bawan (fifty two boxes all with different embroidery) bagh, suraj mukhi bagh, sar pallu bagh (the portion forming the head scarf had a triangular design), kachua (tortoise) bagh and the list is endless. Baghs take minimum three months to often years for creating a flawless piece of a painting like embroidery.

One of the unique bagh was called chidia ghar (zoo) wala bagh. The unique name-connoting zoo was because of numerous figures of animals and birds that were embroidered on it. These intricate embroideries were crafted with the help of a designer called Mistri who was invariably a village carpenter. His services were availed, as he was good at making line drawings. Though the local women conceptualized the designs, the mistri converted them into specific outlines. Several baghs had human figures embroidered imaginatively.

Baghs designed with rolling pin motif were very common. Baghs that were embroidered in the Eastern Punjab (now Pakistan) were much more intricate and had dominance of golden coloured pat. In comparison with these, the Baghs embroidered in Western Punjab were far more colourful. These often had multiple hues of yellow/ golden/ orange/ gulanari (dark pink), angoori (light green) along with white.

Figure 1: Belan Bagh

Another important form of phulkari “CHOPE” is a big sheet in red colour with triangular designs made on to the two lengthwise borders with small triangular motif extending into the middle of the fabric. The size of the chope was bigger than phulkari or bagh in length as well as in width. The surface did not look carpeted, as there were no floats of yarn on the fabric as double running stitch was used. The embroidery was such that it was similar on both sides. Chatrion wali chope, which had triangular motifs resembling umbrellas, was mentioned by one of the respondents. Chope usually had a bird motif, which was called as Chope di chidi.

Local craftswomen informed that embroidering chope was easy except embroidering bird in the chope. It was not everybody's cup of tea as its beginning and ending point was the same. Pal (1955) mentions chope to be a wedding phulkari. Among the Punjabi hindus phulkari was an auspicious ceremonial gift given at the time of weddings as described earlier and is one of the major factors for keeping the tradition alive. Phulkari was also embroidered on a very fine quality fabric called ‘tool’. It was finely embroidered with phulkari motifs on the two pallus (end pieces) and the lengthwise borders of the dupatta. Newlywed used this phulkari only.

Social and cultural change is a historic fact. Traditional embroideries are also not immune to it. Invariably, many forms of embroidery could go into a hiatus and are resurrected after a time lag. Phulkaris also went through the same cycle. After the tradition of phulkari as mandatory gifts during weddings was abandoned and the old phulkaris that Punjabi women had in their wardrobes were cut and made into quilt covers, jackets, curtains etc. and even sold to the vendors, there was a span of about thirty forty years in which many would refer to the phulkari embroidery as a handicraft of the past.

Re-invention of ethnic-crafts happened in the 1980' and gained momentum in the 90's after the revival of the Indian economy. It would be incorrect to say that this form of embroidery simply disappeared during this period. There were several families that sustained the tradition and several connoisseurs of handicrafts bought some of these amazingly embroidered pieces of wraps and spreads from small time vendors who often bought these pieces for a petty amount or in exchange for utility goods like utensils made of steel. Sometimes, young girls embroidered these designs on their headscarf's locally called dupatta on cheap, lightweight fabric.

It was many decades later that various fashion designers rediscovered the remnants of the craft of this form of embroidery in traditional Punjabi houses. They incorporated it in their designs and started the process of remarketing a nearly lost heritage. Conscious efforts were made by the various craft societies of the country to propagate it on a commercial scale and encourage it as an additional livelihood activity. Banks like NABRAD and handicraft promotion cooperatives like CAPAD gave subsidies for the formation of self-help groups that would encourage women to sit at home and embroider or collect in small clusters to embroider for various NGOs, who would then market these to the retailers.

Phulkari now acquired its commercial reincarnation. The designs also changed to facilitate sales in accordance with the market demands. To meet requirements of the market method of making it was redefined. In the next section the changes that were witnessed in the embroidery designs and the method of actually embroidering it on the fabric during the fieldwork (2011-2014) are discussed.

