Gender Socio-Economic Inequalities:
Traditional IndianEmbroidery Industry in India

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"Today, there is a heartening resurgence of interest in handlooms. It can be seen as an interesting natural result of the monotony of globalized brands that are the very same across the world. In contrast, the handlooms of India in pure yarns provide exclusive customized products, the romance associated with tradition and heritage, a large variety from which to choose, ergonomic benefits and a cultural story associated with each textile."[1]

Introduction

The existence of large handicrafts in the 21st century is a feature not only of the Indian subcontinent but of several other Asian countries as well. As a traditional sector, handicrafts coexist with the modern cotton textile industry. Utilizing their inherent strength as efficient small-scale producers, handloom weavers still survive in India. In fact, the Indian Handicraft and Handloom Industry forms an integral part of the rich cultural heritage of the country. The Indian textile industries are extremely varied with hand-spun and hand-woven textiles at one end, and capital intensive sophisticated mill sector at the other end.

One of the essential components of the textile sector, which this paper analyses, is the small-scale cottage and handloom industries[2] that play a significant role in the economies of developing countries like India by providing employment to craft-persons in rural and semi-urban areas. It also preserves the rich cultural heritage of India.[3] This paper attempts to understand the divisions of the labour market and gendered socio-economic inequality in the weaving industry of the handloom sector in India. In particular, the paper explores the lives of the female weavers of Punjab, a north Indian state, through oral interviews.

The division of labour in handlooms was rudimentary in nature in most parts of the country. While men played a major role in weaving, women were involved in pre-weaving activities (such as spinning and warping). Apart from specific activities such as spinning and winding, weaving was never identified with women. Though women worked as hard as men, they received less remuneration than men. However, in contrast to this usual *modus operandi*, the north Indian state of Punjab presents a different picture. In Punjab, weaving as an occupation is dominated exclusively by women. In fact, a very small fraction of these women

have also engaged themselves in the dual role of producer and trader. Though there are power looms and mills in the state today, a small fraction of these women, who are entrepreneurs in their own right, are to be accredited for preserving Punjab's heritage by working laboriously and producing traditional textiles. In this phase of competitive commercialization and ever-expanding globalization, the paper is an attempt to understand the world of female weavers, their socio-economic conditions, and their relationship with the community and their families, wages and their aspirations with changing market structure. Thus, exploring these women's lives means acknowledging their contribution to the society and the industry.

Handloom through the Ages and Divisions of Labour

The glorious saga of the development of the textile sector has continued unabated for the last four millennia. This has been possible, despite the dwindling position of Indian textiles during the colonial period, owing to the policies adopted by the British. At present, the industry provides livelihoods to millions of textile workers in the country. Efforts are also being made to provide employment to the millions of other workers (such as artisans, craftsmen and women, spinners) in the textile industry.

The Indian textile industry is amongst the few in the world that are truly vertically integrated from raw materials to finished products, from fibre to retail; in other words, from 'farm to fashion'. Providing employment to over 45 million people directly and to over 60 million people indirectly,[4] the Indian textile sector is the second-largest employer after agriculture. It is estimated that there are 23 million people engaged in weaving and handicrafts today. The female work participation rate in India has revealed an increasing trend. It increased from 19.7 % in 1981 to 25.6% in 2011.[5] Census Report of 1981, female work participation rate fluctuated widely in Punjab during the period from 1981 to 2011, while the male work participation rate remained stable. It has been observed that female work participation rates show a decreasing trend in rural Punjab and an increasing trend in urban Punjab during 2001-2011. On the other hand, the difference between male and female work participation rates is found to be very high in India as well as in Punjab. The difference in male-female participation vis-à-vis female participation is greater in urban areas as compared to the rural parts of the country. This difference is even present in female participation in the urban and rural areas.[6] However, work participation in the handloom sector is dominated by female workers in India. Almost 30 lakh (78 per cent) of the total adult handloom workers are females, and 88 per cent of them reside in rural areas.[7]

