

## From Silk to Synthetic Phulkari: The Long Journey of a Period Textile

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### Abstract

Present paper talks about a period textile called Phulkari, with reference to its revival in rural areas of Hazara, in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It is based on my three years of research work in Hazara in particular in village Noorpur of District Haripur. The art of silk embroidery on phulkari chaddars and baghs (women's shawls) originated in Punjab in 15<sup>th</sup> Century, whereas in Hazara it can be traced further back to the time of Greek rule in the area. In olden days phulkaris and baghs were part of the dowry given to a bride as a gift at the time of her wedding. An integral part of the Hazara culture, this custom slowly died down by 1950s owing to various factors, but regained popularity in the 1990s on a more commercial scale. A traditional phulkari was prepared putting in a lot of hard work spanned over months and years by the elderly women of the household, to be given to the daughters of the family on their weddings. The period Phulkaris were made for personal adoration with pure silk floss [pat] whereas the contemporary phulkaris made today for more commercial purposes have taken the shape of a commodity and are currently sold in both local and foreign markets. This new popularity is owing to their unfading lure, beauty and artistry to attract local and foreign buyers. The newly emergent trend of commercialization of this period textile, embroidered with synthetic silk floss, entails more profit motive than its original purpose of body-adornment and keeping a rural tradition alive. Although, numerous products are produced with phulkari embroidery in Hazara, for the purpose of this paper Phulkari only refers to women's chaddars or shawls prepared by using this particular type of embroidery.

**Key Words:** Phulkari, Bagh, Chaddar, Silk Embroidery, Hazara, Khaddar

### 1. Historical Background

The word *Phulkari* is a composite term of two Sanskrit words *phul* (flower) and *karya* (to do) and thus means "to do flower work," (Khurshid, 1992). When applied to folk embroidery, it stands for the ancient craft of embroidering flower designs with pure silk floss on a *chaddar* [women's shawl] of plain rough hand woven pure cotton cloth, called *khaddar* [*khadi*]. More recently, however, *khaddar* is prepared on power-looms and available locally and in all major city markets. Although *phulkari* is called a folk art of Punjab - the home of *phulkari*, (Khurshid, 1992 and Maskiell, 1999) it has traveled overtime to Hazara, Swat, Swat Kohistan and Chitral areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The history of Hazara *Phulkari* can be traced as far back as the Greek rule in the area (Khurshid, 1992, Trail, 1996) the present study only primarily investigates the contemporary Hazara *phulkari* [s]. *Phulkari* (flower work) existed at the same time in the neighboring regions of Swat and Punjab. The details of the spread of this stitch in Swat Kohistan, Swat Valley and Hazara are detailed by Ismail in her article, "A Stitch Travels: Embroidery in Swat Kohistan, Swat and Hazara" (Ismail, 2004). Women work in geometric patterns that were densely embroidered with untwisted silk floss to create different shades with the same colored floss, on a base of rough and handspun woven cotton (*khaddar*). Working from the reverse side of the fabric by counting threads, the darning stitch was used, (Rizvi, 2006).

Rizvi notes that "the women of the *jat* community are specialized in *phulkari* work... in all the districts of Punjab, wherever this community has settled down *phulkari* work has originated and flourished," (Rizvi, 2006). The peasant women of Tohtak, Hissar, Gurgaon, Rohtak, and Karnal are known for embroidering the best *phulkaris*. Rohtak (in India) is considered to be the home of *phulkari* work, she notes. Talking about the use of traditional colors in *phulkaris* she notes, "the base was either off white, indigo, madder, saffron yellow or brown. The fully embroidered shawls were called *baags* (garden) and were lovingly made by women of the household for a girl's wedding for months and years, in their free time," (Rizvi, 2006). Ismail also notes, the forced migrations of the Swatis from 15th century onwards to neighboring Mardan Basin, the Mansehra Valley, Hazara and Punjab have carried on the tradition of the darning stitch," (Ismail, 2004) the stitch used in making *phulkaris*.

