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## Modern Adaptation of Phulkari Embroidery in Western Wear: A Study on Consumer Preferences and Contemporary Fashion Trends

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### ABSTRACT

Traditional textiles and embroideries represent the cultural identity and artistic heritage of a nation. Among the rich embroidery traditions of India, Phulkari embroidery of Punjab occupies a significant position due to its vibrant colors, intricate motifs, and cultural symbolism. Originally practiced by rural women for domestic and ceremonial purposes, Phulkari has evolved from a traditional folk craft into a contemporary fashion element widely used in modern apparel and accessories. The present study investigates the adaptation of traditional Phulkari embroidery in western wear, particularly gowns, and examines consumer preferences regarding design elements, embroidery placement, fabric selection, and styling. The research was conducted among students of fashion designing in Batala, Punjab. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from 40 respondents belonging to the age group of 18–26 years. The study further involved the development of ten western gown designs inspired by traditional Phulkari motifs. The findings reveal that consumers highly appreciate the integration of traditional embroidery into contemporary garments, especially hand

embroidery, warm colors, floral motifs, and A-line silhouettes. The study highlights the growing acceptance of cultural fusion in fashion and emphasizes the commercial and aesthetic relevance of Phulkari in the modern apparel industry. The research also contributes toward the preservation and revival of traditional embroidery by incorporating it into present-day fashion trends.

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## 1. Introduction

India has always been recognized globally for its rich textile heritage and traditional embroidery crafts [1]. Every region of the country possesses unique textile traditions that reflect the social, cultural, and artistic identity of the community [2]. Punjab, one of the culturally vibrant states of India, is famous for its traditional embroidery known as Phulkari [3]. The term “Phulkari” is derived from two Sanskrit words: “Phul” meaning flower and “Kari” meaning work. Thus, Phulkari literally translates into “flower work” [4].

Historically, Phulkari embroidery was practiced by women of Punjab during leisure time and was associated with emotions, celebrations, and traditions [5]. The embroidery was done on handwoven khaddar fabric using untwisted silk floss thread known as “Pat” [6]. The art form was deeply connected with marriage ceremonies and dowry traditions [7]. Mothers and grandmothers embroidered Phulkaridupattas, shawls, and garments for brides as blessings of prosperity and happiness [8].

Traditional Phulkari was not merely decorative art but also represented social customs, agricultural life, folklore, and spirituality [9]. The motifs were inspired by nature, including flowers, birds, wheat stalks, animals, geometric patterns, and household objects [10]. Different forms of Phulkari such as Bagh, Chope, Thirma, Vari-da-Bagh, and Sainchi reflected distinct ceremonial and cultural significance [4].

With industrialization and modernization, traditional hand embroidery practices gradually declined [2]. Machine-made products replaced handcrafted textiles, reducing the originality of traditional Phulkari [3]. However, in recent decades, there has been renewed interest in ethnic crafts and sustainable fashion [5]. Fashion designers have revived Phulkari by incorporating it into jackets, skirts, gowns, bags, and fusion garments [8].



The adaptation of traditional embroidery into western silhouettes represents the blending of heritage and modernity [7]. Contemporary consumers increasingly prefer garments that combine cultural authenticity with modern aesthetics [9]. Therefore, this research focuses on exploring the application of Phulkari embroidery in western gowns and understanding consumer preferences related to such fusion garments

## 2. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the historical and cultural significance of Phulkari embroidery.
2. To analyze different types, motifs, materials, and techniques used in Phulkari embroidery.
3. To explore consumer preferences regarding Phulkari-inspired western wear.
4. To design western gowns incorporating traditional Phulkari motifs.
5. To evaluate the acceptance of developed designs among respondents.

## 3. Review of Literature

Traditional embroidery forms an integral part of Indian textile heritage. Several scholars and researchers have documented the cultural significance and artistic value of Phulkari embroidery.

Kamladevi Chattopadhyay emphasized that Indian handicrafts are deeply rooted in regional traditions and social customs [1]. According to her, textile crafts preserve indigenous artistic expressions and cultural narratives.

Jasleen Dhamija highlighted that Phulkari embroidery evolved as a domestic art practiced by women of Punjab and represented emotional attachment, creativity, and identity [2]. The embroidery was entirely hand-executed without tracing patterns.



Surjeet Husain explained that the uniqueness of Phulkari lies in its darning stitch technique, vibrant silk floss, and symbolic motifs [3]. The embroidery reflects the agricultural and rural lifestyle of Punjab.

Recent researchers have examined the modernization and commercialization of Phulkari [4]. Studies reveal that the embroidery has transitioned from ceremonial textiles to market-oriented products such as apparel, home furnishings, and fashion accessories.

