

Phulkari

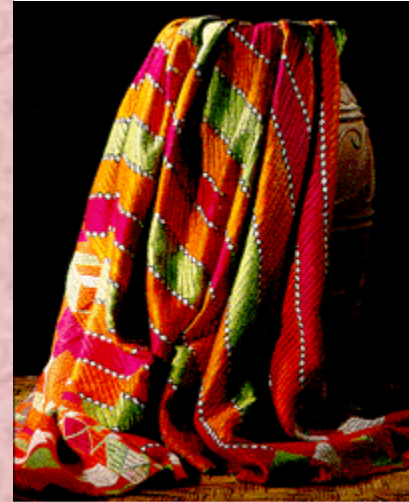


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INTRODUCTION

Phulkari, meaning flower work, is a spectacular style of embroidery peculiar to **Punjab**. Almost every ceremony in which women participate is given a touch of additional colour and richness by the use of Phulkari on account of its being considered auspicious and a sign of 'Sohag'.



Origin

The origin of Phulkari is not quite fully known. Some say that the art was brought by Gujar nomads from Central Asia whereas some assert that the Muslim Persians who settled in Kashmir are responsible for it. It may have some association with Gulkari of Persia which was practiced there. It is also said that the jats, the strongest clan in South-east Punjab who are agriculturists, introduced the art of Phulkari wherever they went.

Historical perspective

One may find references to Phulkari as early as 2000 years back in the **Vedas**. In the popular Punjabi folklore **Heer-Ranjha**, the art of Phulkari has been mentioned by the poet **Waris Shah**. The Phulkari gained its present form way back in the 15th century in the reign of **Maharaja Ranjit Singh**. It was evolved in many different forms and there was one different design for every occasion. The knowledge of this art was passed on from one generation to the other and it was not for sale at that time. Phulkari was considered auspicious and was generously used in wedding trousseau.

The tradition of embroidery in india goes back to the early scriptures of **ajanta murals** ,**buddhist and kushan sculptures**.



Base Cloth

The beauty of Phulkari depended a great deal on the colour of the ground material. Khaddar cloth which was hand spun and hand woven cotton material, was always used for embroidery. The colour was mostly red, white, blue , black & brown.

The cloth primarily used and preferred by the women, was the home-spun, locally woven and dyed khadi.

It was strong, long-lasting, and cheap and served the purpose of keeping the wearer warm during winters. Another reason was that the embroidery involved the counting of threads while doing the straight darn stitch

The coarse weave made this task easier. In addition, the thick cloth did not pucker and pull and could be worked upon without a frame. Usually, pieces of small width, about 45 to 60 centimeters, were worked on separately and the two or three strips were joined together to form the required size.

Thread used

The thread used was pure silk. It is untwisted silken floss called PAT. Golden yellow, green, white, crimson red and orange are the five colours used for Phulkari work.

Stitch used

Mainly long and short darning stitches are used. The usual length ranges half-one fourth of inch. Stem, chain and herringbone stitch are used. Double running and satin stitch are also used. Edging is done by buttonhole and joints of base fabric done with herringbone stitch.

Motifs Used

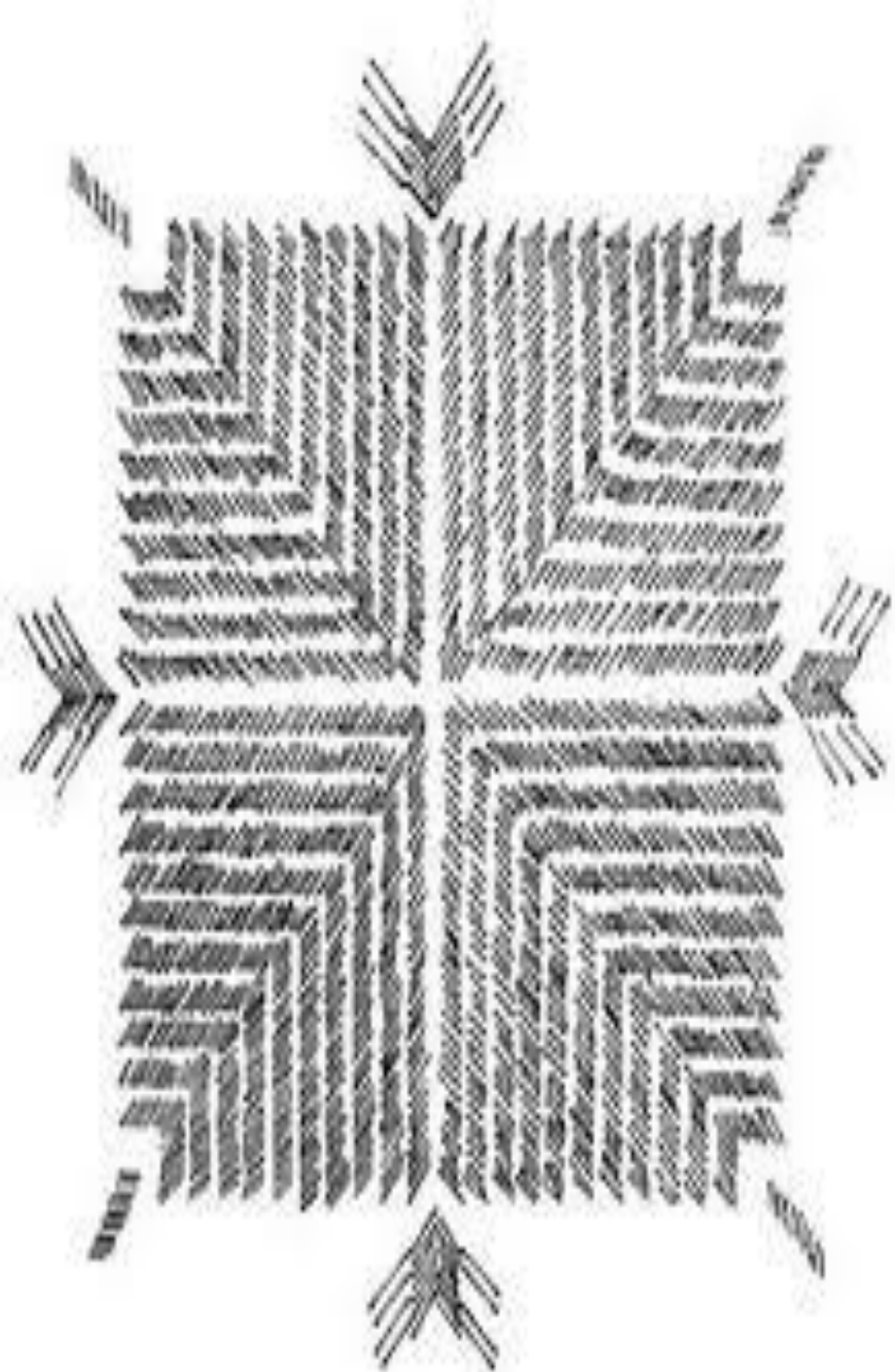
Beginning with geometrical patterns, flowers and leaves, the collection of motifs was constantly enlarged.

