

# Phulkari Needlework: A Pattern Changes in its Demand over the Year

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights the art of traditional hand Needle work Phulkari that has lost its identity in the past has gained momentum. The demand for Phulkari has witnessed an upward trend in the recent years. Hand Needle work is the heritage of Punjabi culture which seems to be diminishing now days due to its higher cost and slow procedure. Previously Phulkari Needle work pattern were limited to shawls and Odhani / Odhni (head scarves). But over the years it is used to decorate large canvases such as sarees, Lenngha and chudidar kameez. It has evolved from a recreational activity to one of the most important sources of employment for women in Punjab. Demand for variety of Duppattas and Odhani has become a part of Indian Women's wardrobe. The Fusion style of Indo Western wears has introduced a rich blend of traditional hand Needle work along with western wears like Jeans, Gowns and Dresses. Hand Needle work is still in boom when it comes to designer studios and couture wear outfits, due to its beauty and excessive modification possibilities which is rigid in machine Needle work. The study tries to identify the various underling factors that led to the increase in demand of Phulkari in both Indian and Foreign Market. The study identifies the increase in demand on the basis of the data available from reliable sources as a result of the different Phulkari Revival schemes designed to Promote and Preserve Punjab's Traditional Handicraft.

**Keywords:** Apparel, fashion, Tradition, craft, motifs, couture, trend, Culture, Heritage.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Phuli means flower and Kari means work Steel, F A. (Oct 1888). The word Phulkari is a combination of two Sanskrit words Phul (Flowers) and Karya (activity) which means to do flower work. The first guru of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev Ji wrote 'Kad Kasidha Paihren choli tan tu jane vari' means one is accepted as a women if one can do Needle work on one's dress Gupta, A. H.,

& Mehta, S. (2016). It is also known as gulkari, a very intricate needle work along with bright colored threads, such as green, orange, red, blue, and pink. Phulkari is a wonderful handcraft produced using silk floss thread on cotton cloth. (Gupta and Kaur July 2019). Since ages, phulkari has been a symbol of elegance and dignity. It has contributed to an aesthetic and artistic form of adornment in Punjab's rural community and is an important element of its tradition and legacy. Initially, it was a simple type of custom and home craft that was not intended for sale but rather as a leisure activity within houses with cultural value (Kaur and Kallan 2019). Craft is considered as the storehouse of cultural legacy, elevating manual work over machine labour, which is seen as a danger to the society.

## II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

According to some investigations, the art of Phulkari originated in Iran, where it is called as "Gulkari." Gulkari is made up of two words: 'Gul' means flower, and 'Kari' indicates effort. The term Phulkari has the same etymology as this. Some academics and historians believe that the art of Phulkari originated in Central Asia and was brought to India by the Jat tribes who settled in Punjab, Haryana, and Gujarat. Both of these hypotheses are false. (Kaur and Gupta 2014).

By the turn of the 20th Century, Phulkari was virtually reduced to a lost art and has been under severe threat of extinction. Quality of products had deteriorated and this once beautiful craft form had become a caricature of itself.

Lack of expertise and exploitation of the craftsperson's by middlemen, Inability to reach artisans and craftsman (physically and communication wise) has led to downfall of this traditional Handicraft.

### **III. REVIVAL OF PHULKARI**

Fresh attempts had been made to revive the lost art of Phulkari as a cottage industry with the combined efforts of State and Central Government, NGO's, designers and entrepreneurs. There were different Phulkari Revival schemes designed to Promote and Preserve Punjab's Traditional Handicraft. (Kaur,2011). In the new millennium, India is poised between past and future, tradition and technology and village haats are being supplanted by shopping malls. Nevertheless, craft still maintains its place, finding new avenues and opportunities. The study reveals the growth in the demand of Phulkari and the reasons for such increase. Following are the factors identified that led to the increase in the demand of Phulkari.