She further notes “Here women embroidered articles of daily use as dowry and ceremonial gifts and of course, the all important covering shawl known as *phulkari*,” (Ismail, 2004). A review of literature on *phulkaris* show that simple embroidered *chaddars* of daily use were known as *phulkari* [s] or as *Til Patra Phulkari* (Khurshid, 1992). Whereas *baghs*, literally meaning garden full of flowers, were given and worn on auspicious occasions, such as wedding and birth of a son. Khurshid has distributed *phulkaris* in four major types: 1. *Phulkari* II. *Bagh Phulkari* III. *Chobe Phulkari* and IV. *Shishadar Phulkari*. For further details on types and uses of *phulkaris* see (Khurshid, 1992). More important from the perspective of the current paper she notes, “The best *Phulkari* and *Bagh Phulkaris* were known to have been made in Chakwal and Hazara area” (Khurshid, 1992). Talking about the evolution of *phulkari*, an article notes that “attempts at commercialization, left to impressive time saving patterns adopted in cheaper material that destroyed the genuine spirit of *Phulkari*,” Ismail in her article about this embroidery also notes the use of under quality fabrics and falling quality standards of *phulkari* (Ismail, 2004).

Traditionally *phulkari* embroidery, also now known as *jisti* embroidery in Hazara, was done to prepare a big *chaddar* or woman’s shawl fully covered with silk embroidery using *dorning* stitch, to be used by brides on their wedding day as a ceremonial veil. Such practices are found among some other groups as well, for instance among Rabbaris who use similar festive veil for brides called “*phulakia ludaki*” (Frater, 2003). Also mentioned by Bilgrami in her book *Tana Bana* as “*luddi*” (woman’s shawl) used by Kutchi Rabbaris of Nagarparkar in Tharparkar, Sindh (Bilgrami, 2004). *Phulkari* also called *Sirga*<sup>1</sup> and *Salari*<sup>2</sup> in some areas of Hazara, is prepared and given to a bride as a gift, is a tradition that has a history of about 700 years in rural areas of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (former N.W.F.P), also Chakwal and Hazara were famous for their exquisite *phulkari* work. The first evidence of *phulkaris* is found in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Sikh accounts and according to various sources, there is reference of *phulkari* in Vedas, Mahabharat, Guru Granth Sahib and folk songs of Punjab and ...in its present form, *phulkari* embroidery has been popular since 15<sup>th</sup> century. Beste also notes about commercial use and states, “commercial work only began in 1882, when Maharaja Ranjit Singh agreed the first export contract for *phulkaris* (Beste, 2009).

## 2. History and Revival of Contemporary Hazara Phulkari

### 2.1 History of *Phulkari* [s] in Hazara Area

According to Gul bibi, a master trainer of *Phulkari* from village Noorpur told, this form of embroidery was local to Hazara area for the last about 200 years. Locally the embroidery was called *raishum ka kam* (literally meaning work of silk) because it was done with *raishum* or untwisted silk floss (Rizvi, 2006), called *sucha* or *pat* in the old days. It is now replaced by a low quality synthetic silk floss made of viscose and polyester locally called *kucha*. Also it was done on local handspun cloth called *khaddar* produced from the cotton crop that was grown in this area in the past, including in village Noorpur. Also, dyeing was done using vegetable dyes prepared by women who used to bring certain local herbs and plants from adjacent hills to produce these dyes. Gul bibi told, now we do not have any knowledge of those dyeing plants that were used by women in olden times. Due to using natural dyes the colors of *khaddar* traditionally used were limited, predominantly yellow, black and green. She told *khaddar* is still produced locally and is available in Haripur market. Which was not the case as I investigated later, all *khaddar* sold here come from other cities. Only white and black colors are good for embroidery other colored *khaddars* are not liked by clients, so generally white and black locally available *khaddar* is used for *Phulkaris*. Also the thick (*mota*) and coarse quality of Haripur *Khaddar* is good to work with *phulkari* stitch but not liked in summers by the sophisticated city clients.

<sup>1</sup> Similar silk-embroidered head drapes are also called *Sirga* in some areas of Hazara, for instance in Kot Najibullah area which is on a short distance from Haripur. *Sirga*, I was told, is generally, yellow silk embroidery on yellow homespun *khaddar*, and given to girl on her wedding as a gift. She traditionally used to wear it on her *mehndi* (henna ceremony a day before the wedding) and also on the wedding day. Gul bibi told, her mother was given a *Sirga* on her wedding that she used and thrown away. Gul bibi herself, or her recently married daughters did not get any such article in their dowry. Her daughters only made pillows and hand fans with *phulkari* for their dowry.

<sup>2</sup> During my visit to Haripur market to interview silk floss (synthetic silk) sellers, I met Haji Abdul Ronaq from village Makhna, about 10 minutes from Haripur market. He told that his mother was given a silk embroidery *chaddar* we call *Salari Chaddar* in local Hindko language, as a gift on her wedding. According to him it is almost 100 years old *chaddar*, big in size, very elaborately embroidered. Made of handspun black cloth (probably *khaddar*) with shocking pink pure silk floss embroidery. He invited me to have a look at it, but due to no time, I could not see this old specimen of *Salari Chaddar*.

