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## ***The Embroidery of Emotions - Phulkari Bagh's of Punjab***

### **Abstract:**

This study intended to examine the traditional folk art of Punjabi Phulkari bagh along with its revival in Multan. The Punjab Province has always been distinguished for its culture and heritage. Multan is considered the oldest city of South Asia. The area from Delhi to Afghanistan was of Punjab province of Indian Sub-continent. The art of traditional Phulkari was originally practiced solely by the women of Punjab. Phulkari has always played an important role in the lives of Punjabi girls. The technique of Phulkari passed from generation to generation, especially girls used to embroider their imaginary world, dreams, and aspirations onto a canvas of khaddar. Phulkari has been a precious gift meant for special family occasions, to welcome a newborn into the family or to gift the daughter during her nuptial ceremony. The designs and motifs are innumerable. This study will focus on the historical background of Phulkari and the variety of Bagh's.

### **Keywords:**

Embroidery Phulkari Bagh Punjab Culture

### **Introduction:**

Embroidery is a decorative form of art that is the richest expression of emotions, aesthetics and textiles. In the Indian subcontinent, embroidery has been practiced for centuries not only to adorn the textiles for temples, houses, clothes and draperies for animals, but also for symbolic and traditional purposes. In the rural tradition it is an integral part of the dowry and was considered a symbol of the ethnolinguistic group and its ritual tradition (Harvey, 2002). The craftsmen of

Punjab excelled in hand embroidery on cotton, silk and wool, creating products that won admiration in Punjab. Phulkari and Bagh were traditional embroidered shawls from Punjab province.

The word Phulkari comes from two Sanskrit words "Phul" meaning flower and "Kari" meaning work (Hitkari, 1980). This embroidery began in Punjab in the 15th century and continues till now. Bhag literally means that the garden is a type of Phulkari. The word Bagh was used to refer to embroidery fabrics made in Peshawar, Sialkot, Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Hazara, which are now in Pakistan. The difference between phulkari and Bagh lies in the phulkari embroidered fabric whose base is visible. In Bagh, the fabric is so closely embroidered that the silk threads cover most of the fabric ground, so that the base is not visible (Randhawa, 1960.) The phulkari embroidery made with border and multipurpose design of traditional motifs. The fabric of Cham and khaddar were the fabrics selected for using design on them. Numbers of techniques like, hand embroidery, machine embroidery, hand painting and screen painting were applied to the Phulkari designs, equality of embroidery, threads of various colors were applied (Michael, 2000). Extant phulkari vary widely, mainly in design and color but also in the type of fabric, method of manufacturing and size. The khadi was usually painted at home before the embroidery was added, with black red, chocolate brown, indigo-blue and black as the most common colors. Bright colors were the norm for embroidery thread, with yellow gold, purple, orange, green and white dominating (Maskiell, 1999).

Embroidery was done on articles of apparel used by both men and women. Most common motifs used in embroidery were floral and birds. With the passage of time man changes in embroidery were reported with respect to design, quality of embroidery, colors and also the kinds of threads (Das, 1992).

This narrative provides the landscape in which this research is shaped. Phulkari is not just a beautifully embroidered fabric, but it is an essential part of a Punjabi woman's life. It was used as a surface decoration on scarves, jackets, covers, pillow cases, table covers and girls who used to embroider them since childhood so that they could prepare and collect good quantities of objects for their marriage. The primary focus of this study is to examine the phulkari designs in

Multan and especially phulkari baghs in Punjab. It will provides an overview of patterns used in phulkari baghs and details of baghs.

### **Origin of Phulkari:**

The women of Punjab made the traditional Punjab Phulkari after completing their chores. They sat in groups called "Trijan" where all the women involved in embroidery as well as dancing, laughing, chatting and weaving. The traditional Phulkari was made from fabric called "khaddar", handmade and using high quality silk thread called "Pat", in bright colors such as red, gold, green, yellow, pink and blue. It took a year to make a special type of phulkari "Vari Da Bagh" where embroidery covers the entire surface of the fabric (Paine, 2014).

In eastern Punjab the women embroidered Phulkari's with pattern of humans, animals and plants as well as other jewelry patterns. There are number of stitches used in Phulkari which are, satin stitch, herringbone stitch, cross stitch, chain stitch, blanket stitch, backstitch, stem stitch and running stitch were also used in Phulkari embroidery.

