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Traditional Materials and Tools Used by Phulkari Artisans: An Empirical Survey of Base Fabrics, Embroidery Threads, and Needles

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Abstract

The selection of base material, embroidery threads and needles used by artisans will play an important role in determine the quality, authenticity and durability of Phulkari embroidery. However that has is limited systematic recording of these essential materials and tools from the perspective of the practicing artisans. The present study is an effort to identity and analyze the base material, threads and needles commonly used in Phulkari embroidery and to examine the factors influencing material made by the artisans. The investigation adopted a descriptive survey research design and primary data were collected from 257 Phulkari artisans in the district of Patiala, Punjab with structure questionnaire and personal interview. The data was examined via descriptive statistical techniques like frequency and percentage analysis. The finding indicate that artisans use a variety of base fabric such as cotton, silk, khaddar, georgette and chiffon depending according to the type of products consumer preference and market demand. Pat silk floss remains to be the most preferred embroidery thread because of its luster durability and traditional significance. Cotton synthetic and blended thread is also used for specific uses.

Keywords: Phulkari embroidery, artisans, embroidery threads, embroidery needles, traditional textiles, handicrafts, Punjab, survey research, textile heritage.

1. Introduction

India is famous for its rich and diverse textile heritage that is a consideration of its cultural identity, artistic traditions and regional craftsmanship. A variety of traditional form of embroidery in Punjab culture heritage as well as Phulkari embroidery holds a unique place among such. The world Phulkari is originates from the Punjabi words Phul (flower) and Kari (work). Phulkari was a kind of floral embroidery, typically done with silk floss thread on hand-woven fabric. Phulkari was traditionally embroidered by women for primarily for personal use



and for ceremonial occasions, particularly weddings, festivals and other important social occasions. This indigenous craft has evolved from a domestic tradition to a highly profitable handicraft offering employment and income to thousands of artisans of Punjab.

Phulkari embroidery is unique not only because of the vibrant motifs and soft stitching techniques but also because of the careful selection of base material, embroidery threads and needles that are necessary for the quality, durability and aesthetic appeal of the finished product. The khaddar fabric were traditionally the primary base material as that is hand-woven, contain a uneven texture and can contain dense embroidery. Although changing consumer preference and fashion trends have resulted in artisans to utilize various fabrics such as cotton, silk, georgette, chiffon, linen, velvet and blend fabrics. These contemporary material have contribute to the growth of the utilization of Phulkari embroidery in garments, accessories and home furnishing also to develop new opportunities in the local and international market.

Embroidery threads also become essential over the appearance and longevity of embroidered products. Traditionally, artisans used Pat silk floss thread known for its natural sheen, vibrant color and smooth texture. Whenever untwisted, the silk floss thread assists the stitches captured the light in a beautiful way of giving the glossy appearance which is the sign of authenticity Phulkari embroidery. In recent years the use of cotton, rayon, polyester, synthetic and blended embroidery threads have been implemented because of increasing production cost and developing market needs. These alternatives reduce the cost of production and rise accessibility however may settlement the texture, durability to recognize the artisans selected threads for the record of traditional knowledge and for the improvement high quality in todays textile production.

The needle is important equipment for stitching precision, workshop, and embroidery efficiency. The size and type of needle shall be chosen on based on the basis of thickness of the fabric, the thread characteristics and the complexity of the embroidery design. The needle utilized by the traditional Phulkari artisans is embroidery or crewel needles with a pointed a tip and a long eye that helps in the simple movement of silk floss through the fabric. Choosing suitable needles can prevent the thread breaking this will reduce damage to the fabric and enhance the overall quality of the embroidery.

The main material, thread and needles are selected based on a variety of factor such as product requirements, market demand, and availability of material, production cost, artisan experience, customer preference and advancement in technology. The rising commercialization and globalization promoted many artisans to modify traditional practices through machine made fabrics, synthetic threads and modern tools to boast productivity and meet demand from customer. These adaptations have enhanced business competition, but they also have a concern for preservation of traditional craftsmanship and cultural authenticity.



Therefore, record of many artisans to adapt traditional practices via machine made fabrics, synthetic threads and modern tools to boost productivity and meet consumer expectations. These adaptations have enhanced competition in the market but they also raised concern for the preservation of traditional craftsmanship and cultural authenticity. Therefore records of the materials and tools currently used by artisans are essential for the safety of traditional knowledge for the advancement of innovation and sustainable craft development.