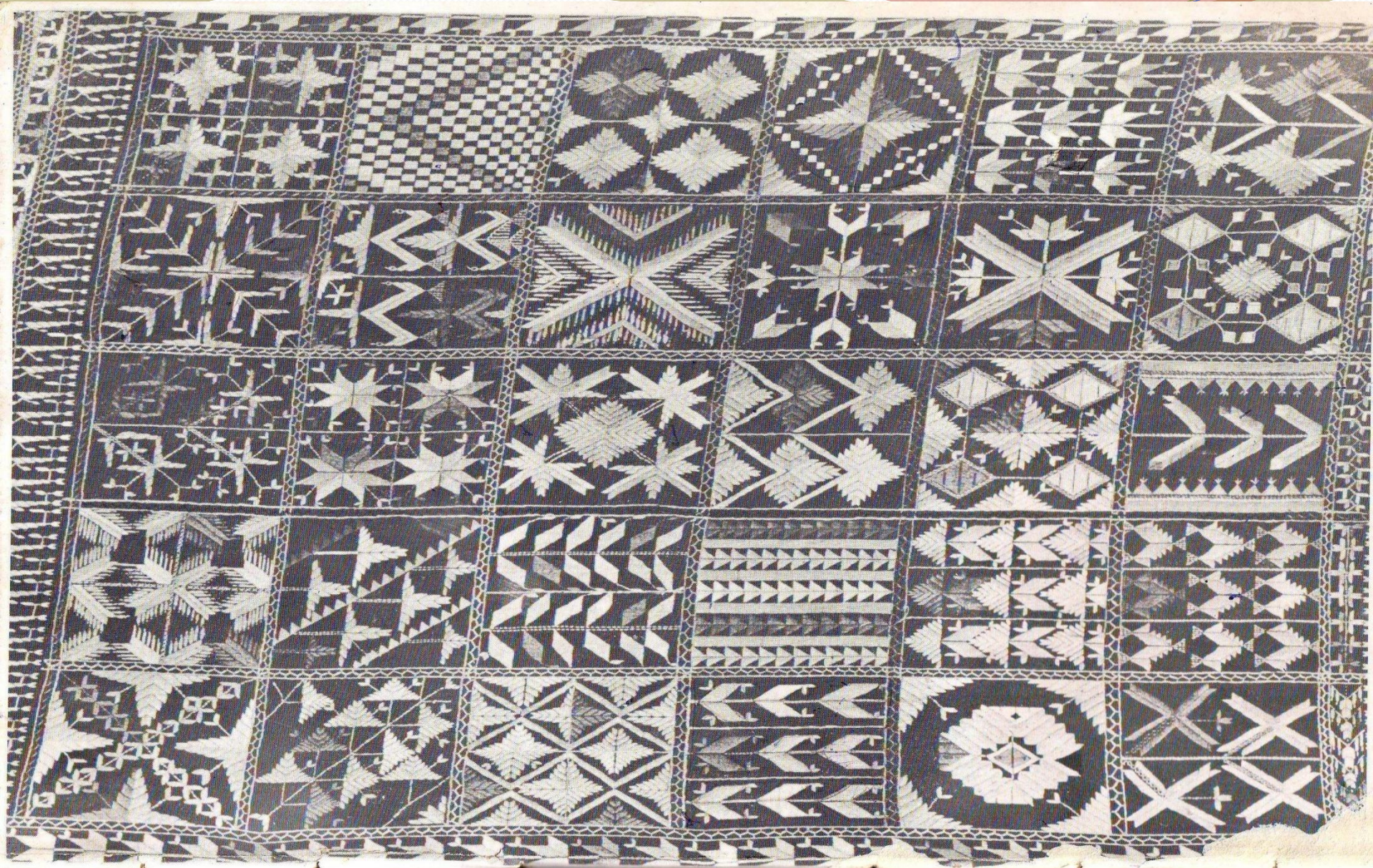
Birds, **animals** and **human figures** and **objects of everyday use** were inducted, along with **vegetables**, **pots**, **buildings**, **rivers**, the **sun and the moon** & scenes of village life. Phulkaris and baghs came to be embroidered in a stunning range of exquisite designs.

In dhoop chaon, which literally means "sun and shade", an amazing interactive display of light and shade was created.

Lotus, cotton, sunflower, orange, muskmelon, pear mango, dates are common. Few vegetables like brinjal, chili, pumpkin, cauliflower are also used. Rabbit, pig, frog, tortoise, camel, horse and elephant, hen, chicken, pigeon and owl are also used.

The designs remained earthy and true to life.