### **Design and Traditional types Phulkari's:**

In Punjab the traditional forms of embroidery have following four distinct styles are recognized:

***Phulkari*** in which motifs are embroidered sparingly.

***Chope*** embroidery done on red Khaddar, which is identical on both side. (Figure: 1) Chope Phulkari another form is a big sheet in red color 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 is bigger than the Phulkari and Bagh in length as well as in width. Chope usually has a bird motif which was called as chope di chidi. Chope is considered as wedding Phulkari (Pal, 1955).



Figure 1: Chope Phulkari

**Tool di Phulkari** was a type of phulkari which was done on a lightweight fabric called tool.

**Salu** is plain red or dark red khaddar shawl known as salu. It is used for daily wear.

**Darshan Dwar or Darwaza** is the Phulkari used as "**Bhet**" presentation for religious institutions. The design is worked out in panels which later draped over the entrance gate from where people can see their deity. (Figure: 2)

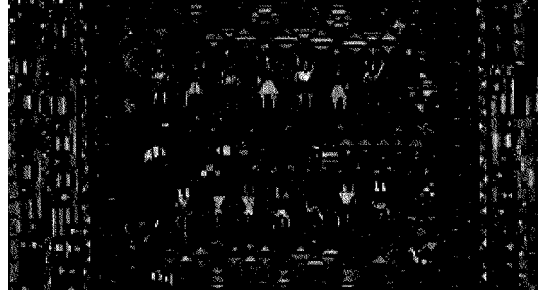


Figure 2: Darshandawar or Darwaza Phulkari

**Shishedar Phulkari** is found in eastern Punjab presently the state of Haryana. This type of phulkari which is combined with glass pieces embroidered all over red or brown background cloth which gradually extinct. (Figure: 3)

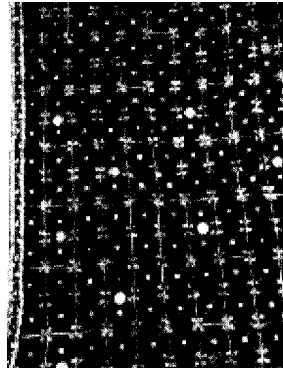


Figure 3: Shishedar Phulkari

**Sainchi Phulkari** is a type which depicts the true rural life of Punjab where the motifs are traced, outlined in black ink before embroidering. The motifs are a visual communication which depicts the activities of rural life. The whole life of villagers are exhibited through colorful sainchi phulkari. The women from eastern Punjab made phulkari with animal, plant, jewelry and human motifs, drawing the

outline in black ink and filling them with a darning stitch. The elephant was considered a royal means of transport. Horses and lions were important because of the association with royalty.

The peacock was famous for its adorable colors, its proud dance. Thus, people's emotions are reflected by the phulkari pieces. The females used every element of the daily routine from which the drawing can be extracted. The designed surface was an imitation of real objects. Some of the shawls were a combination of organic and inorganic patterns. It is the skill of the worker who makes the connection between the objects and their formation in the form of drawing. Punjab is an agricultural province so in case of phulkari such events of daily life are embroidered. (Figure: 4)

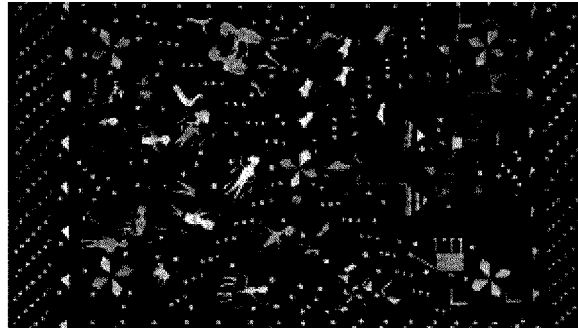


Figure 4: Sainchi Phulkari

**Nilak**, as the name indicate, it is type of blue color. This phulkari is done on blue khaddar with embroidery of yellow and crimson pat though glaring but exhibit beautiful contrast color combination. Sometime it is also done on black khaddar. The motifs used in this phulkari are of like comb, fan, umbrella and flowers. (Figure: 5)

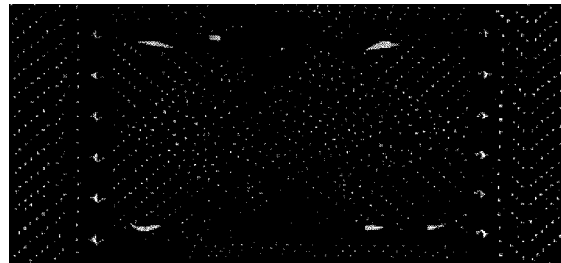


Figure 5: Nilak Phulkari

**Til Patra** is kind of phulkari which means sprinkled sesame seed, scarcely embroidered. It has numbers of tiny embroidered dots on the surface of khaddar. It is usually presented to the maids on their wedding or any other traditional occasions.