Kavita Gupta points out that "the Indian textile industry has inherent strengths in terms of rich legacy of textile production, strong and self-sufficient multi-fibre raw material base, large and expanding production capacities, low import intensity, vast pool of skilled workers at low cost and technical and managerial personnel, flexible production systems, large and expanding domestic market, dynamic and vibrant entrepreneurship."[8] Strong entrepreneurship skills have always been the backbone of the Indian textile industry. The technological obsolescence, however, has been overcome with modernization of the manufacturing process, which has led to an increase in production, enhanced the quality, reduced cost production and maintenance, and the power cost per unit of production.[9] Moreover, attaching sacredness and meaning to the nature of the cloth produced has enabled the handloom tradition in India to survive. It has also offered the individual wearer a sense of identity and belonging to a community. Harnessing the potential of this sector requires different types of effort to preserve the traditional craft, which in turn will help to improve the socio-economic condition of the weavers. On a cultural plane, craftsperson are the conveyers of India's tradition in craftsmanship, epitomizing the beauty of the handcrafted textile. But as a socio-economic group, unfortunately they are at the bottom of the pyramid. Their condition is no better than that of an artisan or their counterpart in the power-loom sector. The continuity of the caste system, according to Jaya Jaitly, kept the weavers trapped within their own profession, forcing them to practice only their traditional hereditary skill and barring their movement to other professions.[10] It is for this reason that the Government of India has implemented a number of schemes to provide social security to the weavers and workers of the handicrafts and handloom sector. Economic assistance is being provided to the artisans in their twilight years. Considering the job opportunities in this sector, the government has focused on technological upgrades and skill development. There have been continuous endeavours through government schemes to benefit their workers from time to time, which I will talk in length in the next section.

The interplay of gender and class, too, plays an important role. This paper highlights the many dilemmas of working women who found their working experience as working class different from their male counterparts. In this context, the paper analyses the history of labouring of women in the Patiala district of Punjab engaged in the traditional craft of weaving phulkari.

Though barely having a voice of their own, the working class at particular historical moments has found numerous heterogeneous spokespersons in form of the state, trade unionists, capitalists and philanthropists.[11] As for women, their voices are more distant. Thus, this paper

attempts to not only recover the voices of those working class women (craft weavers), but also weave a story of their life as phulkari workers. These voices are of considerable importance as they provide an insight to understand the transformations in the women's socio-economic landscape.

Attempts to understand the gendered dimension of globalization compels one to reconsider key issues in feminist historiography. In most of the literature on Third World women's participation, there is a tendency to portray them as victims of class and of patriarchal, racial and sexual ideologues. Instead of attributing them a social agency, women are caught in the contemporary forms of capitalist discipline. As feminisation of labour[12] became a reality in developing countries, questions of gender, class and caste took a new turn. Though feminisation of labour has been restructuring economies due to globalization, in the Indian context, the framework lacks a comprehensive analysis. The prior typical masculine framework of the 'worker' has been destabilised by the projection of women who are seen to be better able to adjust to the new conditions of work. The gendering (and racialisation) of labour has created new kinds of working classes which need to be acknowledged and they require a more detailed analysis. This restructuring has created an imbalance within the existing labour hierarchies because much of this new labour is located at lower levels within the production process. Informalisation is the common terminology that has been used to define this process, which is often invisible even though it plays a very significant role in the labour market.

The nature of work and the production process have been undergoing major changes across the world. While the term work can be applied to all kinds of activity, employment refers more precisely to activity that is paid. Hannah Arendt has noted how the Industrial Revolution replaced workmanship with labour, with the result that the things of modern world have become labour products.[13] In the modern work process, the division of labour appropriates and transforms the labouring process. Mass production would be impossible without the replacement of specialised workmen through the division of labour. The 'right to work' was interpreted in the late 1940s as the 'right to employment for a reasonable wage', primarily for men with dependent women and children in households.[14] This classical labour model imagined a free, male wage-worker working in the modern factory who was also a member of a trade union.[15]

According to labour historians, a gendered shift occurred within labouring households in South Asia after the middle of the 19th century.[16] While women and children did unpaid

family labour and lower-wage labour, men dominated the more capital-intensive forms of labour. Women's labour became more labour intensive, low status and poorly rewarded. This gendered division of labour varied between social groups, economic activities, periods and geography. If agriculture threw up a variety of gendered roles, so did other economic activities such as fishery, cottage industries and factory work. Labour historians have begun to explore these gendered roles, the ideologies of kinship and family supporting them, their transformations over time and how they were interconnected.

