

RESEARCH NOTE

Unlocking Potential - A Study of GI Tag for Phulkari Crafted Products

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ABSTRACT

Phulkari, a traditional embroidery finds its roots in Punjab and is an amalgamation of various stitches. It has found a big space in fashion industry, has been reinvented innumerable times and has earned good prestige in India and abroad. In order to protect this art form, Geographical Indication (G I) tag for phulkari has been awarded to Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. The present study was undertaken in the districts of Patiala and Amritsar with a view to identify the level of awareness about this traditional embroidery among various stakeholders. The study was conducted among 60 artisans and a group of wholesalers and retailers. It was seen that the awareness about G I tags was not present among the artisans as none of the artisans interviewed were aware of this tag and its benefits. However thirteen per cent of the retailers and eight per cent of the wholesalers interviewed were aware of the GI tag available for the craft. It was seen that only thirty per cent of the respondents were involved in this craft for economic reason. Many artisans were unable to identify the difference between the embroidery done by hand or through computerized machineries. The need of the hour is to provide the GI tags to the communities that are custodian of those products and empower local communities by backing them as applicants thus making them better informed. The marketing network of these rural communities is the weakest link which should be strengthened by hand holding.

Key words: *Phulkari; Artisans; Embroidery; Geographical Indication; Punjab;*

Phulkari, embroidery with gorgeous thread work, has stood the test of time and can be seen on practically everything imaginable today. It is the finest expression of floral splendor on fabric. The art of storytelling has many forms in rural India, and *phulkari* embroidery, which finds its roots in Punjab, has a big role to play not only in history, but also in classic and contemporary fashion. As per *Dani S (2013)*, this embroidery is a seamless amalgamation of the button hole stitch, running stitch, darn stitch and cluster stitches. The cloth used is generally homespun and dyed, is sturdy and does not need a frame to stretch the fabric while embroidering. Some patterns are so intricate that the colour of the base cloth becomes invisible. Traditionally, this embroidery was done with silken thread on hand spun fabric by women of the villages to commemorate birth, weddings, and was worn at auspicious occasions

(*Kapila P, 2017*). With social and economic changes in the lifestyle of Punjabis, women craft persons have introduced innovations in design and base fabric thus enhancing the marketability of *Phulkari* craft (*Kaur and Sodhi, 2014*).

Phulkari and Geographical Indication: Though it is a traditional craft form, the *phulkari* embroidery has found a big space in fashion industry and has been reinvented innumerable times with the creativity of the designers to suit the demands of the changing times. The prestige this embroidery has earned is the result of several centuries of experience and craftsmanship. The traditional name these products of unmatched quality enjoy has been further protected by formal GI tags which are a form of Intellectual Property protection based on geography of an area. These tags are important to preserve a community's preserved cultural heritage

and aims to provide recognition to the craft form along with monetary benefits to the women artisans. GI tags in India are provided for a period of 10 years and need to be renewed after this period. GI tag for *phulkari* has been awarded to Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan as it was considered that artisans, mainly women, might have migrated to the neighbouring states after marriage and also due to restructuring of some states after independence. Punjab Small Industries and Export Corporation Limited (PSIEC) was setup in 1962 with an objective to support individuals in their endeavour to set up their own industrial unit and help small scale industry to grow in Punjab. PSIEC filed for the G I tag in 2005 and it was finally awarded in year 2011 and was the first GI tag to be awarded to the state. PSIEC has opened 5 emporiums through which it sells the products with GI tag. With the allocation of GI tag, it was necessary that traders will have to get themselves registered in order to deal in this art form.

Export status of Phulkari craft: Imagination and creativity combined together created hundreds of patterns of *phulkari* and it is these designs that continue to witness dramatic evolution even today (Gupta A, 2014). The products have found worldwide acceptance and are regularly exported from the country. In the year 2018-19, the total number of 6006 pieces have been exported out of the country to various countries like Hungary (\$39046) followed by US (\$28752) and UK (\$14162). The total export from India last year has been goods worth \$ 110598. Ironically, the top exporters are from Surat, Gurgaon, Noida and even Dharwad and Delhi. There is only one registered exporter of *phulkari* products from Patiala in Punjab which is the place where the embroidery originally belongs to.