2. Review of Literature

Traditional embroidery was an important element of India's textile heritage, reflecting regional identity, craftsmanship and cultural continuity. Several researchers investigated Phulkari embroidery from historical, socio-economic, cultural and design perspectives; however that is limited attention towards documentation of the base material, embroidery threads and needles used by artisans. The following review summarizes the significant studies relevant to the present investigation.

Bhatia (2018) explains Phulkari as one of the most distinctive traditional embroidery form of Punjab. It was initially performed on hand woven khaddar fabric with untwisted silk floss thread. The studied brought outside that selecting the correct material was essential to recreate the original texture, durability and visual richness of traditional Phulkari embroidery. The author stated that the shifting preference of the customers has encouraged the artisans to test towards the fabric such as cotton, silk, chiffon and georgette for contemporary products. Gupta and Kaur (2019) carried out a questionnaire based survey to evaluate the occupational health condition of Phulkari artisans. The primary focus are ergonomic and health however the study also documented the process of embroidery including the use of khaddar and cotton fabrics, pat silk floss thread and hand embroidery needles. The findings indicates that repetitive needlework and long duration of stitching were associated with musculoskeletal discomfort, eye strain and fatigue among artisans. The study emphasized the need for good working conditions and ergonomic interventions, without compromising the traditional craftsmanship.

Gupta and Mehta (2019) analyzed the skills, traditional knowledge and livelihood practices of the Phulkari artisans of Punjab by mean of field survey and interviews. They discovered that knowledge of how to select fabric, quality the quality of thread they perform to do basic stitches as well as how to utilize standard tools is primarily inherited through family tradition. While Pat silk floss stays a symbol of authentic Phulkari, researchers tell artisans were increasingly applying cotton, rayon and synthetic threads to cut cost to the requirement of rapidly changing market. The study demonstrate the importance of documenting traditional material knowledge for future generation.

The development of Phulkari embroidery in changing fashion was investigated by Kaur and Singh (2020). Over time the traditional Khaddar has given a way to lighter weight fabrics such



as georgette, chiffon, silk, linen and blended textiles in garments intended for the current consumer,” The authors also proposed to selection of material based on the density of embroidery, the functionality of the item the requirement the customer and the price. The study emphasized the requirement to maintain a right balance among innovation as well as preservation in order to maintain the cultural identity of Phulkari preservation.

Gupta et al. (2020) documented the experience of women craftswomen engaged with Phulkari production in Punjab. The field research revealed that most artisans work from their residence and based on locally available materials from traders or contractors. Traditional embroidery techniques remain practiced however increase commercialization has resulted in the use of machine-woven fabrics, synthetic embroidery threads and readily available embroidery needles in order to make production more effective. It highlights the significance of sustaining artisans livelihood while maintaining traditional techniques viable. Embroidery material was additionally investigated in other traditional embroidery clusters of India. Studies on kutch embroidery, kasuti, chikankari, kantha and zardosi indicate that the selection of fabrics and embroidery threads through artisans is influenced by stitch characteristics, durability among the product, complexity the design and consumer preference. Cotton remains one of the most use base fabric because of its strength and ease of handling. Silk and blended fabric are preferred for premium products. Similarly, the choice of of embroidery thread is influenced by the preferred surface texture, colour, fastness, availability and production cost. The research indicates that the selection of material is most important for both the quality for a product as well as acceptance in the market.

Recent occupational health research on embroidery artisans have emphasized on embroidery tools, basically needle. Study on traditional embroidery workers in cross sectional studies has indicated that the incorrect needle size, repetitive hand movement, long hours of sitting and bad constructed work area lead to musculoskeletal disorders and reduce work efficiency. Researchers have recommended improving workplace ergonomic to reduce physical strain while maintain the quality of embroidery and selecting needle size depend on the thickness of the material and the type of the thread

3. Material and Methods

The present study was carried out with descriptive survey research design to figure out the base materials, embroidery threads and needles used by Phulkari artisans in Patiala. The survey method was considered appropriate as it gives an a chance to collect firsthand information on artisans preferences for tools and supplies and the factors that impact their choice. The descriptive survey design was selected because it facilitates the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data from a specific population without manipulating the variables of the study. A person has to become familiar to the common practices and trends used by artisans in

their embroidery work. It also additionally made it convenient to document the type of fabric, thread and needle used and the reason over their selection on the basis of availability, cost, durability, ease of use and the quality of the end result.