Monima observed that modernization has significantly altered traditional Phulkari aesthetics [8]. Although contemporary products use Phulkari-inspired motifs, many fail to preserve authentic craftsmanship.

Fashion designers such as Manish Malhotra have played a crucial role in reviving traditional embroidery by introducing Phulkari in haute couture and fusion fashion collections [5]. Their work demonstrates the adaptability of traditional textiles in global fashion markets.

The literature indicates that while several studies discuss the cultural significance of Phulkari, limited research has been conducted on integrating Phulkari into western gowns and evaluating consumer acceptance [9]. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this research gap.

## **4. Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Design**

The present study was conducted using an experimental and descriptive research design. The study aimed to analyze consumer preferences and acceptance of Phulkari embroidery incorporated into western gowns. The research focused on developing innovative gown designs inspired by traditional Phulkari motifs and evaluating their aesthetic appeal among respondents.

### **4.2 Locale of the Study**

The study was carried out in the Department of Fashion Designing at R.R. Bawa DAV College for Girls.

### **4.3 Sample Selection**

A purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of respondents. A total sample of 40 respondents belonging to the age group of 18–26 years was selected from the Department of Fashion Designing. The respondents were chosen because of their awareness and understanding of fashion trends, textile aesthetics, and embroidery applications in contemporary apparel.



#### **4.4 Data Collection Tools**

Primary data for the study was collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding:

- a. Awareness about Phulkari embroidery
- b. Preference for embroidery styles
- c. Preferred color combinations
- d. Fabric preferences
- e. Choice of gown silhouettes
- f. Placement of embroidery motifs on western gowns

The responses collected from the participants helped in identifying current fashion preferences and consumer acceptance toward fusion wear incorporating traditional embroidery.

#### **4.5 Design Development**

Based on the collected data and consumer preferences, ten western gown designs inspired by traditional Phulkari embroidery motifs were developed. The designs included floral and geometric motifs combined with modern silhouettes to create contemporary fusion wear. Design sheets were prepared and later evaluated by a panel of judges from the Department of Fashion Designing to assess their suitability, creativity, and market acceptability.

#### **4.6 Statistical Analysis**

The collected data was systematically tabulated and analyzed using percentage analysis and ranking methods. The statistical tools helped in interpreting consumer preferences and identifying the most preferred design features for Phulkari-inspired western gowns.

### **5. Historical Background of Phulkari**

The earliest references to Phulkari are found in Punjabi folklore and literary works such as Heer-Ranjha by Waris Shah [4]. Historical evidence suggests that Phulkari embroidery existed in Punjab during the 15th century and flourished during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh [8].



Traditionally, women embroidered Phulkari collectively in social gatherings known as “Trinjan” [2]. These gatherings promoted social bonding, creativity, and cultural learning among women. Young girls learned embroidery from elders and prepared embroidered textiles for their wedding trousseau [1].

Phulkari embroidery spread across regions including Amritsar, Patiala, Lahore, Rawalpindi, and neighboring areas of Haryana [3]. The embroidery became a symbol of Punjabi identity and womanhood [5].

## 6. Types of Phulkari

### 6.1 Bagh



Bagh means “garden” and refers to heavily embroidered textiles where the base fabric is almost completely covered with embroidery [3].

### 6.2 Chope



Chope is a ceremonial Phulkari gifted to brides by their grandmothers [2]. It is embroidered mainly on borders using golden yellow thread.

### 6.3 Thirma



Thirma is embroidered on white khaddar fabric and symbolizes purity [5]. It was generally worn by elder women.

#### 6.4 Sainchi



Sainchi Phulkari depicts scenes of village life including farmers, animals, spinning wheels, and daily activities [8].

#### 6.5 Vari-da-Bagh



This form of Phulkari is gifted by the groom's family to the bride during marriage ceremonies [4].

#### 6.6 DarshanDwar





It is a type of phulkari to “The gate to see God”.it is believed that this embroidered phulkari is given to the gurudwares due to the fulfillment of someones wish .Also it is a kind of offering to thank god,that relate with religious importance in people’slife.It was usually made in last Punjab.

### 6.7 KaudiBagh



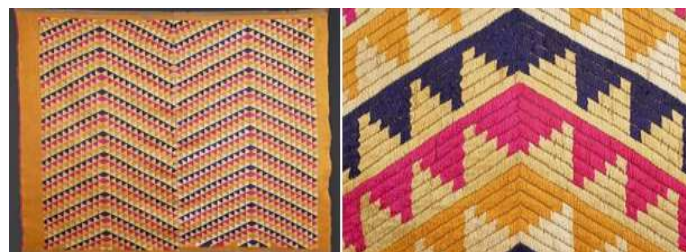
KaudiBagh represents humility, prosperity, and fertility in Punjabi culture through its stylized cowrie shell motifs. Traditionally, it was associated with women’s wishes for motherhood and symbolized blessings of fertility and well-being.



