

Techniques and Stitches Used in Traditional Phulkari Embroidery: An In-depth Exploration

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Abstract:

Phulkari embroidery is a uniquely vibrant and intricate craft hailing from the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. This research paper delves into the techniques and stitches employed in traditional phulkari embroidery, shedding light on the rich heritage, cultural significance, and artistic brilliance of this time-honored craft. Through the examination of historical records, interviews with artisans, and analysis of existing phulkari works, the paper aims to present a comprehensive overview of the different stitches and techniques used in phulkari embroidery, along with their applications and regional variations.

Keywords: Phulkari, embroidery, craft, heritage, traditional.

Introduction:

Phulkari embroidery is an integral part of Punjabi culture, cherished not only for its aesthetic appeal but also for its cultural significance and expressive storytelling. Through the centuries, phulkari has evolved, adapting to changes in fashion and design but still retaining its traditional essence. This paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the various techniques and stitches employed in this art form, highlighting regional specialties, patterns, and narratives.

Historical Overview

Phulkari embroidery is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Punjab region, which spans across present-day India and Pakistan. The word "phulkari" itself translates to "flower work" in Punjabi, reflecting the prominent use of floral motifs in this art form. While the exact origins of phulkari are still debated, its history can be traced back several centuries. One theory suggests that phulkari embroidery originated as early as the 15th century, during the reign of Emperor Akbar in the Mughal Empire. It is believed that the art was introduced to the Punjab region by the Mughals, who were known for their intricate textile traditions. Over time, phulkari evolved and absorbed influences from various cultures, including Persian and Central Asian embroidery styles. Women in rural areas would create phulkari as a form of artistic expression during their leisure time or while working in the fields. The tradition of "shagun," where phulkari embroidered textiles was given as gifts during weddings and other auspicious occasions.

Phulkari Techniques

Ground fabrics used in phulkari embroidery

Traditionally, phulkari embroidery was done on hand-woven fabrics like khaddar (a coarse, hand-spun cotton) or malmal (a fine, lightweight cotton muslin). These fabrics were locally produced and readily available, making them ideal for embroidery.

The choice of fabric was crucial as it determined the final look and feel of the phulkari piece. Khaddar, with its textured surface, allowed the embroidery to stand out more prominently. On the other hand, malmal's delicate weave provided a smoother canvas for intricate stitches.

Over time, as commercial textiles became more accessible, phulkari artisans began incorporating other fabrics such as silk and synthetic materials. However, traditionalists still prefer to work on hand-woven fabrics, as they possess a unique quality and authenticity.

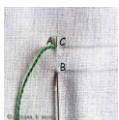
-Thread selection

Traditionally, phulkari embroidery employs silk threads known as "pat" or "paat" to achieve its characteristic vibrancy and sheen. These threads are hand-spun and hand-dyed using natural dyes, giving them a unique luster. The choice of thread color is significant in phulkari, as different colors hold symbolic meanings. Red, symbolizing fertility and auspiciousness, is the most commonly used color in traditional phulkari embroidery. Other colors such as yellow, blue, green, and white also find their place in phulkari designs, each representing different emotions, traditions, or cultural beliefs.

In contemporary phulkari, artisans may also incorporate synthetic threads for practicality and cost-effectiveness. However, there is a growing movement to revive the use of natural silk threads, acknowledging their historical authenticity and superior quality.

Major Phulkari Stitches

- Satin stitch



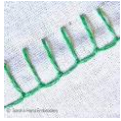
- Holbein stitch



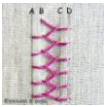
- Herringbone stitch



- Buttonhole stitch



Cretan stitch



Phulkari embroidery is not just a form of art but also a medium of self-expression for the people of Punjab. It embodies their emotions, beliefs, aspirations, and cultural traditions. Each phulkari design has its own symbolic meaning, reflecting the cultural ethos of Punjab.

Symbolic Motifs and Their Connotations:

1. Flowers: Flowers are the primary motif used in phulkari embroidery. They represent the beauty of nature and symbolize love, vitality, and prosperity.
2. Fish: The fish motif in phulkari symbolizes fertility, abundance, and prosperity. It is also believed to be a sign of good luck in some cultures.
3. Peacock: The peacock motif represents grace, beauty, and pride. It also symbolizes protection and is often used in phulkari embroidery on newborn baby clothes.
4. Sun: The sun motif symbolizes brightness, warmth, and rejuvenation. It also represents the life-giving power of the sun and is often used in phulkari designs on home textiles.
5. Trees: Trees are a symbol of life and prosperity in phulkari embroidery. They represent the abundance of nature and are often used in designs on shawls and dupatta.

Role of Phulkari in Expressing Emotions, Beliefs, and Aspirations:

Phulkari embroidery played an essential role in expressing the emotions of the people of Punjab. It was considered a way to convey love, protection, and blessings for the recipient. Phulkari embroidery was also used to express the belief and aspirations of the women of Punjab. It was a way to showcase their artistic skills and creativity.

Phulkari was also used to mark significant life events, such as weddings and births. It was considered an auspicious gift and was often given as a token of love and good wishes. The embroidery was also used to express grief and sorrow during funerals, with the black-colored phulkari used to symbolize the sadness of the occasion. Phulkari, with its symbolic motifs and connotations, was a powerful medium of communication for the people of Punjab. It helped them express their emotions and beliefs, reflect their cultural identity, and pass on their traditional values and practices to future generations.

Conclusion:

Phulkari embroidery is an art form that not only showcases intricate craftsmanship but also carries the cultural heritage and traditions of generations. By analyzing the techniques and stitches used in traditional phulkari embroidery, this research paper aims to preserve and promote the knowledge and appreciation of this remarkable craft. Understanding the historical, cultural, and artistic aspects of phulkari can foster an increased awareness and admiration for this captivating form of embroidery. Phulkari embroidery, with its rich historical origins, relies on carefully selected fabrics and meticulous fabric preparation. The choice of fabric and threads contributes to the overall aesthetic and symbolism of the phulkari piece. Understanding the traditional techniques and materials used in phulkari embroidery is crucial for preserving the integrity and authenticity of this treasured cultural art form.

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