4. Result and Obsrrvation

4.1 Study Area

The study was carried out in the district of Patiala of Punjab, India, which is renowned for traditional Phulkari embroidery. These districts were carefully selected due to the large concentration of skilled Phulkari artisans and their responsibility within production and promotion of this traditional craft.

4.2 Sample Size and Sample Technique

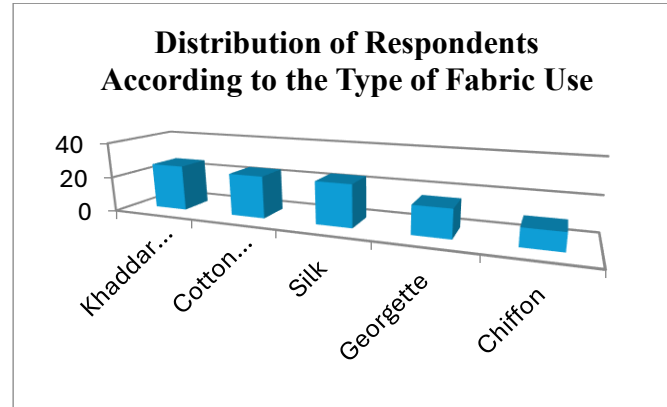
A total of 257 Phulkari artisans participated in the study. The respondents were selected with Slovin formula as only artisans activity practicing Phulkari and getting practical knowledge of embroidery materials and tools were included. The sampling method has been created to collect information from trained artisans that participated directly in the craft.

4.3 Data collection Procedure

Primary data were collected through personal interview and face to face admiration of questionnaire during the field visit to the artisan cluster in Patiala. Prior informed consent. All respondents participated in part in an interview once. In addition to the survey findings. Additional information on embroidery practices, materials and tools were also observed.

Distribution of Respondents According to the type of Base Fabric used by Phulkari Artisans

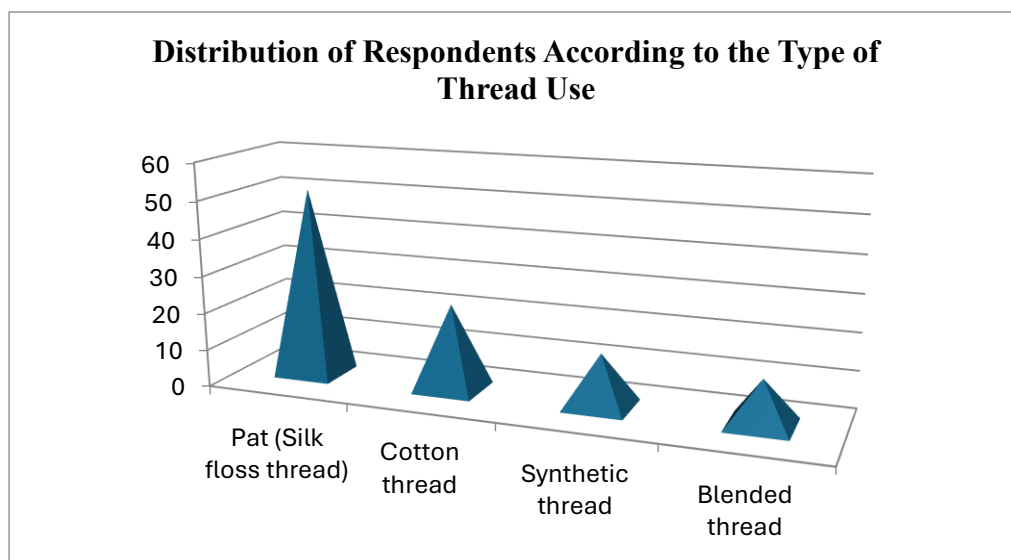
S.No	Type of Fabric Use	Frequency	Percentage
01	Khaddar (Hand woven cotton)	67	26
02	Cotton (Mill-made)	62	24
03	Silk	62	24
04	Georgette	40	16
05	Chiffon	26	10
	Total	257	100



The findings indicates that most commonly fabric used by artisans was khaddar, that had a rate of utilization of 26% cotton and silk followed that 24% of the fabrics used. Artisans used Georgette 16% as well chiffon 10%. The results show that artisans preferred traditional and natural fabrics. Khaddar was most preferred fabric followed by cotton and silk whereas chiffon was comparatively less preferred.

