LESSON 15  PHULKARI AND BAGH

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In the previous lesson we had studied about Kashmir Embroidery. In this lesson we will learn about another beautiful and vibrant embroidered textile called Phulkari and Bagh, from Punjab. The word “Phulkari” literally means ‘flower work’ and this embroidery is done for happy domestic, social occasions.

15.0 Objectives

After going through this lesson you will be able to:

- Have basic idea about the embroideries of Punjab.
- Learn about the stitches and designs used in Phulkari.
- Learn about different kinds of Bagh.

15.1 Introduction

The Indian craftsmen excel in hand embroidery on cotton, silk, and wool, creating products, which raise the admiration for all the darn stitch of Phulkari in Punjab. The Phulkari (Fig. 15.1) and the Bagh (Fig. 15.2) are the traditional embroidered shawls of Punjab. Phulkari literally means “flower work”, the best ones are known to have been made in Hazara and Chakwal areas of Northern Punjab. The designs on the Phulkari are more or less floral in character with a few geometrical patterns.

![Phulkari Shawl](Fig. 15.1)  ![Bagh Fabric](Fig. 15.2)

The women of the *jat* community of Punjab have specialized in phulkari work. Wherever they settled in Punjab, Phulkari work originated and flourished. At present Rohtak, Hissar, Gurgaon and Karnal are the main centres of this embroidery work. It is known as a ceremonial shawl worn by the Punjabi Girls at their wedding. Usually the size of these shawls is 1.5 x 2.5 yards.
15.2 Historical Background

The origin of Phulkari is not quite fully known due to lack of evidence and documentation. Some say that the art of Phulkari came from Iran where it is known as ‘Gulkari’. Others think that it came from Central Asia along with the Jat tribes who migrated to India and settled in Punjab, Rajasthan and Saurashtra areas of Gujarat. The earliest mention of Phulkari is made in the famous literary Ballad of Hir Ranjha. The earliest available article of embroidery is a rumal, the kerchief, embroidered during 15th century by the sister of Guru Nanak Dev.

15.3 Technical Details

Phulkari and Baghs are invariably embroidered on home spun, locally woven and dyed coarse khadi because it is strong, long lasting and easy to embroider on as it involved counting of threads (Fig. 15.3). In villages khadi was woven in small width and later two pieces were joined together to have the desired width.

Soft untwisted floss silk called ‘PAT’ was used for embroidery work. These silk threads used to come from Kashmir, Afghanistan and Bengal. However, the best quality silk came from China. It was dyed at Deragazi Khan, Amritsar and Jammu and then distributed all over Punjab by the nomadic tribes. The colours employed in darning stitch were golden yellow, red, crimson, orange, blue, white, violet, green, and dark brown. The design was worked out on the backside of the material (Figs. 15.4 to 15.9: Varieties of Phulkari and Bagh).
The beauty of phulkari lies in its intricate, balanced composition, pleasing and harmonious colours, which make it a real work of art. Embroidery could be easily done in short and long Darning Stitch (Fig. 15.10).

For ceremonial occasions, however, a special kind of Phulkari known as a ‘Bagh’ (Garden) was made (Fig. 15.11), in which the whole of the ground was covered with embroidery so that the base cloth was not visible at all. Unlike Phulkaris, Baghs do not have separate pallas, but the main pattern of the Bagh is repeated by sometimes placing differently, and it still consists of beautiful and gorgeous geometrical motifs. In some only a narrow braid-like-trimming stitch is employed.

**Self-check Questions**

1. What is meant by ‘PAT’?
2. What are the basic stitches used in Phulkari?

Fill in the blanks:

3. Phulkari and Baghs are invariably ___________ on home _______, locally ________ and dyed, coarse ________ because it is strong, long lasting and easy to embroider on as it involved counting of threads.

4. The __________ of Phulkari lies in its __________, balanced __________, pleasing and __________ colours, which make it a real work of art.
15.4 Design

The designs of Phulkari are seldom traced but have been worked by counting both warp and weft threads. However, to overcome the faulty designs, the area or boundaries of the designs are demarcated with a row of Running Stitch, using green ‘Pat’. The embroidery by counting the yarn has given way to traced or Block Printing Designs, which are embroidered from the right side. There is lot of variation in colours, e.g. dwiranga (two colours) (Fig. 15.12), satranga (seven colours) (Fig. 15.13), Panchranga (five colours) (Fig. 15.14).

No religious subjects, court scenes or hunting or battle scenes were embroidered in Phulkari or Bagh.

There were no pattern books or diagrams. Young girls learnt the art from their grand mothers. The designs are geometric and very much stylized. Most of the motifs were taken from things used in day to day life which were precious to them.