## 2.2 Revival of Contemporary Hazara *Phulkari*: with reference to village Noorpur

Talking about the particular case of village Noorpur, and the revival of contemporary Hazara *Phulkari*, Gul bibi informed that in this village no one knew this form of embroidery before a girl from this village went to Kot Najibullah (a village some 20 minutes distant) and learned *phulkari* from a very old woman of that village (no more alive). On her return to Noorpur, she taught this to Gul bibi and other women of the village. But due to no market for such embroidery locally and no outside marketing channel and income it did not flourish. Few pieces for household use or as dowry items for wedding of daughters were made occasionally. Gul bibi has been working with a national NGO since its inception in 1994. This NGO worked to revive and promote *phulkari* in rural Hazara in a major way. According to Gul bibi, one day the founder of the NGO came to visit this village and came to her house. She asked Gul bibi about what can women of this area do and what skills they have that could be marketed. Gul bibi told her about the *phulkari* embroidery done in the village. She told Gul bibi to prepare two *kurtas* (loose women shirts) so that she could try to sell them in Islamabad market. Those *kurtas* were sold on a good price in Islamabad and that's how the old folk art of *phulkari* was rediscovered in Hazara and took off in the shape of what is now also called *Jisti* [stitch] embroidery in rural Hazara.

According to Rizvi *jisti*, (a name given to *phulkari* embroidery by the NGO to make it unique for their own use) is the traditional embroidery stitch that is unique to Haripur area.

According to women who do this embroidery, traditionally any work done by hand was called *phulkari* in rural (Hazara) areas, and over a period of time this has come to be known as *phulkari*, due to its floral motifs.

According to women, in old days in villages of Hazara local people would call this kind of embroidery "*raishum wala kam*" (work of silk) it was also called *phulkari* in some areas as mentioned above due to its floral motifs. With the passage of time it came to be known as *phulkari* and now in all of Hazara the generic term used to refer to this kind of embroidery is "*phulkari*." The term also refers to the head-coverings or shawls for women made in this particular embroidery, called *phulkari* [s], this paper only primarily focus on these *phulkari chaddars* or shawls.

Around 1950s the tradition of using *phulkaris* and *baghs*, almost died down at the hands of various socio-economic factors, including a dislike for such an old custom of using heavy *phulkaris* and *baghs* among younger generation of women, and the labor-intensive process involved in producing a good piece over months and years. An increased demand for men working outside home, due to monetization of village economy, and an increase in women's workload in rural areas also contributed in inducing this change. Many parts of Hazara had cotton crop which was used to make the thread and weave *khaddar* cloth on handlooms, which is no more the case. Non-cultivation of cotton crop that used to be the source of handspun and hand-woven *khaddar* primarily used for making the lavishly embroidered silk *phulkaris* in Hazara added to the decline of this folk art and textile.

The two major types are "*phulkari*" and "*bagh* [*phulkari*]" The *phulkari* that is very heavily embroidered is called *bagh*, whereas a simple and less embroidered one is called *phulkari*. As also noted by Ismail, writing about the *baghs*, Ismail notes, "The Bagh is the most precious of *phulkaris*, completely covered with embroidery in which little of the background fabric shows. It was embroidered by the bridegroom's grandmother to present to the bride, and took years to complete" (Ismail, 2004). A similar period *bagh-phulkari* is shown in Figure 1, and another simple period *phulkari* is shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7. It is now rare to find any period *phulkaris* and *baghs* in rural Hazara.

The only shop that sells *khaddar* in Haripur market also sells *phulkari chaddars* in sufficient numbers, as was observed during my visit, probably the shop has contacts with rural women who come and sell their pieces for an income on regular basis. But according to my informant Gul bibi, these were not good quality *phulkaris* as the thread used was polyester variety that gets lint over time with use. In addition, embroidery is not done so intricately but using loose stitch, for quick completion and selling. Though, this could not be confirmed from village women who sell these pieces.

## 2.3 *Khaddar* [*khaddi*]: The Base Cloth used for *Phulkaris*

Traditionally the base cloth used for making *phulkaris* was the handspun and hand-woven cotton cloth called *Khaddar* [*khaddi*]. After hundreds of years the tradition of using *khaddar* as base cloth still continues in rural Hazara. The only change is that the *khaddar* used for contemporary *phulkaris* and *baghs* is machine made and not homespun or hand-woven any more.