Phulkari patterns

Procedure

The phulkari stitch derives its richness from the use of **darning stitch**, placed in different directions - vertical, horizontal and diagonal.

Embroidery is done from the wrong side. The pattern is controlled by counting of thread, but quite often the outline of pattern is embroidered on the cloth in green thread.

The needle picks up only one thread at a time, so that the back of pattern is delineated with single lines of color in extremely fine stitches. In the front the stitch ranges from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ cms in size.

The stitching is done with silk thread, though occasionally cotton threads in white and green are introduced, and sometimes even woollen.

Double running stitch or chain stitch is used to outline the figures of human beings, animals and birds.

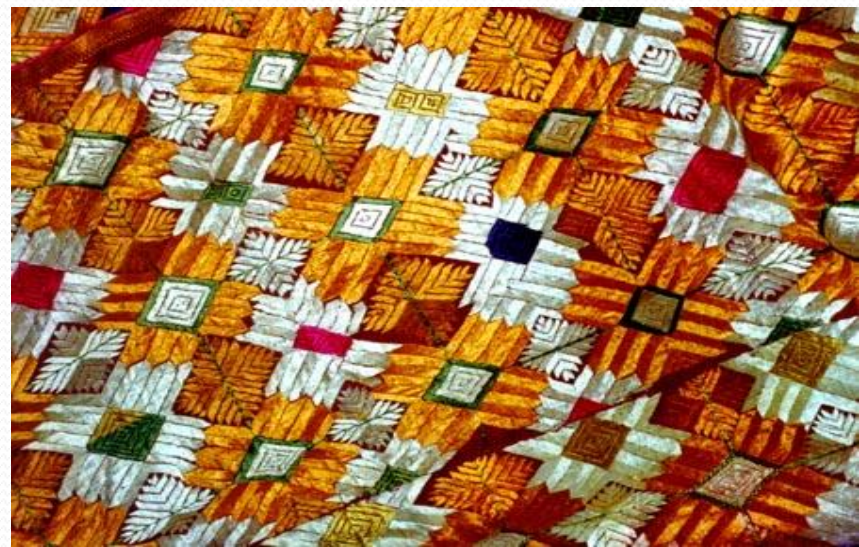
Satin stitch and herring-bone stitch is used on edges and borders.

Difference b/w phulkari and bagh

Phulkari : the ornamentation is dispersed ,mostly diapered with large areas of field colour . The designs are floral in character with few geometrical patterns .



Bagh : the whole field is covered with PAT or silk and not even a thread of base fabric is visible with beautiful blending colours chiefly in two shades with geometric and diapering designs .



Varieties of phulkari

Chope :

Chope is red coloured phulkari presented by grandmother of bride at wedding. Triangular design are embroidered with golden yellow pat.

Chope is draped around bride at the time of 'Chura Charna'.



Suber: Suber is a phulkari worn by a bride during marriage rites. It comprises five motifs, one in the center and one each in the four corners.



Darshan dwar: (the gate offering a view of the deity): is usually for presentation in temples or to adorn the walls of the home when the Granth Sahib (holy book of the Sikhs) is brought to a house.

The gate motif has been inspired by the arched verandahas of the temples. It is again, always on a red cloth. The architectural design depicts two outer panels of all gates with arched tops. The bases face each other with motifs of humans, animals, birds, flowers etc., giving the impression of passing through a crowded street.

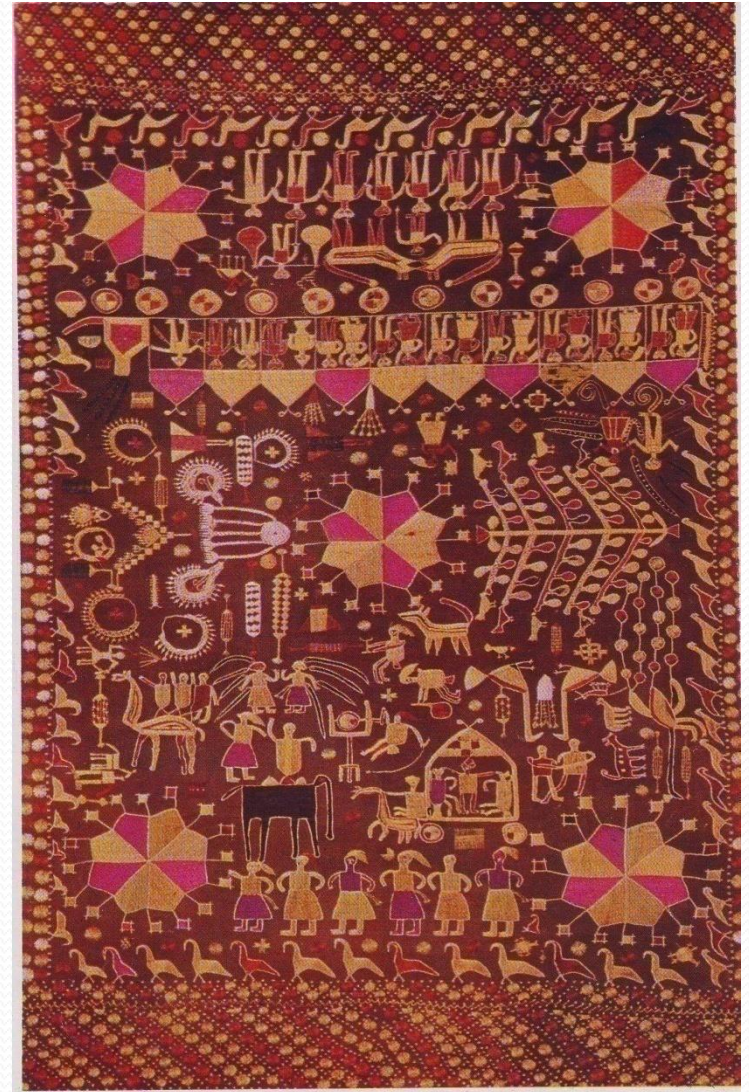


Chamba: is a hybrid phulkari having a series of wavy creepers, stylized leaves and flowers. It came into vogue earlier this century.