**Thirma** is a kind of phulkari made in white khaddar, commonly called thirma, a symbol of purity. It is preferably worn by older women and widows. The pat of subtle are used on the surface of the fabric. The type of phulkari is simple and the patterns are well organized. The design included floral and triangular patterns. The two main features are that it has two vertical zones on each side separated by a series of herringbone stitches with green thread and the pallu being embroidered. This phulkari represents the humble and indefinable life of older women and widows. (Figure: 6)

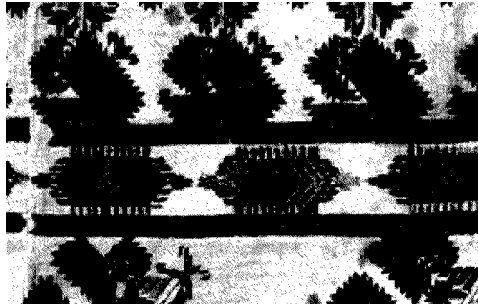


Figure 6: Thirma Phulkari.

Phulkari and Bagh had innumerable designs that showed imagination, originality and excellent knowledge of color mixing. Gulkherain di Phulkari was a phulkari flower because Gulkhera means phul khile hon (blooming flowers). The shapes and designs of Gulkherain can vary. The women refer phulkari to their local textual names such as Kapah di tindya (Cotton Balls) and Ladoo Phulkari (sweet Balls) (Anu, Shalina 2014).

#### Motifs of Phulkari

The most popular motifs of phulkari includes parantha boti, which looks like a flat bread square in shape. Tikoni boti is named because the boti which flower has triangular petals and gol boti is a flower with round edged petals. The motifs in Phulkari can be placed next to each other to form a pattern or jal. Dabbi jal is a pattern created when square boxes or check is created on the base of fabric and

one motif is placed in each dabbi. Another design patta boti (leaf motif) in which boti is used in whole design and patta is used on the borders of dupatta. Mor which is a peacock motif is used in many Phulkaris. Some other common names used for motifs are, bacha boti, burfi piece, veer-zara, gol kadhai (as it has a round circle in it), main phulkari and nau-phullon wala design (in which it has nine flowers).

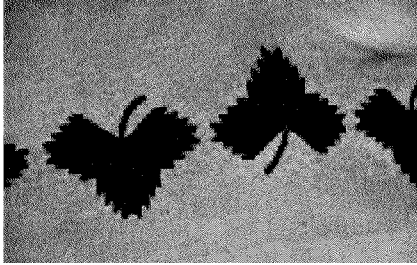


Figure 7 Chevron Flower Design

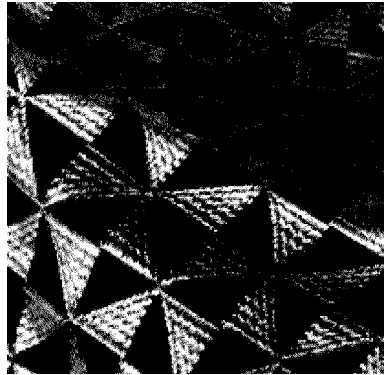


Figure 8: Dhabbi Jal.



Figure 9: Peacock Motif.

**Bagh phulkari** in which embroidery is so close that one cannot see the base of fabric. The Bagh's were designed in a very different way, with a single thread of

base material separating one design from the other. Bagh had carpet appearance due to the full coverage of the fabric with silk thread. The embroidered bagh in eastern Punjab was much more complicated and had golden pat. The Bagh's in western Punjab were very colorful and often had several shades of yellow, gold, orange, gulanari, angoori and white.

The bagh is the most precious of the phulkari completely covered with embroidery with a little show of background surface. It was embroidered by groom's grandmother to present it to the bride and it took years to finish it. Bagh is presented to the bride as a symbol of fertility: the new life becomes a garden filled with blooming flowers. From a historical point of view, it seems that it is only after a certain time that people are passionate about phulkari in the second half of the 19th century. Bagh cannot be considered as a technical outcome of the art of phulkari construction. Most silver and gold were used for embroidery. The symmetrical geometric accuracy of the design reflects the accuracy of the needle work. It present the social value and the status of the individual.