Beste notes, “For *baghs*, ground fabrics of better quality are woven, called *chaunsa khaddar* (ca.15-18 threads/cm); Here warp and weft have the same thickness and the material is more supple than standard *khaddar*. A still finer texture was also used - *halwan* (ca. 22-25 threads/cm). produced only in Amritsar and Lahore. Weaving these clothes was much more time consuming, so women used it only for more costly pieces. *Halwan* is found more often in pieces from west Punjab, mainly Hazara and Rawalpindi (Michael, 2009).

In Haripur market, *khaddar* is now available in two popular colors, black and beige, and a small range of other colors like saffron, skin, red and white. Traditionally it was available in, green, red and saffron colors hand dyed by women. Talking about the color use in old Swati textiles, Ismail notes that “the dominant color of old *Swati* textiles is a deep indigo blue or a black hand-woven cloth (*khaddi*) embroidered with shocking pink or red silk floss,” (Ismail, 2004). This, she note, is a predominant color scheme in the northern mountainous regions, which was later adapted to black as the most practical color for women working for multiple tasks from morning to night. In contemporary *phulkaris* as well black is still a very popular color. During my various visits to rural Hazara, however, I have not seen any indigo blue base *phulkari* so far.

In Noorpur village I was told that in olden days women would go to the nearby wooded areas and collect herbs and plants that were used to prepare traditional vegetable dyes which were used to dye the *khaddar* cloth used for making *phulkaris*. Presently none of the younger generation of women have any knowledge about local herbs and plants for dyeing and no knowledge of traditional dyeing techniques. All dyeing of *khaddar* is done professionally nowadays in big cities and brought to Hazara markets. It is important to note here that Ismail while talking about the natural dyes in the remote mountainous areas says that yarn to be woven was sent to the village dyer to have it dyed in black... Silk floss was available in bigger markets in red or shocking pink... yellow floss was used in smaller quantities for outlining and was sometimes dyed at home. The use of this color palette, she notes is a tradition in Middle and Lower Swat... There is no documented history of natural dyeing in this area,” (Ismail, 2004).

The local variety of *khaddar* available in Haripur market is in black, saffron and beige colors. It is not locally made, as I was initially told. A visit of local Haripur market shops revealed that it is made in Faisalabad and Lahore and not locally produced, as generally perceived by women who purchase it. I was also told that the synthetic floss used in making contemporary *phulkaris* is not tussore silk (a coarse silk produced with an Asian silkworm tussah) but is also synthetic silk floss made in Faisalabad. The yarn is dyed using weight in kilograms in the form of hanks called *guchhi*. Dyeing is not locally done on a massive scale and mostly done in Faisalabad and in Shah Almi Market in Lahore. The dyeing rate is rupees 2400 to 2800 a *maund* in Lahore. Some local dyeing of yarn was also reported. The sellers complained about ever increasing rate of yarn and dyeing and the growing cost of *phulkari* production for an average village woman.

#### 2.4 Use of Color [s] in Contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris*

Popular Colors of *Khaddar* for Contemporary *Hazara Phulkari* [s] The study shows that most frequently used base colors in contemporary *phulkaris* are black, white, saffron and beige. The material used is coarse *khaddar* bought from local market in Haripur. The synthetic silk floss used is red, shocking pink, magenta and turquoise, and a mix of gold and greens. For border trims matching colors are used in Anchor Brand thread. Most frequently used color is shocking pink and magenta on black and other base colors. There were no *baghs* found on any trip to Hazara during this research. Talking about colors in *Phulkaris* Ismail notes, “The khadi cloth for the shawl is mostly a deep reddish-brown, white or yellow, and sometimes black. Embroidered with silk floss, the colors used in the *phulkaris* of Hazara and Punjab are vibrant shocking pink, maroon, green, yellow, or a monochromatic golden and white,” (Ismail, 2004).

Maskiell also notes, “The embroidery ranges from striking geometric medallions in reds, shocking pinks, and maroons, through almost monochromatic golden tapestry-like, fabric-covering designs, to narrative embroideries depicting people and objects of rural Punjab,” (Maskiell, 1999). No such *phulkaris* with rural scenes, however, were found in Hazara *phulkaris*, as also noted by Khurshid, she notes that figure work is totally absent in *Hazari Phulkaris* (Khurshid, 1992). The most popular colors in locally available *khaddar* are black and beige for *phulkaris* among local women embroiders, who were seen in scores buying *khaddar* from the only *khaddar* shop on the day of my visit. The black and beige *khaddar* sold in Haripur market is coarse, which is good for embroidery due to easy counting of holes to work with using darning stitch. This kind, I was told, is not liked by sophisticated clients in cities due to its rough surface and thickness, especially in summers.