#### **Aesthetic Values**

Phulkari, as a dupatta used in marriage ceremonies it can be easily replaced by any other if its only significance was of being a head scarf. But there is something more which makes the presence of Phulkari an indispensable aspect of the ceremony. Even in the everyday usage of Phulkari there is a special place accorded to it in the attitude of the consumers towards it. Crafted item stands apart from other commodities in its distinctive appeal to the people. The question that this ethnography tries to unravel is what makes this distinctive appeal comes into being? It does so by inquiring into the kind of spaces and practices under which Phulkari is made through the narrative of the Phulkari embroiderer herself. Phulkari suits are also the preference of costumers rather than Phulkari on duppata. Today, a Phulkari duppata is used in marriages for covering the bride and the groom when they enter the 'mandap'.

#### **Fusion**

India has a 65% young population which is the highest in the world. Increasing the purchasing power of fashion-conscious, financially independent working women and youth will continue to appreciate the field of fashion jewelry and fashion accessories. Traditional dress is an essential aspect of cultural Identity which is something that should be preserved. It would be tragic for India to lose its cultural diversity which is one of the things that makes it so wonderful. (JD Viharini, 2016, 35-36)

Over the years we could witness the influence of western Fashion on the Indian Fashion on Women Clothing. However, the Desi Chic concept never gets subtle. Anita Dongre identified a key need gap that in boutiques, only Indian wear was available, despite a demand for western wear. She realized working women required formal office wear which was not available in cottons and linens, with cuts of the dresses in keeping with Indian culture. She also saw an opportunity in a western wear line with Indian colours and patterns which was a fusion targeted for the younger women who were students or were working. She supplied embroidered ethnic clothes to Saks boutiques in Bandra and later on to big boutiques in Mumbai, like Sheetal, Benzer and Roopam. (Rangnekar, 2018).

Many Yash Raj heroines have been spotted wearing phulkari dupattas. Designers have used it for saris and kurtas, and it has even made its way onto the runways. At the newest party or during the winter, you'll most likely see someone sporting a phulkari shawl or dress.(1)

The development of a transnational, cosmopolitan ideal with an Indian soul supported not only the fashion media in asserting their authority, but also the local design sector in defining its own measure of authenticity. Craft was positioned as the vehicle for imagining a distinct design culture helpful to the nation's well-being. Such techniques were familiar and effective in generating a desire since they drew significantly from historical nationalist ideals as well as post-independence craft revivalists' writings.

The most common names used for various motifs made on contemporary Phulkari are listed as under:

- i. Biscuitb wala (Square Pattern)
- ii. Ding wala (wavy strips)
- iii. Gole Booti (round pattern)
- iv. Phapher or bari-booti (big floral pattern)
- v. Choti Phapher (Combination of small and bigger flower pattern)

- vi. Adhi-booti (Semi floral pattern)
- vii. Gole phool (Circular Floweral design flower)
- viii. Phool do-peher wali (Mid-day flower)
- ix. Pata (leafy pattern)

The above list showcases the wide range of patterns that are available in Phulkari that widens its scope to use the Phulkari Needle work for a different purpose and occasion from formal, traditional to casual wears. This Needle work has also been used for decorative purposes like Wall Decorations, Home Furnishing, and Decors, giving way for steady demand for the art.

The Patterns of the Phulkari Needle work is also used for Jackets, Blouse, Lehenga, Choli, Indo-Western Fusion wear. Use of different fabrics will change the look and feel of the Phulkari to suit different occasion and wear.

#### **Commercialization:**

Low-quality synthetic materials, not just khaddar, the pure cotton cloth used for traditional Phulkari, are currently being employed as cheaper materials. In contrast to pure silk floss, which accumulates lint with use, synthetic silk floss is utilized. Needle work is frequently done in a hurry for business reasons rather than to add to a daughter's dowry. Machine-made thread and fabric were used. Large dupattas are made of blended cotton or georgette. The colour scheme is largely pastel and monochromatic. The term motifs have evolved and have become synonymous with common place objects. The originality of the Phulkari has remained intact in the way the darning stitch is done today, all other stitches has been altered along the years right from the thread used like from Silk to Synthetic thread.