The most common patterns comes from everyday life and, as a result, it received very literal names, such as gobhi and mirchi bagh. Shalimar and chaurasia bagh are reminiscent of the famous Mughal gardens, while ikka bagh is inspired by playing cards (diamonds). Dhoop chaoon (sun and shade), laharya (wave, kite), saru (cypress), suraj mukkhi (sunflower), panchranga (five colors) and satranga (seven colors) are among the most common patterns. The dang bagh depicts a series of blue wavy stripes on a white background, while the chand bag recalls the play of moonlight with small white or beige lozenges on dark red field.

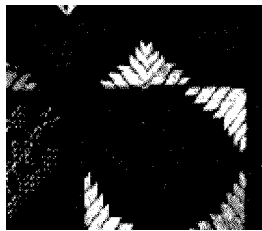


Figure 10: Bagh Phulkari.

The most celebrated baghs are as follow:

***Vari Da Bagh:***

Vari refers to as the clothes and jewelry presented to bride from the grooms's



side and bagh is the elaborately embroidered article made by the grandmother of the groom. It takes four years to complete as an important item of the vari. This special phulkari shawl symbolizes the responsibilities which the new member of the house has to take. Vari Da Bagh means the original home place of new bride. The bagh is the sepciality of west Punjab. The design of this phulkari is organized in such a way that as one side of the shawl is heavily embroidered, the other side has only one design unit. The systematic division of the design symbolizes that a new person is going to join a new group of people in her life.

The red ground fabric is covered with tiny lozenges, usually embroidered with yellow color. The whole surface is covered with diamonds, each enclosing a smaller diamond. In especially good pieces three sizes of concentric diamond are found, various pattern works in various colors. Apparently these patterns were divided into three parts. The outer part was associated with the year, the next one was linked with the city and the last was considered as a family house. (Figure: 11)

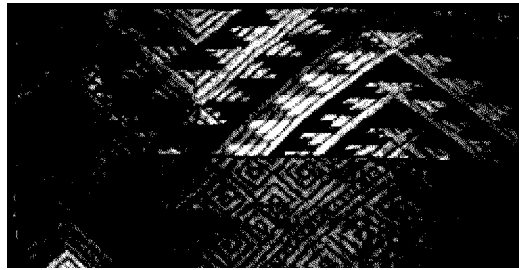


Figure 11: Vari Da Bagh Phulkari.

### ***Bawan Bagh***

Bawan Bagh is one of Phulkari's most complex styles with a spontaneous pattern for harsh events to come in one's life. In Punjabi, Bawan means fifty-two. It is a kind of mosaic that has fifty-two different geometric patterns. The whole surface is divided into fifty-two equal boxes embroidered with a different pattern and bright colors used. Shawl boarders have different types of designs. (Figure: 12)



Figure 12: Bawan Bagh.

### ***Kudi Bagh***

The patterns used in this bagh included the chains of small White Square which represented stylized cowries. The shells had been used as currency in old times but now it is only used for the purpose of ornamentation. The shells has resemblance with female genital. Kudi bagh were often worn by the female who want to increase their fertility. (Figure: 13)

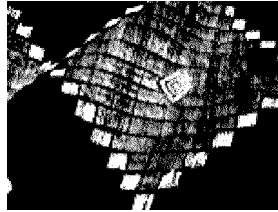


Figure 13: Kudi Bagh.

### ***Satranga Bagh***

As the name indicate satranga means seven color. The decoration of the bagh is done with seven colors. The satranga bagh is mainly used by the ladies on the occasion such as marriage ceremonies, engagements and the child birth. The bagh is highly decorated and inspired by the nature refers to the seven natural color of rainbow. The zigzag pattern give a sense of movement and sometimes the inspiration taken from Ralli (ethnic patchwork of rural areas). It has similar pattern lik Ralli, every motif stands on its individuality and rich in color. (Figure: 14)

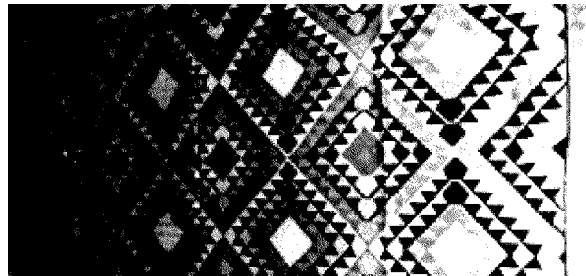


Figure 14: Satranga Bagh.