Due to changing trends and variety of articles produced now with *phulkari* embroidery including *phulkari chaddars*, more refined varieties of *khaddar* from *Kamalia* (in Punjab) are now frequently used by women in many villages in Hazara, purchased from markets in Islamabad City.

### 2.5 Colors of Synthetic Silk Floss Used in Contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris*

The silk floss that was used in days of yore was pure silk floss called *sucha* (literally meaning pure). Now pure silk floss is no more used, and what is now sold in Haripur market is synthetic silk floss locally called *kucha* (literally meaning not pure). Currently the silk-like floss used for embroidering contemporary *phulkaris* sold in local market of Haripur in a hank is synthetic which comes in two varieties, viscose and polyester. The viscose is superior quality and embroidery does not get lint with use. Whereas polyester variety is inferior and gets lint over time. For both varieties see Figures 15 and 16.

The colors in six-thread and single thread floss are also different. The single thread as a superior variety is custom dyed for specific clients while six-thread comes in a generic mix of six colors, as shown in Figures 16. Some thread is also locally dyed and washed before given to the customers -- rural women, who regularly visit Haripur market to buy the raw materials. Two other types of threads used to make trims of a *phulkari* are both Anchor Brand, one in silken and the other in cotton material. Both are used for crocheting the edges of the contemporary *phulkaris*, as seen in Figures 7 and 11. In old *phulkaris*, however, precious threads were also used and there is a mention of using a special thread made of gold used along side silk threads and also that many women also stitched ornaments as part of the design. See Figures 2 and 5 for edges of period *phulkaris*. The price of both varieties of thread used in contemporary *phulkaris* is almost the same. The two types available are called *cheh-tara* (with 6-threads) sold at one rupee per gram and made of polyester. One hank or *guchhi* weighs about 120 to 130 grams of thread and costs rupees 120/130 as per weight. The other one is comparatively superior quality, single-color thread of viscose and sold at a little higher price. One hank weighs about 100 to 120 grams and costs rupees 110/130.

### 2.6 Materials and Techniques Used in Making Contemporary *Phulkari* [s]

As mentioned earlier, currently *khaddar* is still heavily used in making *phulkari* [s] in rural Hazara but is not locally produced. It is now bought from either Haripur or Islamabad markets. But along with locally available coarse variety of *khaddar* now other thinner varieties of *khaddar* from *Kamalia* area (another famous name for *khaddars* in Punjab) are also used for *phulkaris* and other articles like *kurtis* (women shirts) bags, glasses covers and the like, in response to multiple weather conditions and wide range of clientele within the country and abroad. The material and color of cloth also matters a lot as the embroidery depends on counting threads in the fabric to produce symmetrical geometrical designs. According to respondents black surface is the hardest to work on as it is hard to see and count the threads on such a surface and takes a lot of eye-work. Also the rough or coarse the *khaddar* cloth the easier it is to make a design, the thicker the weave the harder it becomes to do embroidery.

A contemporary *phulkari* made today is generally 3-yards (or 2 ¾ meters) in length and 44-45 inches in width. Previously 2 to 3 lengths of homespun *khaddar* were joined to produce the required width also measuring about 44 to 45 inches, as homespun *khaddar* was only 14 to 15 inches wide (as seen in Figures 1 and 4). The situation has changed now and 44-inches width in *khaddar*, prepared on power looms, is currently available in the local and city markets (both in Haripur and Islamabad), and hence one only finds one width *Phulkaris*. Generally speaking one *guchhi* (hank) of thread is sufficient for one [contemporary] *phulkari*, as shown in Figure 16.

### 2.7 Time Spent on Making a Contemporary *Phulkaris*

I was told by women in village Noorpur that it takes one woman a month and a half to finish an average *phulkari* and 20 to 25-days for two persons. The length of time also depends on color of *khaddar* involved, because the embroidery involves counting of threads in cloth for producing geometrical and floral designs. Black color *khaddar* is the hardest to work with, and costs more due to length and hard labor and eye-work involved in producing a piece. *Bagh* [s] (garden) are now rarely made and only produced custom made for individual clients. Women say it is too much labor and eye-work and costs a lot and not many clients are interested to buy such expensive pieces.

## 3. Conventional *Phulkaris* and *Bagh Phulkaris*

Talking about *bagh phulkari* Gurvinder Kaur notes, "In fact, the old tradition of giving away the bride covered in a *bagh* [*phulkari*] still continues in Punjab (in India) especially among the land-owning families of the state," (Kaur, 2003).