The present study was to identify the level of awareness about traditional *phulkari* embroidery among various stakeholders and the awareness about GI tags among the marketing network of retailers and wholesalers.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted among a group of women artisans who wanted to enhance their understanding of the embroidery and learn about preparation techniques of contemporary articles from the *phulkari* embroidery. A total of 60 artisans were interviewed for the purpose of understanding their

awareness level about the traditional craft and the G I tag along with the benefits associated with this tag. As marketing network is extremely important for the commercial success of any craft, a group of wholesalers and retailers were also interviewed to identify their awareness level regarding the availability of GI tag for *phulkari* work material.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to create a difference in the approach of various stakeholders, it is important to understand their awareness levels regarding availability of GI tag and certification for *Phulkari*. The results were collected and analyzed to get a better understanding of the awareness level among various stakeholders.

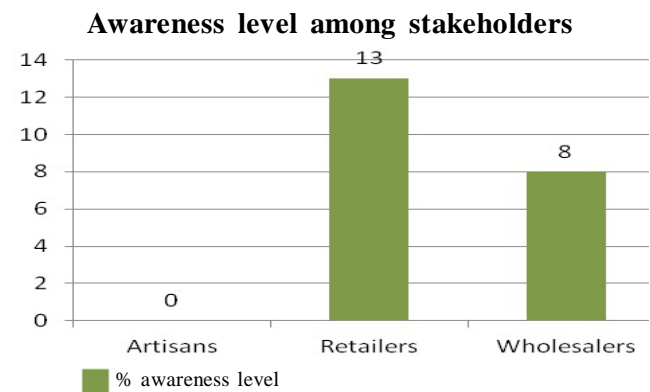


Fig 1. Awareness about G I tag for *Phulkari*

As per Fig 1, It was seen that the awareness about G I tags was not present among the artisans as none of the artisans interviewed were aware of this tag and its benefits. However thirteen per cent of the retailers and eight per cent of the wholesalers interviewed were aware of the GI tag available for the craft. Yet the usage was not there as even after being aware, none of them were found to be taking any benefit of the tag.