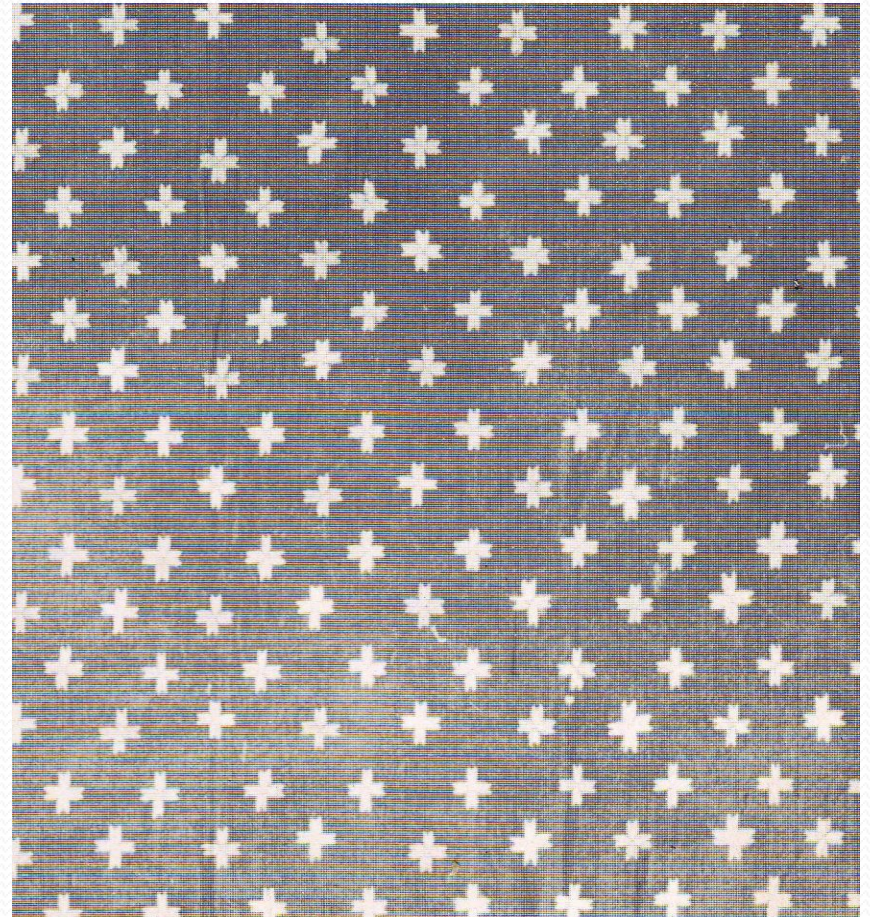
Sainchi: They are coloured representations on a red ground of human figures, beasts, village scenes and so on, without symmetry and end borders. The black, dark brown or, very rarely, blue grounds, are symmetrically drawn. Here we often see a pattern of five lotus flowers - a large, vibrant blossom in the centre, the other four in the corners.

Various traditional ornaments show that sainchi phulkari played a part in the wedding ceremony. Abstract peacocks often appear in the end borders, contributing to the symmetry, while in between are yet more animals and objects, randomly completing the design.



Til patra: they are shawls with very little embroidery and are of inferior quality khaddar with til seed designs .

They have only a sprinkling of a few loose far apart stitches on field and pallao . It was traditional custom to give servants presents during marriages and auspicious occasions .



Nilak :is worked on **black or navy blue khaddar** with yellow and crimson red PAT. The nilak is pretty phulakri shawl and looks very attractive. This is popular among peasant women .

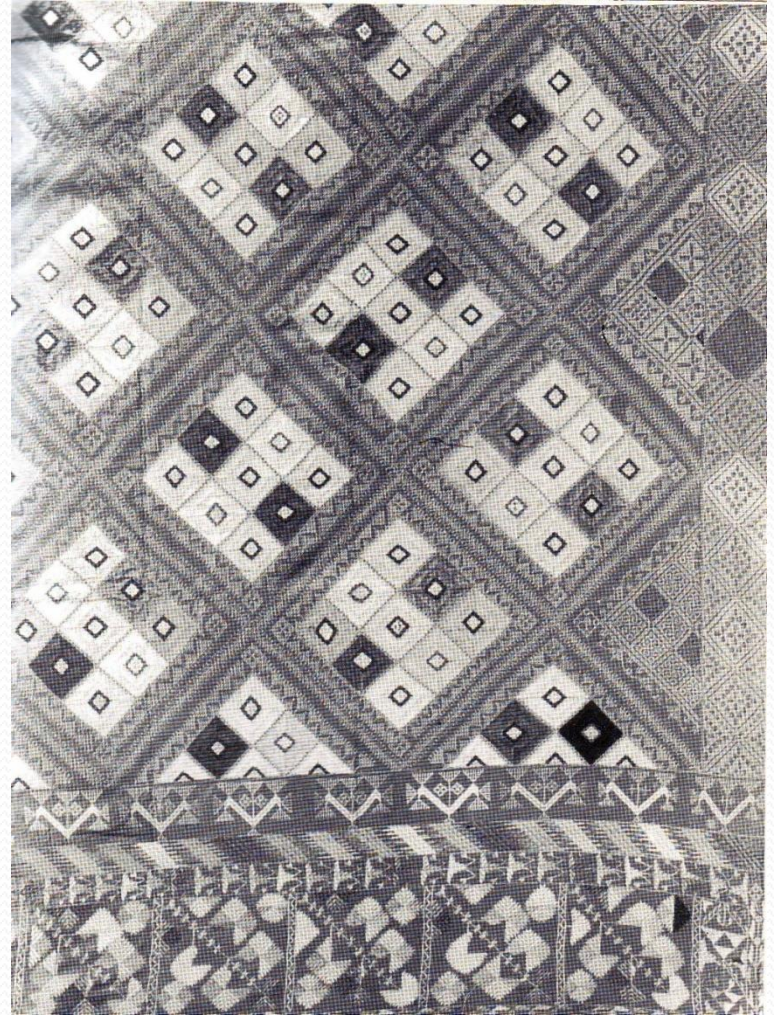
Sheeshedar phulakri:

In this small round pieces of mat, dull, not bright mirrors are adorned . The whole world seems to be reflected in these tiny mirrors they are popular in Hissar and Hansi.