Distribution of Respondents According to the Type of Thread use by Phulkari Artisans

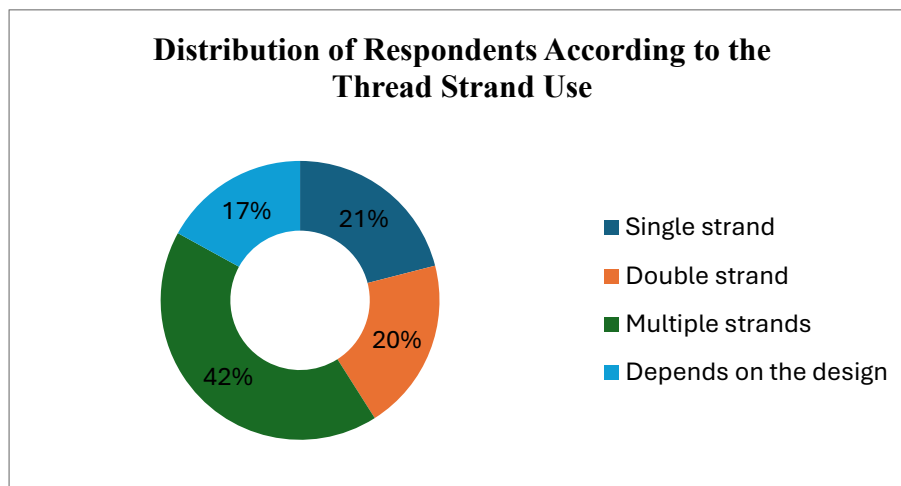
S.No	Type of Thread Use	Frequency	Percentage
01	Pat (Silk floss thread)	131	51
02	Cotton thread	59	23
03	Synthetic thread	37	14
04	Blended thread	30	12
	Total	257	100



The finding indicates that Pat (silk Yarn) was the most popular thread through the artisans accounting for 51% of the total usage. Close below was cotton thread which comprised 23% indicating a strong preference for natural fibers. In contrast, 14% of the artisans used synthetic thread, as well as 12% of the artisans used blended thread which was considered the least preferred type of thread. The result shows that artisans mostly used traditional and natural threads such as pat and cotton as they are appropriate for handloom and handicraft products, whereas synthetic and blended threads were used to a much lesser extent. This preference matches up with artisans goal to maintain the quality, durability and traditional appeal of their products.

Distribution of Respondents According to the Number of Thread Strands used by Phulkari Artisans

S.No	Thread strands Use	Frequency	Percentage
01	Single strand	55	21
02	Double strand	51	20
03	Multiple strands	108	42
04	Depends on the design	43	17
	Total	257	100

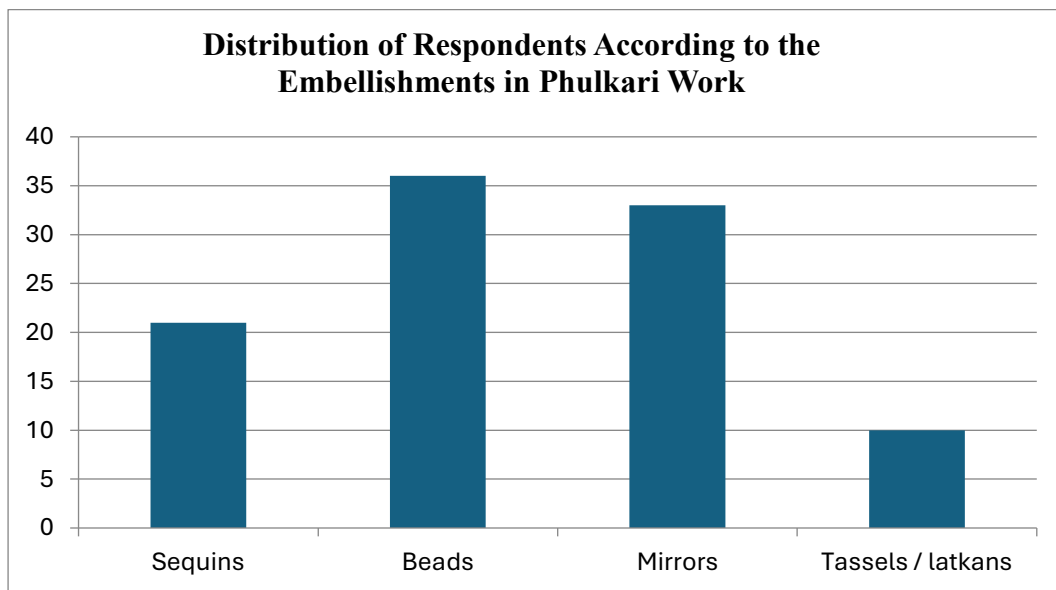


The finding shows that the Phulkari artisans use the thread stands various based on the requirements of the embroidery. Most of the respondents 42% used multiple strands of thread, 21% used single strands and 20% used double strands. Additionally, 17% of the artisans stated

that the number of threads depends on the design. The results overall indicate that artisans choose strands for thread based on the desired design, texture and embroidery technique