Association of craft with different elements

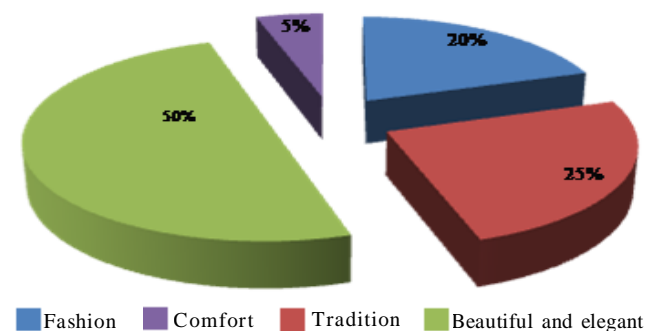


Fig 2. Perception towards *Phulkari* craft

Reasons for association with phulkari among artisans

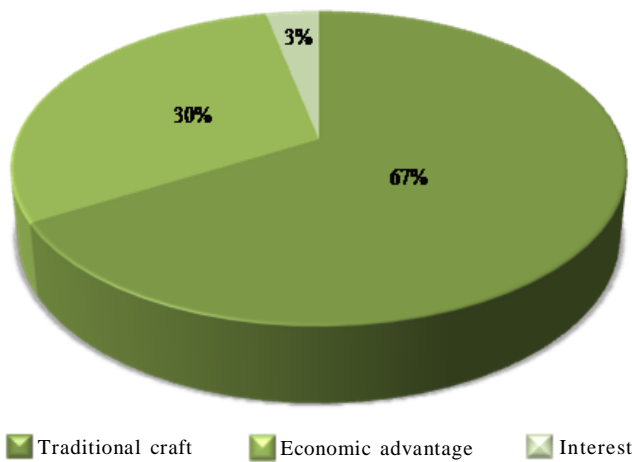


Fig. 3. Reason for association with craft among rural women

The traditional art of *Phulkari* was initially practiced by women of Punjab in order to fulfill their own requirements and as a necessity of the tradition. However, the artisans were interviewed to identify the elements with which the modern generation involved in this craft associates it with. It was seen from the fig 2. that only twenty five per cent of the respondents still associate it with the tradition while fifty per cent of the respondents consider this craft as beautiful and elegant and twenty percent of the artisans associate it with fashion. A small fraction i.e., five percent of the respondents associated it with comfort also.

Traditional *Phulkari* not only reflect the versatility, hard work and creativity of rural women but it also represent the tradition and culture of Punjab (Kaur R, 2014). In order to identify the reason for the interest or association of artisans with this craft, it was evident in fig. 3 that thirty per cent of the respondents were involved in this craft for economic reason while a majority of them (67%) were indulging in this craft because of it being a traditional craft and they wanted to create contemporary articles for personal use. A mere three per cent respondents wanted to gain an expertise in this craft because of their interest in the same.

Phulkaris and *Baghs* which a bride acquired as a part of her trousseau was a reflection of bride’s talent and the teaching she has received from her mother. In later years, it was the commercial aspect of this embroidery that encouraged women to embroider for a payment or sell their treasures of textiles

(Kaur A, 2018). With the changing times, the craft is gaining new admirers while losing its traditional ones. The artisans were interviewed about their awareness level regarding the embroidery and its basic techniques and it was discovered that the awareness about the traditional types of *phulkari* like *Chope*, *Subhar*, *Sainchi*, *Tilaptra*, *Neelak* or *Chhaamas phulkari* was not very prominent among the respondents. It was seen from table 1 that only fifty per cent of the respondents were aware of the various traditional types of *Phulkari* and only forty two percent were having the knowledge or ability to recognize the various types of traditional motifs prevalent in ancient *phulkari* craft. However a majority of them (66.67%) were able to recognize the difference between two major types of this embroidery namely *Bagh* and *Phulkari*.

Table 1. Awareness about phulkari among artisans (N=60)

Indicators	No.	%
Awareness about traditional <i>Phulkari</i> Craft	30	50.00
Knowledge of traditional motifs of <i>Phulkari</i>	25	41.67
Recognition of difference between <i>Bagh</i> and <i>Phulkari</i>	40	66.67
Recognition of difference between Handmade and Computerized <i>Phulkari</i>	22	36.67
Awareness about agencies and institutions providing support in training and marketing	04	6.67

Traditional *phulkari* work was never a commercial activity. The articles were prepared by the women of the household for use within the family depending on the occasion like marriage of the daughter and the motifs and colours used in preparation were also selected accordingly. Today this craft has provided employment to a large number of rural women. The craft is at its splendour only when it is hand embroidered but in recent years, the *phulkari* embroidered articles are being made only for commercial purpose. Hand embroidery is a time consuming process, and as a result, comes out to be expensive hence machine made *phulkari is* have flooded the market and it becomes difficult for a layman to differentiate between the two. Around 36.67 per cent of the artisans were unable to identify the difference between the embroidery done by hand or through computerized machineries. Table 1 depicts that the awareness about agencies and institutions providing support for training and marketing of *phulkari* products was abysmally low (6.67%) among the respondents.

The new popularity of this craft is owing to its 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 (*Malik S, 2011*).

CONCLUSION

The need of the hour is to provide the GI tags to the communities that are custodian of those products.

Government bodies should empower local communities by backing them as applicants thus making them better informed. These people are the actual and rightful inheritors of traditions and they should reap the benefits. The awareness need to be created to empower and institutionalize these custodians so that the actual benefit is reaped by them only. The marketing network of these rural communities is the weakest link which can be easily strengthened if the handholding is provided to them and efforts are made to actually benefit these rural people and not only the traders.

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