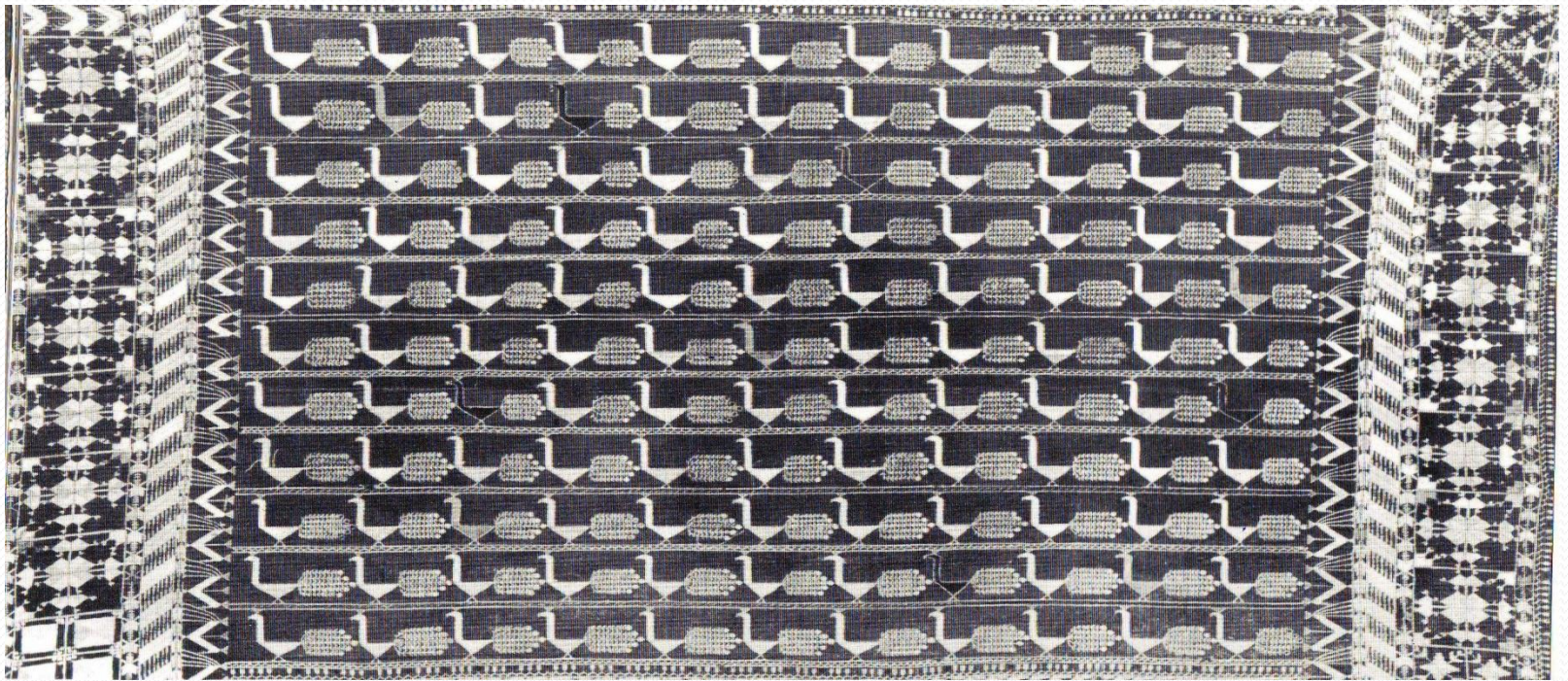


Surajmukhi

(sunflower) is a cross between a chope and ordinary bagh in brilliant yellow, which creates a stunning effect.

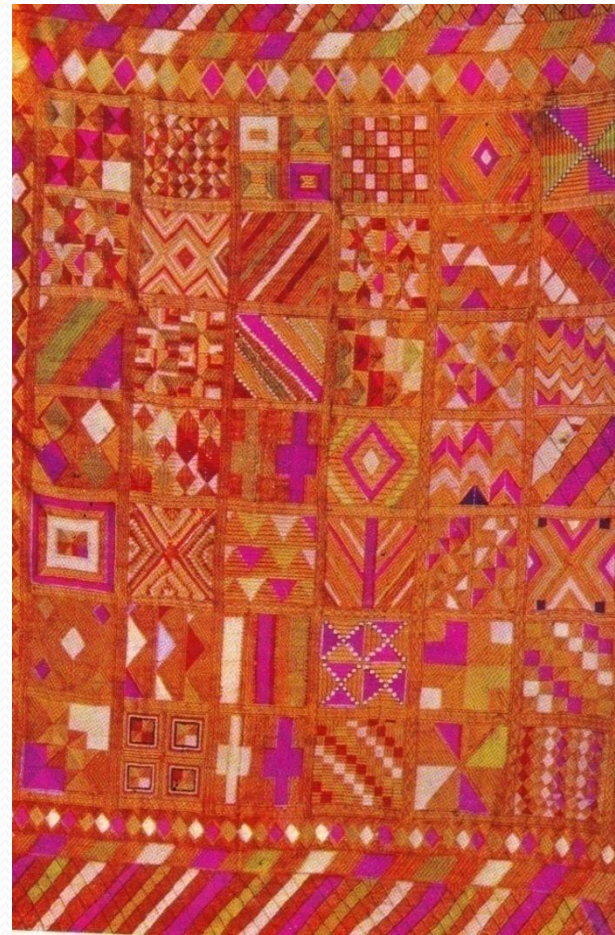


Mor or tota: is one that has a peacock or parrot motif.