The conventional *phulkaris* were made primarily with handspun and hand-woven cotton cloth locally called *khaddar* and heavily embroidered with silk floss called *resham or pat*, by women of the household. The heavy embroidered *phulkaris* called *baghs* were prepared by older women spending months and sometimes years to complete a really embellished piece to be given to a bride [s] as a gift on her wedding. Two case studies of period *Phulkaris*: a simple *phulkari* and a *bagh phulkari*, described in the subsequent text highlight some of the features in the conventional *phulkaris* to clearly see the change in color, motif and materials over time.

### 3.1 Case Studies

#### 1. A Simple Period *Phulkari*

#### 2. A Period *Bagh Phulkari*

##### 3.1.1 Case Study1: A Simple Period *Phulkari*<sup>3</sup>

This piece of simple period *phulkari* measures 86” x 43 ½”, as seen in Figure 4. It has three panels of handloom *khaddar* in traditional saffron color, in a thin variety, of three 14 ½ inches pieces each sewn together to achieve a length of 86 ½ inches and a width of 43 ½ inches. Probably hand dyed with herbal colors, and pure silk floss embroidery in light yellow, violet, magenta and green colors. See Figures 4 and 5. The motif used is small and different than those seen in other vintage *phulkaris*, as seen in Figure 1. The border is also part of hand-woven cloth in magenta color, as shown in Figure 5.

##### 3.1.2 Case Study 2: A Period *Bagh Phulkari*<sup>4</sup>

This particular period *bagh phulkari* measures 40” in width, and of about 2 ¾ meters in length, which is normal for an average *phulkari* piece. With two panels measuring 16” and 24” each, the two panels are sewn together by hand. The color is very unusual almond brown, as compared to other period and contemporary *phulkaris*. The base cloth is pure *khaddar* of a coarse variety. As is shown in Figure 1, the piece was sold incomplete probably in order to get some cash for an immediate need. The color and motif is very different as compared to contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris*, as shown in Figure 14. Border motif is beautiful floral in various hues of golden silk floss. The other colors used to make small filling triangles design on border include magenta, indigo blue, and green, as seen in Figure 3. The front border on length of the piece is in green color using a biscuit design in green silk floss about one inch wide. This highlights the difference when compared with contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris*, that use crochet trims for both front and side borders of a *phulkari* made of cotton thread instead of silk floss, as shown in Figures 7 and 11.

### 3.2 The use of *Nazar-battu* in Period *Phulkaris* and *Baghs* to Ward Off the Evil Eye

In old *phulkaris* and *baghs*, the use of color blue in the form of a small flower to ward off the evil eye called *nazar battu* was also evident in a corner or in a hidden place. In spite of my keen interest to physically see any such blue flower on a contemporary *phulkari*, I could not find one. Khurshid also notes the making of *nazar battu* and notes, “...and on the other corner the needle woman embroidered *nazar battu*, a black spot, so as to protect it against the evil eye,” (Khurshid,1992). In the book “Tana Bana” I finally found a proof of the use of color blue in an early 20th century *bagh phulkari* from Punjab, in the shape of a small piece of blue embroidery or *nazar battu*, as described by the author “an added imperfection to ward off the evil eye.” (Bilgrami, 2004). It clearly shows a blue color patch of the same design on the back of a magenta color *bagh phulkari* to ward off the evil eye, not seen any more on contemporary Hazara *phulkaris*. She notes “The perfect is made deliberately imperfect,” (Bilgrami, 2004). In another vintage *phulkari*, I found another imperfection, probably for the same reason, but in this particular piece the color used is green in a yellow motif, see Figure 5 and 6. The palace where this flower is made is also at the back in almost similar way as in the *Phulkari* shown in Bilgrami. My findings show that although, an imperfect flower or design was made to ward off the evil eye, it is not necessarily blue as this *phulkari* shows.

### 4. Cost of Contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris*

The cost of one piece of contemporary Hazara *phulkari* starts from minimum rupees 4,000, depending on intricacy of design, color and amount of embroidery.

<sup>3</sup> Personal collection. The piece was bought in the early 1980s from Rawalpindi, probably from adjacent Chakwal or Hazara area that were famous for their *phulkari* work.

<sup>4</sup> Personal collection. The piece was purchased from a Peshawar City market (in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province) in the early part of 1990s.