The mass-produced current phulkaris are not of the same quality or serve the same purpose as the originals. Traditional pure silk floss pat or sucha, which was used to make period phulkaris and baghs, has been replaced by kucha, or second-quality synthetic silk floss composed of viscose and polyester, which is available in bulk and comes in a wide spectrum of colors. The renaissance, on the other hand, is now catering to a larger, more affluent city and western clientele, who buy from NGOs and designers that present contemporary phulkari items in all major cities and beyond. It is now done more for profit than in the past, when a phulkari or bagh was created merely to suit a rural ritual involving a Phulkari or bagh was prepared solely to serve a rural custom involving months and years of hard work and love of the maker. The better side of this rebirth is that it is providing a source of income for many poor rural needy households, particularly women, who are the sole manufacturers of Phulkari.

#### **Diverse Usage:**

Desi Fusion (DF) was launched in 2011 by Pavit Sidhu Puri, DF's products gave a modern twist to the traditional Phulkari (the handmade Needle work work of the Punjab) by converting it into products like laptop and mobile covers, handbags, wine covers and tissue boxes. (Dahliwal, 2020).

Many interior designers are using Phulkari on walls of hotels and homes. Phulkari is also being used on sarees, bed sheets, bangles, earrings and on Punjabi jutti (shoes). (Rajinder Kaur, Ila Gupta, 2014)

#### **Growth in Market Consumption in Textile Industry:**

In 2021, the estimated market value of the Indian textile industry was worth 223 billion U.S. dollars. In comparison, the textile industry market value was worth around 140 billion U.S. dollars in 2018 across India as Published by Statista Research Department, Apr 8, 2022.

The fact that the media serves as a means for self-assertion and identity building by identifying and distinguishing Punjabi identity from Indian identity explains why ethnic clothing are in such high demand among NRI Punjabis. Punjabi films claim a distinct identity from Hindi films. This distinct identity can also be seen in depictions of Punjabis residing in other countries. Punjabi films depict the ladies adorning traditional clothing which reaffirms that the bond still remains with their roots. Hence there has been a steady demand for Phulkari amongst Punjabis living abroad be it UK, USA, Canada and Australia which as huge immigrants population from this part of the country.

Overseas Indians (Punjabis), particularly Sikh emigrants, have made a large and varied contribution to the socio-economic change of rural Punjab. With nearly a century of migration experience, Sikh emigrants have not only preserved, but have also become more proactive in the advancement of their home regions by acting as a catalyst. (Rahman, M., & Yong, T.T.)

Agents that sell Phulkari do not make as much money as the true market price of this product. Punjabi women make only 200-300 rupees embroidering duppata, whereas the identical duppata sells for 1,000 rupees on the market. They make 450-500 rupees through bagh Needle work, which sells for 1,000-1,500 rupees in the market. A single Phulkari now requires numerous persons, including dealers, printers, and embroiderers, working together. Many women embroider Phulkari and earn Rupees 15,000 per month through government organisations.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Finally, despite the fact that traditional Phulkari is fading from its original form, numerous NGOs are attempting to bring it back. The modern Phulkari's quality and longevity as a traditional Punjabi Phulkari has been harmed by its commercialization. It is no longer done for personal or gift purposes. It is currently done for business, with the advantage of Punjabi women. The delight of this country art was transmitted to the cloth through the method of needlework with folk tunes sung. A Phulkari is not made by a single individual as it is the result of a group effort. Making Phulkari today is not as time intensive and detailed as it was in the past. Traditional Phulkari, on the other hand, is more appealing than current Phulkari. The government has been attempting to promote the Punjabi Phulkari by arranging specific training programmes, fairs, exhibitions, and contests. The positive aspect of this rebirth is that it provides employment to many disadvantaged people, particularly women. Phulkari is now well-known not only in Punjab, but also internationally.

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