Varieties of Bagh

Bhawan bagh :The *bawan bagh* is very rare as only a few women were able to fashion this type. Bawan means the number 52; in these pieces we usually find 52 different patterns. The field is subdivided into 42 or 48 rectangles, each containing a different multicoloured motif. The remaining four or ten motifs are placed in the side or end borders.



Vari-da-bagh :(bagh of the trousseau) is also on a red cloth with golden yellow embroidery symbolizing happiness and fertility.

The entire field is covered by small *lozenges* and each lozenge contains inside another small lozenges .Different patterns are embroidered on side borders and pallus with multiple colors .it is draped over daughter in law immediately after marriage rites are over.



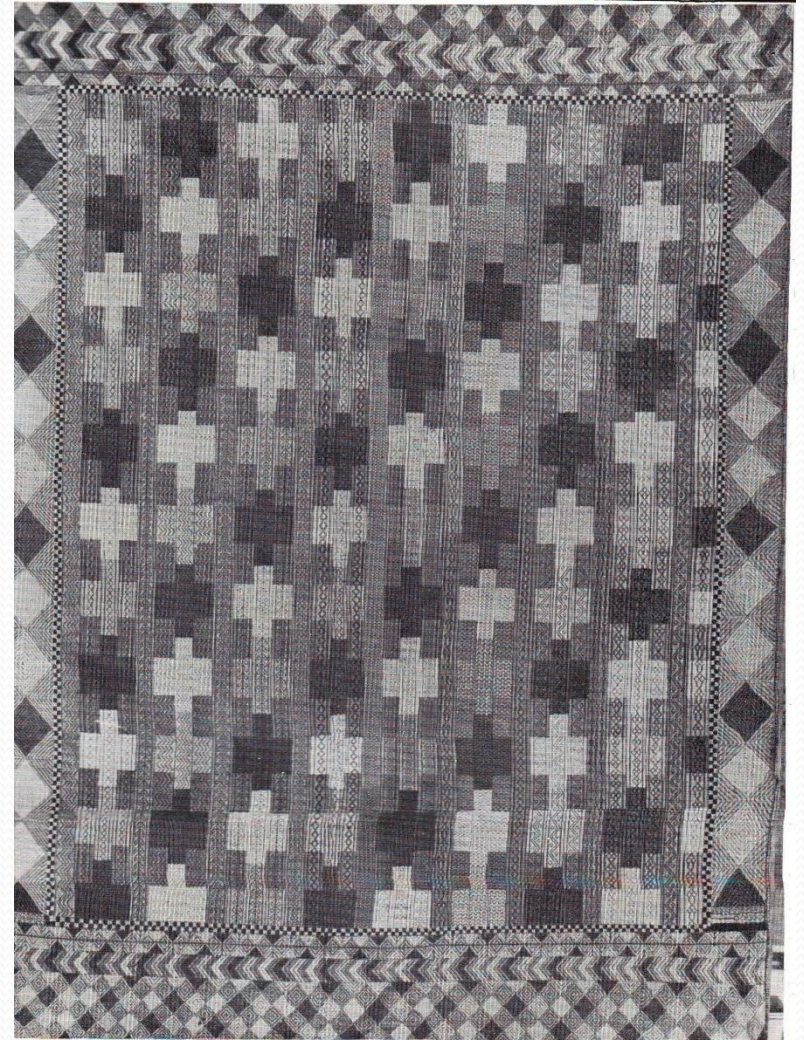
Ghunghat bagh: or sari-pallau (covering for the head) has a small border on all four sides. In the center of each side, which covers the head, a large triangular motif is embroidered preferably in one color.

Other varieties of bagh

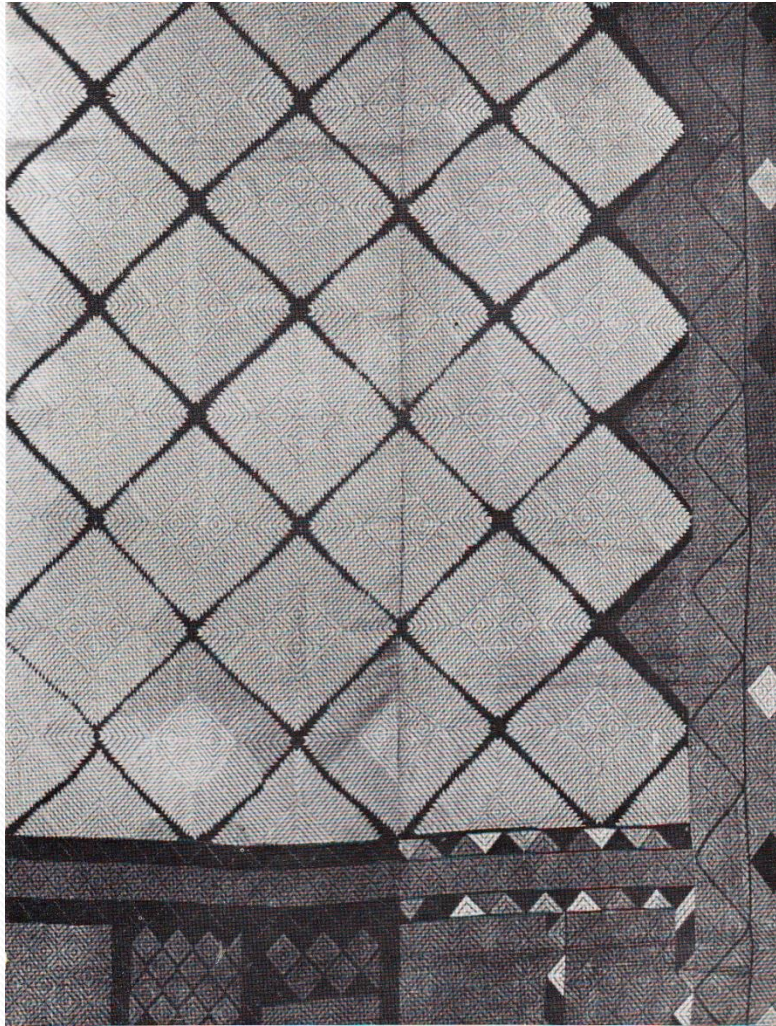
- Shalimar bagh
- Kakri bagh
- Mirchi bagh
- Karela bagh
- Dhunia bagh
- Wheat bagh
- Gobi bagh
- Asharfi bagh(gold coin)
- Belan bagh
- Ikka bagh
- Sheesha bagh(mirror)
- Dhoop chhon bagh(sunlight and shade)
- Lahriya bagh(waves)
- Patedar bagh(stripes)
- Chand bagh(moon)
- Patang bagh(kite)
- Saru bagh(cypress tree)
- Pachranga bagh(five colored)
- Satranga bagh(seven colored)
- Dariya bagh(river)
- Genda bagh(marigold)
- Motia bagh(jasmine)