An unusually heavily embroidered piece can go for more than 30,000 to 50,000 a piece, rarely made at present. The cost of synthetic silk threads and cloth used [*khaddar*] is just a fraction of the heavy labor cost that is involved in preparing a good *phulkari*. *Bagh phulkari[s]* being very heavily embroidered, could be very expensive, hence, only custom made for individual clients. Both old and young women are involved in producing *phulkari* pieces in their free time on regular basis to earn an income. Other than Noorpur other villages that produce *phulkari* in this area include Peerkot, Sikanderpur and areas in Tanol. Some vocational schools in the vicinity of Haripur also teach girls *phulkari* embroidery. (Khan & Rahman, n.d.). It is also taught in Havalian Vocational School near Haripur.

### 5. Marketing of Contemporary Hazara Phulkaris

This *phulkari* does not have much of a local market and the items produced are sold to some national NGOs that had started working in some Hazara villages in 1994 and created a regular market for these items in the markets of Islamabad, Lahore and in some foreign countries as well. Lately, some designers are also getting involved in marketing *phulkari* work from Hazara, and Gul bibi said they are paying better wages for our labor and we are very happy with this development. Considerable among these are two national NGOs Sungi and Saba Pakistan. Sungi named this particular embroidery *jisti*-work after they started working in Hazara area to accord it a recognition as a work of the people of Hazara (Khan & Rehman, n.d.). Also it is now joined by Saba Pakistan another NGO that has recently started marketing *phulkari* embroidery by opening a show room in Rawalpindi, in collaboration with a designer in Lahore. Their mode of payment is different as compared to Sungi, and pay an hourly wage to women workers. Previously they were paid when a piece was sold, so women seemed happy about this change.

In addition to using formal marketing channels, some women workers also have clients in big cities for whom they make custom made pieces from time to time. This has brought a positive change in the lives of these impoverished communities and they have high hopes that *Phulkari* continues to be popular among its new found markets outside the rural confines of Hazara.

### 6. Local Names of Motifs used in Contemporary Hazara Phulkaris

In Noorpur women embroider *phulkaris* without tracing a design. The motifs of contemporary *phulkaris*, as seen in Figure 14, are very different from the traditional designs seen on period *phulkaris*, as seen in Figures 1 and 4.

The most common names used for various motifs made on contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris* are noted as under:

- i. Biscuit *wala* design (biscuit design)
- ii. *Ding wala* design (wavey design)
- iii. *Gole Booti* (round flower design)
- iv. *Phapher* or *bari-booti* (big flower design)
- v. *Choti Phapher* (small big flower design)
- vi. *Adhi-booti* (half flower design)
- vii. *Gole phool* (round flower)
- viii. *Phool do-peher wali* (flower of afternoon)
- ix. *Pata* (leaf design)

Interestingly Ismail talks about use of motifs in Hazara, Swat and Swat Kohistan *phulkaris* and notes, “The stylized, rosette-like sun motifs, tree and floral motifs stem from the shamanistic beliefs of the neighboring Kafirs of Nuristan and the Kalash Valleys, before the Islamic Conquest. These can also be traced to Bactrian, Buddhist and Ghaznavid influences,” (Ismail, 2004).

### 7. Changes in Phulkari [s] Overtime

Contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris*, as seen in Figure 14 show a tremendous change of motifs, materials and color use in Hazara area. The quality is not as good as period *phulkaris*, both in materials and quality of embroidery. The cheaper materials currently used also include low quality synthetic materials and not necessarily only *khaddar*, the pure cotton cloth used for traditional *phulkaris*. Synthetic silk floss is used as compared to pure silk floss, that produce lint with use. Embroidery is also hurriedly done for commercial purposes and not to enrich a daughter’s dowry. Motifs are monotonous with not much variety, as seen in old period pieces. Some vocational schools in Hazara are teaching young girls the skills of *phulkari* to revive this folk art of Hazqara but the quality is not good in terms of materials and embroidery.

Ismail also notes the existence of such schools in Saidu Sharif as well in Swat teaching women the art of embroidery, but she notes, "Sadly, the quality of work is mediocre. The thread and fabric used is machine-made. Blended cotton or georgette is used for large *dupattas*... The color palette is mono-chromatic and mostly pastel. The terminology of motif has changed and is synonymous with objects used in every day life (same as in the case of Hazara motifs, see page 18). All that remains in common with the traditional age-old Swati embroidery is the stitch... (Ismail, 2004). The same is true for the contemporary Hazara *Phulkaris*, where only darning stitch is the only thing left original in producing contemporary *phulkris*, all else is changed along the long journey from silk to synthetic *phulkari* in Hazara.