Distribution of Respondents According to the Embellishment use for Phulkari work

S.No	Embellishment Used	Frequency	Percentage
01	Sequins	53	21
02	Beads	93	36
03	Mirrors	86	33
04	Tassels / latkans	25	10
	Total	257	100



The data shows that the respondents prefer beads 36% to be the most preferred embellishment used in Phulkari work followed by mirror work 33%. Sequins 21% are used quite lightly indicating a preference for adding sparkle and decorative appeal. Tassels/latkans 10% is the least preferred embellishment when compared with other ornaments. Overall finding indicate that the respondent is fond of bead and mirror embellishments which can be sign for preference for traditional yet attractive decorative elements in the contemporary Phulkari design.



Sustainability Perspective

The finding of the present study has import implications for the sustainability of Phulkari embroidery in general. Traditional, Phulkari was embroidered on hand woven khaddar fabric using natural silk floss (pat) thread. Both the fabric and thread are associated with environmentally sustainable textile practices due to durability, biodegradability and reliance and natural fibers. Hand woven khaddar also support traditional methods of textile production with a relatively low ecological impact and supports local weaving communities. However, the survey demonstrated that many artisans are currently using machine made fabric and synthetic embroidery threads in initiatives to meet market demand, reduce manufacturing expenses and enhance production efficiency. The material assist to create Phulkari cheaper and a wider range of goods is accessible but their recognition and use many reduce the traditional authenticity of Phulkari and also help to greater environment damage caused by the use of synthetic fibers.

In term of sustainability the preservation of the indigenous knowledge on the selection and use of traditional materials is as important as the preservation of the embroidery techniques. The abilities of artisans to choose suitable fabrics, threads and equipment's are valuable intangible cultural heritage passed down from generation. Policy initiatives and market incentives can motivate the use of eco-friendly raw materials, use of natural or low impact dyes, enhancing access to authentic traditional materials and sustainable handicraft production that can help preserve the cultural identity of Phulkari and improve the livelihoods of artisans. Therefore it is essential to balance the traditional craftsmanship with environmentally conscious innovations to assure the long-term sustainability and global competitiveness of Phulkari embroidery.

Preservation of Basic Skills and indigenous knowledge

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the knowledge of choosing appropriate base fabrics, embroidery threads and needles is an integral part of traditional craftsmanship of Phulkari artisans. This information gathered over years of actual use and divided across generations, is key element of intangible culture heritage. The choice of suitable materials, that



also display the artisan ability and understanding of traditional method impact the quality, durability and visual appeal of the embroidery. It is necessary to document carefully preserving this traditional knowledge of indigenous people for the authenticity of Phulkari embroidery and to preserve the traditional skills that have been slowly disappearing because of modernization and changing market trends. However the findings might serve as an invaluable education tool for craft training organization, designers and young artisans to learn authentic Phulkari techniques. preservation and advancement of traditional material knowledge and embroidery skill may assist stakeholders in preservation of the rich textile heritage of Punjab and continuity and sustainable development of this traditional handicraft.

Conclusion

Phulkari embroidery represents an important part of Punjab's textile heritage, where the selection of base materials, embroidery threads, and needles plays a vital role in determining the quality, durability, and authenticity of the craft. The findings indicate that while traditional materials such as khaddar fabric, Pat silk floss thread, and hand embroidery needles continue to symbolize authentic Phulkari, artisans are increasingly adopting modern fabrics and synthetic threads to meet changing market demands and reduce production costs. These adaptations have expanded the commercial potential of Phulkari but also pose challenges to preserving its traditional identity. Therefore, documenting the materials and tools currently used by artisans is essential for safeguarding indigenous knowledge, supporting sustainable craft development, and ensuring that this valuable cultural heritage is preserved for future generations while remaining relevant in the contemporary fashion industry.

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