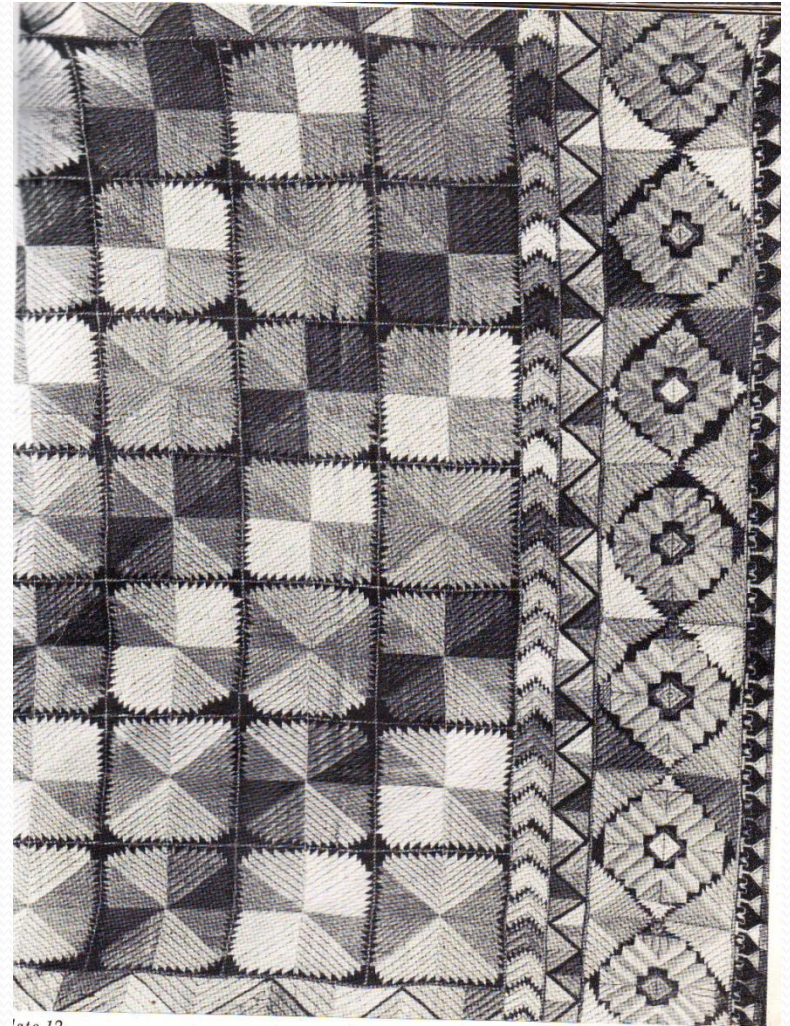
Mirchi bagh



Belan bagh



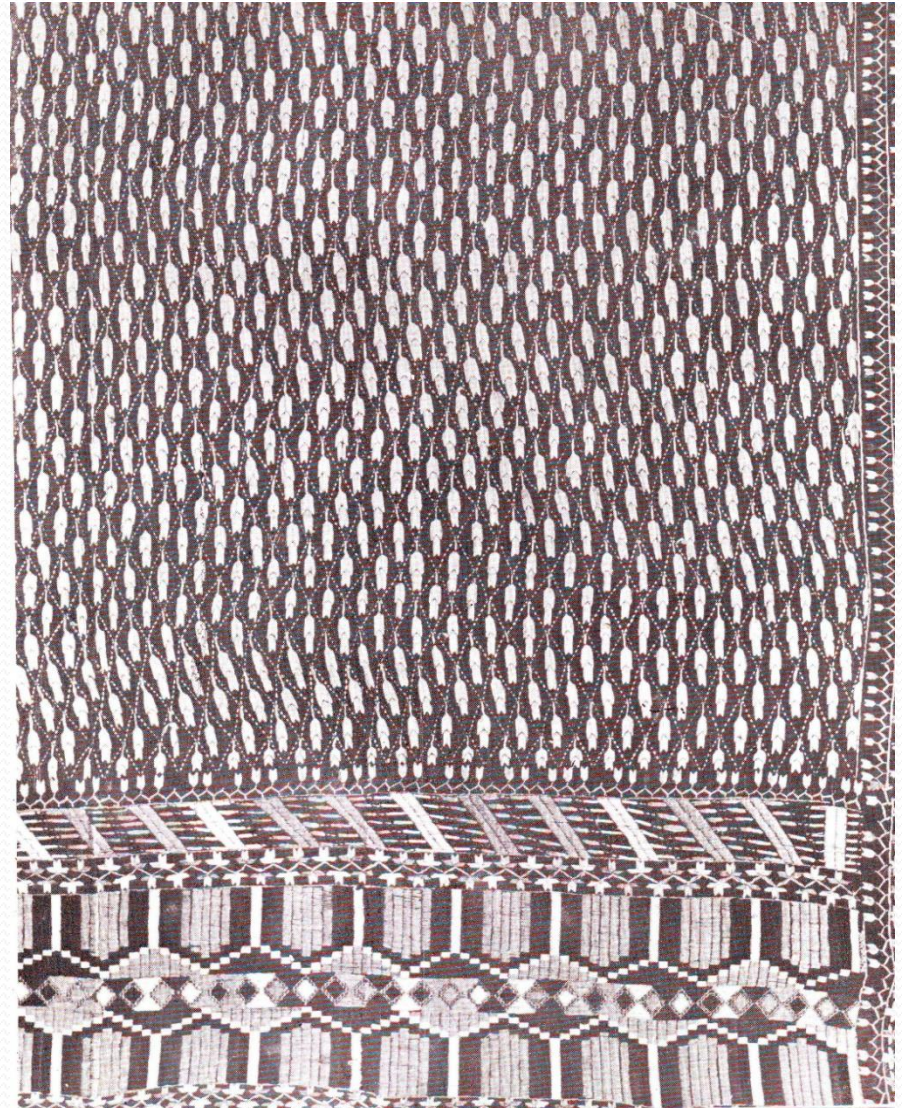
Chand bagh



Dhoop Chhaon bagh



Lehriya bagh



Wheat bagh

Articles

Average size of phulkari and bagh is 230cm x 180 cm. Chope phulkari is an exception . It is much larger in size than ordinary phulkari and bagh.

Articles made with phulkari are :

- Shawl
- Bed spread
- Wall decorations
- Drapery for deities
- Cover for holy scriptures

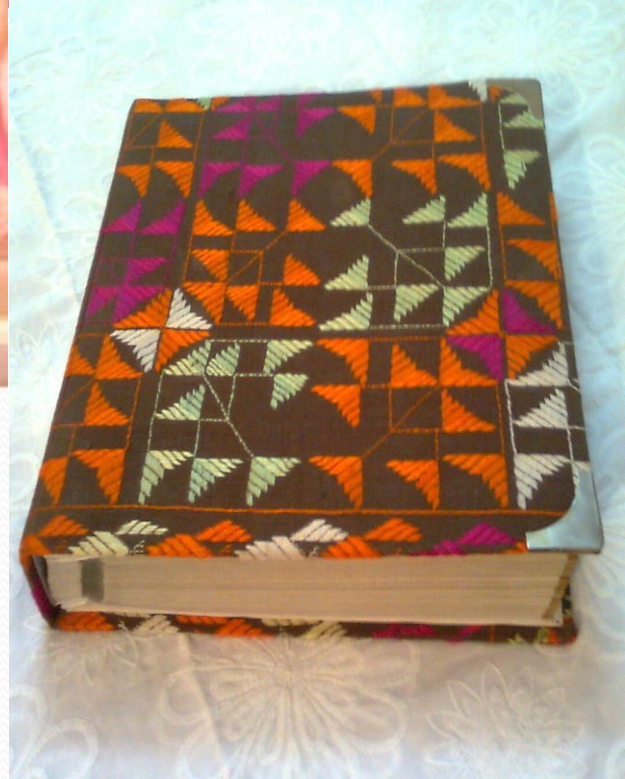
Phulakri is cut out to fashion into :

- Ladies coat
- Sarees
- Suits
- Lenhgas
- Juttis
- Purses

Phulkaris are exported and used as

- Curtains
- Piano covers





Phulkari -A Symbol Of Familial Ties

The women of Punjab created **phulkari** mostly for personal use. The cycle began with the young girl who followed her mother's chores and learned household work including this embroidery. When the girl got married, phulkari formed a part of her bridal trousseau. If a son was born to her, her mother would start preparing a *vari da bagh*, a gift she would present to her grand daughter-in-law.

The bagh was considered a symbol of marriage and among the wealthy families, sometimes up to fifty-one pieces of various designs were given to the bride. She, in turn, wore them for auspicious and ceremonial occasions. In some parts of Punjab, it was customary to drape the new mother with a bagh on the eleventh day after the birth of the child, when she left the maternity room for the first time.





Reflecting Emotions