Phulkari can be distinguished on the basis of types of motifs used, colour of the base material, stitches employed, area or part of the base material embroidered. The different kinds of phulkaris are:

i) **Chope and Suber** are wedding Phulkaris and are presented to the bride by her maternal relations during the actual ceremony (Fig. 15.15).

ii) **Salu** – The plain Red or dark Red Khadder Shawl, known as Salu, is used for daily household wear.

iii) **Darshan Dwar or Darwaza** is the Phulkari used as a ‘Bhet’ presentation for religious institutions. The design is worked on a panel, which is draped over the entrance gate from where people take the Darshan of their Deity (Fig. 15.16).

iv) **Shishedar Phulkari or Chhamas** - South Eastern Punjab (Presently in Haryana State), used to have Phulkaris with glass pieces embroidered all over red or brown background cloth. However, it is gradually becoming extinct.

v) **Sainchi Phulkari** - It depicts the true rural life of Punjab where the motifs are traced, outlined in black ink before embroidering. The motifs depict the various activities of rural life, different household articles, and daily chores of a housewife. In other words, the whole life of the villagers is exhibited colourfully through Sainchi Phulkari (Fig. 15.17).
vi) Vari da Bagh – Vari means the clothes and jewellery articles presented to the bride by the groom's family. It was embroidered by the grandmother and presented to the bride of the grandson at the time of marriage. This embroidery was done on red background with yellow silk thread in small lozenges.

![Vari da Bagh](Fig. 15.18 Vari da Bagh)

vii) Bawan Bagh – As the name suggests, the Bagh has fifty two different geometrical designs. The field of such Baghs is divided into small boxes, outlined by intricate geometrical border. Each of these boxes has a different design embroidered in bright striking colours. The border and pallu have different types of designs.

Various other Baghs are named according to the motif employed for stitchery:

- Karela Bagh
- Mirchi Bagh (Fig. 15.9)
- Chandrama Bagh (Fig. 15.20)
- Kakri Bagh
- Dhania Bagh
- Bawan Bagh
- MOR Bagh (Fig. 15.21)
- TOTA Bagh
Self-check Questions

5. How are the designs of Phulkari made?

6. Fill in the blanks:

Phulkari can be __________ on the basis of types of _____ used, colour of the base ________, stitches employed and area or part of the base material embroidered.

15.5 Other Phulkaris

_Sindhi_ Phulkari is known as _sheeshedar_ (mirror work) Phulkari. It is a mixture of Punjab and Kutch embroidery. The stitches are known as _‘SINDHI TAROPA’_. Tiny mica (small mirrors) are fixed to the cloth with the buttonhole stitch. The material used for embroidery work is very often silk or satin.

Mirror work of Kutch and Kathiawar is also like Phulkari work done on silk or satin material for making skirts (Figs. 15.22, 15.23). In Kutch embroidery the motifs are elephants, peacocks and parrots along with floral border. Most of the embroidery is done with chain stitch and herringbone.
15.6 Assignments

15.6.1 Class assignments

i) Draw and Sketch the various motifs used in Phulkari and Bagh. (Designs to be shown in the class and explained in fine detail)

ii) Make a replica of Phulkari or Bagh using any of the designs explained in the class.

15.6.2 Home assignments

i) Collect pictures/photos of Phulkari work that you can find from magazines, shops, and the Internet, representing different styles we have covered in this class. Paste them neatly on clear pages with labels under each photo or picture.

15.7 Summing Up

Phulkari, literally meaning flower works, and Bagh are traditional embroidered Shawls of Punjab. The designs of Phulkari are more or less floral in character with a few geometrical patterns.

The earliest mention of a Phulkari appears in the famous literary ballad of Hir Ranjha. The earliest available embroidered article is a rumal embroidered in 15th Century by the sister of Guru Nanak Dev.

Phulkari and Bagh are invariably embroidered on dyed coarse khadi with soft untwisted floss silk, called PAT.

For ceremonial occasions a special Phulkari, known as Bagh, is made in which whole ground material is covered with embroidery. Designs are geometrical and highly stylized. Motifs are derived from day to day used precious items. There are several types of Phulkaris based on types of motifs, colour of ground material, stitches employed, etc.

15.8 Possible Answers to Self - Check Questions.

1. 'Pat' is soft untwisted floss silk used for embroidery work.

2. Phulkari and Baghs are invariably embroidered on home spun, locally woven and dyed coarse khadi because it is strong, long lasting and easy to embroider on as it involved counting of threads.

3. Short and long stitch and Darning stitch are used in Phulkari.
4. The beauty of Phulkari lies in its intricate, balanced composition, pleasing and harmonious colours, which make it a real work of art.

5. The designs of Phulkari are seldom traced but are made by counting warp and weft threads.

6. Phulkari can be distinguished on the basis of types of motifs used, colour of the base material, stitches employed, area or part of the base material embroidered.

**15.9 Terminal Questions**

1. What are Phulkari and Bagh?

2. Why was Khaddar used as the base material for Phulkari? What new materials are used today?

3. What are the basic stitches used in Phulkari?

4. What is the difference between Phulkari and Bagh embroideries?

5. What is the characteristic feature of Bagh embroidery?

6. What is meant by PAT?

7. Which is the oldest item of Phulkari known?

8. What is the distinctive feature of Sindhi Phulkari?

9. What is the significance of ‘Vari da Bagh’ Phulkari?

10. What are the distinguishing features of Phulkari and Bagh?

**15.10 References and Suggested Further Reading**


5.
15.11 Glossary

1. Warp Set of parallel threads wound on a warp beam ready for being mounted on a loom's frame. (The length of warp determines the overall length of the woven cloth coming off the loom).

2. Weft A set of threads runs at right angles to the warp, interlaced with them to create various strictures of weaves, such as plain or twill weave.

3. Lozenges A four sided diamond shaped figure.