### 6.8 Surajmukhi Phulkari

SurajmukhiPhulkari symbolizes brightness, positivity, and traditional artistic excellence through *its* sunflower-inspired motifs. Its unique blend of Holbein and darning stitches makes it technically distinctive among all Phulkari styles.

### 6.9 PANCHARANGA BAGH





Meaning “Five colours”, this bagh is decorated with chevrons of five different colours. In The same way, similar pieces like satranga (“seven colours”) bagh are also available.

## 7. Motifs and Symbolism

The motifs used in Phulkari embroidery are inspired by nature, agriculture, and domestic life. Floral motifs symbolize beauty and fertility, while peacocks represent grace and prosperity. Wheat motifs symbolize abundance and agricultural richness [2,3,6].

Colors also possess symbolic meanings:

- Red symbolizes happiness and marriage.
- Yellow represents fertility and prosperity.
- Green symbolizes growth and harmony.

## 8. Material Used in Phulkari

Traditional Phulkari embroidery mainly uses hand-spun and handwoven cotton fabric known as *khaddar*, which is durable and suitable for counted-thread embroidery. The embroidery is done using untwisted silk floss thread called *Pat*, available in bright colours such as red, yellow, green, orange, pink, and blue. Simple tools like needles and embroidery frames are commonly used for creating the designs.



The primary technique used in Phulkari is the *darning stitch*, executed on the reverse side of the fabric by counting threads without tracing the design. Other stitches such as Holbein stitch, herringbone stitch, running stitch, and buttonhole stitch are also occasionally used for decorative effects and borders. The beauty of Phulkari lies in the skillful manipulation of stitches, colour combinations, and geometric arrangements that create rich visual patterns and textures.



## 9. Modernization of Phulkari

The modernization of Phulkari has expanded its traditional boundaries by introducing new motifs, color combinations, and contemporary design layouts while preserving its cultural roots. Earlier practiced manually on the reverse side of khaddar fabric, Phulkari is now designed systematically and produced for commercial markets. Over the years, tourism, media, music, and fashion industries have played a significant role in reviving and popularizing this embroidery globally. Renowned designers such as Manish Malhotra have creatively blended Phulkari with modern garments like jackets, skirts, and gowns using fabrics such as chiffon, velvet, and lace. Thus, modernized Phulkari successfully combines traditional craftsmanship with contemporary fashion, making it relevant in multicultural and global fashion trends.



## 9. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that:

- 95% respondents liked embroidery work.
- 93% respondents were aware of Phulkari embroidery.
- 75% respondents preferred hand embroidery over machine embroidery.



- 84% respondents preferred Phulkari in western dresses.
- 73% respondents preferred A-line gowns.
- 65% respondents preferred organza fabric for gowns.
- 72% respondents preferred embroidery placement on the yoke area.
- Warm colors were preferred by 65% respondents.

The findings indicate a strong acceptance of traditional embroidery in contemporary fashion garments. Consumers appreciated garments that blended ethnic aesthetics with western silhouettes.

### 9. Design Development and Fashion Adaptation

Ten western gown designs inspired by Phulkari motifs were developed during the study. The designs incorporated:

- Floral geometric motifs
- Warm color palettes
- Organza and blended fabrics
- Yoke-centered embroidery
- A-line silhouettes

Among the developed designs, Orange Design received the highest ranking from the panel of judges due to its balanced embroidery placement, color harmony, and modern appeal.





The study demonstrates that traditional embroidery can successfully be adapted into western wear without losing its cultural essence.

### **10. Sustainable and Economic Importance of Phulkari**

Phulkari embroidery contributes significantly toward sustainable fashion by promoting handcrafted textiles and reducing dependence on mass-produced garments [9]. The craft also supports rural women artisans by providing employment opportunities and preserving indigenous knowledge systems [2].

The revival of Phulkari through fashion industries, exhibitions, and designer collections has improved market demand for handcrafted products [5]. The commercialization of Phulkari has empowered women economically and contributed to rural livelihoods [3].

### **11. Conclusion**

Phulkari embroidery is not only a traditional textile craft but also an expression of Punjabi culture, emotions, and artistic heritage. The modernization of fashion has created new opportunities for integrating traditional embroidery into contemporary apparel. The present study reveals that consumers positively accept the adaptation of Phulkari in western gowns, particularly when traditional motifs are combined with modern silhouettes.



The research highlights the importance of preserving traditional crafts through innovation and design intervention. The incorporation of Phulkari into western wear can enhance the commercial value of handcrafted textiles while ensuring cultural sustainability.

The study concludes that traditional embroidery can successfully coexist with modern fashion trends and contribute toward sustainable and culturally rich fashion practices.

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