With time, the **phulkaris** became closely interwoven with the lives of the women of Punjab. **The joys, sorrows, hopes, dreams and yearnings** of the young girls and women who embroidered the phulkaris were often transferred onto cloth. Many **folk songs** grew out of this expressive combination of skills and intense feelings. So, it is that one hears a young woman, whose betrothed has not sent a promised message to her, murmuring sadly, softly, as she *embroiders peacocks on a phulkari*. It was not long before phulkari folk songs became a part of the famous, pulsating **folk dances of Punjab - the gidda and the bhangra.**

Current scenario

Like most traditions of yore, embroidering a phulkari had taken a backseat. Neither was there an inclination nor the patience. The interest being taken by government craft centres, non-government organisations (NGOs) and heritage preservation societies is seeing the revival of the [embroidery](#).

Tripri, in Patiala district, is a place where large-scale work is being done. Due to such efforts over the past few years the demand for phulkari sees a major upswing during the wedding season when orders pour in from the non-resident Indian (NRI) population as well as from around North-India.

NGOs and other semi-government bodies working on orders are confident of phulkari touching the global scene and constantly innovate, crafting new products and motifs, all within the parameters of tradition.

References

- Savitri pandit (Indian Embroideries)
- S.S hitkari (phulkari –the folk art of punjab)



Thank you