### ***Panchranga Bagh***

The panchranga bagh has five colors. This bagh is decorated with chevrons of five different colors. (Figure: 15)

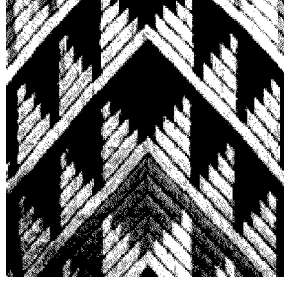


Figure 15 Panchranga Bagh.

***Meenakari Bagh or Ikka Bagh:***

This type of bagh is often made with gold and white colored pat. It is decorated with small multi-colored lozenges referring to enamel work (Meenakari) or diamond shape like playing card suit. (Figure: 16)

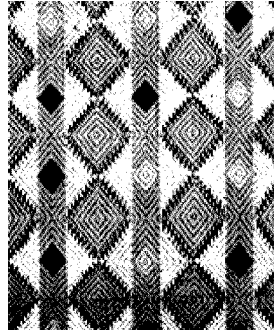


Figure 16: Meenakari or Ikka Bagh.

***Ghunghat Bagh:***

A special type of three cornered shawl used by the bride to cover her head. It is a traditional shawl to draw ghunghat (Veil) in presence of elderly people. The embroidery is done in triangular patches. In eastern Punjab a similar bagh is known as sar-pallu, it has elaborate embroidery. The background is in red color on which golden yellow and multi colored motifs are used. (Figure: 17)

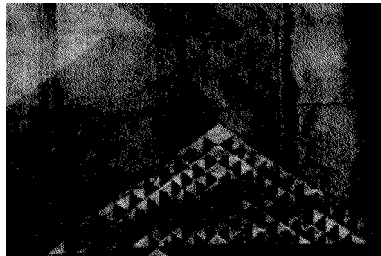


Figure 17: Ghunghat Bagh

***Velanian Da Bagh :***

The name of this bagh is given on the basis of the traditional motif, rolling pin which is kitchen device, quite a popular motif. The design have rows of roling pins which are distinguish through various color combination. The rolling pins are sometimes insert with consecutive rows of zig-zag lines or small circular lozenges, which produce the image or shape of rolling pin. (Figure: 18)

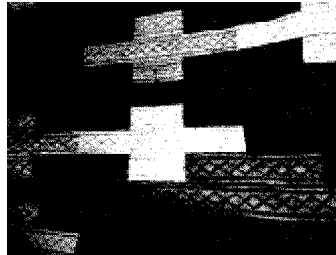


Figure 18: Velanian Da Bagh.

***Suraj Mukhi Bagh (Sunflower Bagh):***

The Suraj Mukhi Bagh is covered with geometric designs, built up with lozenges, each composite lozenge has three small lozenges which are arranged diagonally. These lozenges have another smaller lozenges in the center, the outline is emphasized with dark color. The boarder and the outer most lozenge is lined out with double running stitch. It is popular in eastern Punjab. (Figure: 19)

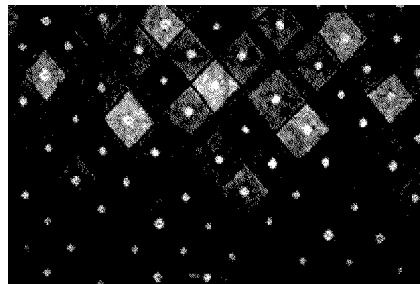


Figure 19: Suraj Mukhi Bagh.

***Phulkari Work in Multan:***

The city of Multan has a rich historical past and has hosted various cultures including the Indus, Greek Mauryan, Gupta, Muslim and then British Empires. The most notable influence on the culture of Multan came from the Sufi tradition in the Subcontinent. From twelfth century onwards, the cultural developments in

Multan were characterized by the Sufi doctrines and poetry. The city is blanketed with shrines, tombs and mosques. The Sufi tradition would have contributed to the development of crafts in the region since most of the crafts particularly the thread craft are associated to cultural events that largely draw their substance from Sufi teachings.