B. Contemporary Designs

One of the important centres of mass scale production of phulkari embroidery is Patiala district of Punjab. Embroidery is now being done on different fabrics catering to different customer sensitivities and there is a distinct class element to it. Phulkaris on fine georgettes, chiffons and even silk intricately embroidered and marketed for the upper crust of the society constitute one end of the spectrum and sparsely embroidered cotton wraps and cotton fabric for dresses are marketed for the customer from middle and lower middle classes.

It is observed that it is not only the style of embroidery that has been simplified; the product range has also diversified. The process is now simpler with the printing of motifs, followed by the embroidery. According to an artisan from Tripuri in Patiala, who also owns a shop and is considered an expert of phulkari, says that there are thousands of new designs and all are addressed as phulkari. According to the variety of fabric use seen during the course of fieldwork, we would like to classify these into the following categories:

- On light weight fabrics
- On cotton voile or opaque fabrics like crepe, silk etc.
- On khaddar or casement fabric to resemble Bagh of earlier times.

The same phulkari motifs are many a time used differently from vendor to vendor. Usually shopkeepers coin their own names for several designs, e.g. if a buti (motif) looks like a star it is called as star buti, if one comprehends a diamond motif as burfi design other person can call it by dabbi design etc. Motifs are usually geometrical in nature. A printer from a village in Patiala district mentioned few motifs and designs of phulkari like paranthabuti, chaukadajal, kanchanbuti, tikoni phulkari, gol phulkari etc. He said most of these motifs were in use 15 to 20 years ago but were embroidered on a coarse fabric, now they are embroidered on fine voile.

MOTIFS

Some of the popular motifs include Parantha buti, which looks like parantha (Indian flat bread square in shape). Tikoni Buti is so named as the buti or flower has triangular petals and Gol Buti is a flower with round edged petals. Motifs can be placed next to each other, forming a network or jaal. Many a times, these motifs are placed only on the borders or can be placed heavily on the pallus (end pieces) of a dupatta. When tikoni buti is dispersed all over on the base of dupatta it is called as Nabha jaal. Dabbi Jaal is a pattern created when square boxes or check is created on the base fabric and one motif is placed inside each dabbi.

Unlike in the past, when these motifs were embroidered on the fabric by counting threads, these motifs are now pre-patterned on printing blocks and printed on the fabric and then embroidered. If there is a design in a big block, small component of the same design or motif is also available. If big blocks are placed on the border of dupatta/product, then small block/component is dispersed in the field. These patterns are more popular on transparent fabrics. Along with these, small butis or bel (trellis) is added in many dupattas to either form the body or border of the dupatta. These little additions are called as kharcha.

Designs on cotton voile or opaque fabric are usually a jaal (network) of motifs or designs on two end pieces of a dupatta and two lengthwise borders. The layout of design is usually a combination of two to three or three to four motifs/designs. It is interesting to note that by various permutations and combinations of some of these basic motifs, innumerable designs are created. These designs are often supported with straight lines to form an outline or border in a dupatta. Cotton voile dupattas when fully embroidered usually gives a carpeted look and are visually very appealing.

Motifs are combined in different ways: e.g. in case Patta buti (leaf motif) and star buti are to be used, one motif can be used in the body the other can make the borders on two or four sides; the other combination can include positioning of both the motifs on complete dupatta; another option includes a striped pattern created with both the motifs. In this way new designs and look is created to fulfil the demand of the customer. Mor (Peacock) motif is also used in many phulkaris. Some of the other names of the motifs as stated by the respondents were baccha buti, burfi piece, veer-zara, gol kadhui (as it has round circle in it), main phulkari, nau phullon wala design/kadai (it has nine flowers in it). Sometimes the names of popular movies are used to define a particular pattern like the Veer Zara design depicted in the figure below that came from a popular Bollywood film that portrayed a love story from Punjab in which one of the lead actor was residing in West Punjab in Pakistan and the other in Punjab in India. Many women in the film from both sides of Punjab were shown wearing Phulkari wraps.