## 8. Conclusion

The paper concludes that although, the work of NGOs, have revived the art of *phulkari* in rural Hazara, its commercialization has compromised its quality and durability as a rural art form. The mass produced contemporary *phulkaris* do not have either the quality or the purpose for which they were originally produced. Traditional pure silk floss *pat* or *sucha* used in making period *phulkaris* and *baghs* is now replaced by *kucha* or second quality synthetic silk floss made of viscose and polyester, sold in the Haripur market in bulk and in huge color range. The revival however, is now serving a bigger more elite city and western clientele, living in big cities and buying from NGOs and designers who showcase the contemporary *phulkari* pieces, in all big cities and overseas. It is now done more for a profit motive, as compared to olden times, when a *phulkari* or *bagh* was prepared solely to serve a rural custom involving months and years of hard work and love of the maker. The plus side of this revival, however, is that it is providing livelihood to many poor rural impoverished households, especially women, the exclusive producers of *phulkaris*, in rural Hazara.

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**Figures**



**Figure 1** A period *bagh phulkari* sold incomplete (personal collection, *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* Province, 1990s).



**Figure 2** Embroidered edge and main motif of a period *bagh phulkari*



Figure 3 Border motif showing various hues of golden silk floss used in this period *bagh phulkari*



Figure 4 A vintage *phulkari* made on pure *khaddar* in traditional saffron base (personal collection 1980s, origin unknown)





**Figure 5** The hand-woven *khaddar* shows the original woven border and vibrant colors used in this period *phulkari*



**Figure 6** The use of a different color to create an imperfection or *nazar battu* in a period *phulkari* to ward off an evil eye



Figure 7 The border motif of a new *phulkari* from Hazara



Figure 8 The border of a contemporary Hazara *phulkari* (personal collection 2010, origin rural Hazara)



**Figure 9** A young woman doing *phulkari* in village Noorpur



**Figure 10** Close up of the motif of a new *phulkari* made in Hazara

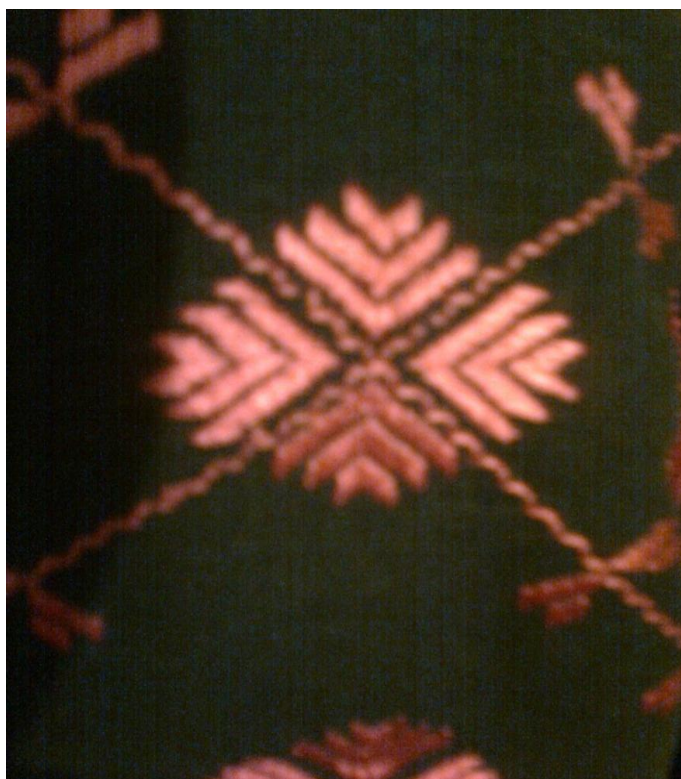




**Figure 11** Border of a contemporary *phulkari* from Hazara and use of popular traditional colors green and magenta



**Figure 12** A black *phulkari* showing density of the design and use of leaf for filling the surface using shocking pink thread



**Figure 13** Close view of a motif used on a black background *Phulkar*



**Figure 14** Three contemporary *phulkaris* from Hazara made on different colors of *khaddar* showing different density and colors of thread used but same motif with some variation (personal collection 2009/2010, origin rural Hazara).





**Figure 15** Two types of synthetic floss, *aik-tara* (single thread) *cheh-tara* (with six-threads) used on all contemporary *phulkaris* in Hazara



**Figure 16** Hanks of synthetic silk floss (*koo-cha*) used in making contemporary *phulkaris*. Showing both varieties of thread *aik-tara* (on left) and *cheh-tara* (on right)