The thread crafts of Multan, broadly speaking, are an expression of human desire to decorate himself. Wilferd Lambert, an expert on ancient cultures, establishes that the most ancient decorative expressions, whether in terms of surrounding, built environment or human body are intimately connected to religion, mythology, magic, and identity. Amar Tayagi while exploring the handicraft tradition of India also emphasized that people decorated themselves with feathers, seeds, cowrie shells and stones with a belief that they contributed to their power over things. Both these claims suggest an important link between crafts and cultural formation. A brief overview of history reveals that as we entered into civilization, aesthetic considerations seeped into cultural formations. Mankind moving beyond mere necessity and belief, started using decoration for beautification, however, with an underlying paradigm of consolidating personal, cultural, social or political identity.

Thread crafts of Multan is one of the major crafts of subcontinent and is popular because of its religious, mythological, political, cultural and aesthetic paradigms which nurtured the desire of decoration of human instincts from primitive times. Thread crafts have a rich ideological basis, colour symbolism and express a diversity of techniques and forms. This study will be focusing on the analysis of the thread crafts of Multan from aesthetic point of view particularly, Embroidery; and the most used pattern of Phulkari. Embroidery work developed in Multan with a distinct identity, which expresses the rich cultural heritage of the region.

The city of Multan is rich in culture in which textiles plays an important role. The city is hub of various crafts such as pottery, tile and embroidery work. Tahira Khan a local resident of Multan, who is experienced in embroidery work and in phulkari. She has experience of over twenty years and she knows about different stitches which have been used in various areas of Multan. The Pashtun tribe in

Multan has a tradition of making embroidery shawl Sargah for bride which is presented to her on her wedding day. The different casts of Pashtun like Gardezi, Khakwani and Durrani's are usually owns this tradition. The sargah is made in different styles which has the white base color and embroidered with multicolored thread. The shawl is decorated with darning stitch along with many other stitches. The overall look of sargah is similar to the baghs of phulkari. Each region in Punjab has different kinds of Phulkari Baghs. The visual communication through embroidery is a tradition which dates back to ancient civilizations. Khan is also planning to open a boutique to exceed her business on big level to get commission work. Khan lives near Ghanta Gher Mohala Kiri Akhwanan, Abdali Road and according to her the main center of embroidery work is Nang-Shah which is near to Multan. Twenty to twenty five homes linked with embroidery tradition in Nang-Shah.

There is another woman who was working for thirty to forty years she is old now and not able to work further. Her name is Kulsoom and she lived in Rasheedabad. In Multan, Adda bili wala and Laar there are ten to fifteen women who are working in embroidery. She said initially we have to choose fabric, colour, design with my own sensibility keeping local aesthetics because in villages people like dark and bright colour and in big cities people like light colors. She also said that I invest a lot of money in experimentation of different design and combinations to make sample to get order. According to her this profession needs a lot of time, money, aesthetic sensibility and trips to villages and then different cities to make clientage. There are also centers in Government level, for instance, Poli-technical College Mumtazabad, Shehnaaz Bibi works there for ten years and she trained so many students in that time period. Sanat Zaar is also another center of embroidery and other local crafts to gave skills to girls and women to earn money.

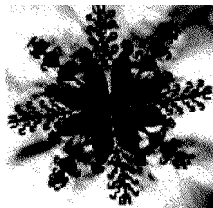


Figure 20: Floral Motif of Sargah.



Figure 21: Sargah, Phulkari Shawl.

The traditional shawl sargah is not exactly phulkari bagh but it has many similar motifs of Phulkari and stitches as well. The most famous motif used in Sargah is Gula-sita, it is like a corn. The shawl has mirror work along with Gota work and various stitches. The base color is white but it is embroidered in multi-colored thread. The modified form of Phulkari has the resemblance with chope phulkari. The pattern of triangle is similar like many other phulkari baghs. The bagh phulkari are associated with traditional wedding ceremonies and sargah is one of that kind.

#### Conclusion

The study concludes that the crafts created over the centuries never really die. Crafts are invented and reinvented depending on the demands. The phulkari is losing its original form but yet it is still practicing in Multan in a modified way. Now original phulkari work is hard to see. The designs are not as intricate and delicate as it had been. Women are no longer investing their time in making of fabric and Phulkari. The mass production of today's phulkari do not have either quality or the purpose for which it was started. The richness of rural art was transformed on fabric through embroidery. The dying art of phulkari should be revived at various levels.

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