Figure 2: Patta (Leaf) Design (Left) Veer-Zara Design (Right)

A third variety of phulkari is made on casement of the size of a single bed sheet and referred as Bagh. This is heavily embroidered with big size motifs in such a way that the base fabric is not visible or very little of the fabric are seen. Stripes, chevron, diamond, check patterns with motifs placed inside each box are very common. Along with this, motifs in bigger size in parantha, patta and many other motifs are also used.

This brief description of motifs makes it evident that with commoditization; the finesse of doing this embroidery has witnessed considerable drift. Motifs are now mass manufactured on blocks and are printed differently on each fabric, keeping the cost of the finished product as a priority. Individual creativity, which defined the delicate patterns, painstakingly embroidered by each woman, according to their imagination by counting threads on the fabric, has effectively disappeared.

C. Design Inspiration

The designs available with the shopkeepers are similar because the motifs are mostly common and embroideries generally monotonous without embroiderer's individual imagination adding to it. If there are any new designs in the market, these are easily copied by other shopkeepers. Most new designs, once exhibited in exhibitions or shop windows get replicated. Movies, magazines, visiting exhibitions, old baghs and phulkaris are other sources of inspiration for new designs for vendors.

One of our respondents- a vendor from Patiala said that he used to copy designs from magazines. He mentioned a Hindi movie Mann ki Aankhen in which heroine of the film wore a saree with mirror work on the border. He converted the mirror work design in phulkari and embroidered a saree with it. The narrative depicted individual handicraft worker's ability to innovate by merely looking at designs styled in a different form of embroidery.

In another narrative, one of the national award winner artisan showed her creativity by copying a design from an old bagh and hand embroidering it on a woman's pant worn by women from Punjab and locally called a salwar (loose, pleated trousers, usually tapering to a tight fit around the ankles, worn by women from South Asia typically with a long A-line shirt). She embroidered the phulkari motif on the pauncha (the front panel of the salwar near the hemline).

Many artisans reported that they create varieties of designs by intermixing different motifs and often creating new block to help others to create new designs. phulkari products are popular in most exhibitions that are regularly held in Punjab. For the last five years, the number of artisans from Pakistan has also been bringing their phulkari products to these exhibitions opening possibilities for creating more designs. These become a source of inspiration for many people who either want to wear phulkari or sell phulkari or some creative people who even want to learn this traditional and time honoured craft. Phulkari has become a source of extended cultural commonality between artisans from India and Pakistan with these frequent exchanges of motifs, designs and clothing.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is now well established that crafts created over the centuries never really die. They are invented and reinvented depending on the demand. In India revival and commoditization of several other forms of traditional Indian embroidery is reported by Vattam (2003) and many other scholars and was evident in our research.

There are several organizations like NABARD, SIDBI, KVIC, DC (Handicrafts) etc. in the country working towards revival of traditional forms of embroidery. Revival of various forms of phulkari in Punjab and some other states of northern India has been an outcome of multiple factors. Once the designs were re-discovered and hand embroidery regained its prestigious position, not only that phulkari motifs gained popularity, but also the traditional odhini came back in fashion.

Commoditization of Phulkari started both as a necessity to provide livelihood to marginalized women in Punjab. It was an activity that they could pursue from the comfort of their homes. Designs were simplified to help commercial production. Motifs were printed on the fabric and given to the village women to embroider on these. The earliest form of Phulkari making was an intricate process in which starting from the yarn to designs and the method of making it was entirely left to the embroiderer. Now there is an additional support system.

Women are no longer investing their personal resources in neither making the fabric nor pressing on their imagination to invent new designs for each piece of handicraft. They are also not required to go to the market to sell it. There are agents coming to the villages and assigning tasks to either organizations of self-help groups or to individual craft women. The designs that are brought for embroidery are as per the demand of the market.

In the last three decades, this form of embroidery has acquired far more popularity. But this popularity has come at the expense of individual innovation. Most motifs are repetitive and the designs are not as intricate as these were in the past. The transition represents the present day philosophy symbolized in by Wilkinson-Weber (2004) suggesting that handicrafts in an idealized form can be preserved and maintained by launching it in the form of commercially successful products for the customers/consumers and this comes at a cost that both the consumer and the craftsmen have to bear.

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