Links had been made in the gendering of jute factory and tea plantation labour with the rural systems on which these industries depended for their labour supply. These studies indicate that the peculiarities of the industrial working class in Bengal were predicated upon the structural adaptability of rural families, factory managers' preference for a flexible labour force, emergence of a male provider ideology and a secular impoverishment of rural producers. In order to understand the power of kinship and family ideologies in deploying labour, this paper attempts to focus on the agency of female labour and the transformative role of their living strategies, which has been culminating over generations. In this context, it becomes even more imperative to look at their decision-making, the world in which they operate, that is, their homes and their struggles within the household regarding gendered deployment. While gendering of labour in households was a trend since the 19th century, in the academic sphere there was no critical engagement with questions of gender and labour work in labour history. As women were generally invisible in the pages of history, labour historians did little on their part to bring them into visibility. Another reason for this neglect was the fact that labour history was centred on the urban factories, ignoring rural and domestic households.

There is also a debate around the issue of male breadwinner in working class families. In the Indian context, the issue resonated with discussions on women and work. Samita Sen talks of how ideas of domesticity were appropriated by working class families who associated seclusion with high social status and tended to withdraw from the labour force.[17] She brings out the shared assumptions underlining the masculinist discourse of male-dominated unions, who legitimised the exclusion of women by valorising ideals of motherhood and domesticity.

The rural ties of workers have been examined in terms of masculinist assumptions that denote the urban as 'main' and women's earnings as 'supplementary'. Within this logic, women marginalised from public employment retreat into the home and domesticity. Thus, the way women contest or try to exercise their agency is not taken into account. In other words,

boundaries between the domestic and outside, the inner and outer are often reworked: the home itself becomes an arena of wage-work for large numbers of women.[18]

In a scenario where large traditional industries are declining and there is an expansion of informal work, women's waged work at home is a source of subsistence for a large number of urban, working class families. Shram Shakti's report for the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector points towards a minimized workforce with women engaged in a range of activities in households and small industrial units. The question that arises is: what implications these changes had for the production of gendered identities, male and female? I have attempted to look at the answers to some of these issues in the last section by introspecting the lives of women weavers in the district of Patiala, Punjab.

Traditional Craft Tested by Time

Handicrafts of a country showcase the rich, artistic history of that nation. The phulkari tradition of Punjab is an example of this craft heritage, which is reflected in the art. Artisans and craftsmen make use of a number of techniques combined with exquisite and vibrant designs to make the most intriguing artistic artefacts.[19]

What attracted me to Punjab culture is its weaving, particularly, the colourful patterns of Phulkari. Punjab shares Phulkari weaving with Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is an art form, in which exquisite embroidery is done over shawls, dupattas and headscarves, in a simple and sparse design.

Phulkari, as the name suggests, evokes memories of Punjab countryside. The term is derived from two Sanskrit terms: *phul* meaning 'flower' and *kari* meaning 'work'. Taken together, it denotes flower work or flower craft.[20] While men worked in the fields in the biting winter, women sat in the afternoon sun after completing their domestic chores singing, gossiping, spinning and embroidering phulakri together in a group called a "trijan."[21] This stereotype of feminine and masculine works is expressed patently in the domestic folk art of phulkari. Thus, it became a cosy ornamental winter garment of women displaying exquisite workmanship of floral designs and patterns done to enhance the beauty of their attire.

However, the history of the origin of phulkari is not quite fully known due to a lack of documented evidence. Some studies suggest that the art was brought to India by the Persians who settled in Kashmir. It derived its etymology from the term 'Gulkari', as it was called in Iran (*Gul* – flower and *kari* – craft/work and *Phul* – flower and *kari* – craft/work). Others argue that

the art came from Central Asia with the Jats and Gujars, pastoral nomadic tribes. Though one finds similarities between present-day Kashmir embroidery and Chinese and Persian embroideries, both assertions have been rejected due to a lack of substantial evidence.[22]

Skilful and artistic decoration of textiles is an ancient art of the Indian subcontinent. A girl's education was not considered complete if she did not know embroidery, Rampa Pal points out.[23] Since the medieval period, phulkaris were made by the bride, perhaps to flaunt her 'feminine' skills. Embroidery as a form of ornamentation, Anu Gupta and Shalina Mehta point out, was considered the richest mode of expressing emotions and aesthetics.[24] Attaching such attributes to 'ideal' femininity continues to be a social process today.

Practiced by women, young and old, phulkari, in a social context, can be seen as the product of love and affection of grandmothers and mothers, who stitched phulkari for their daughter's bridal trousseau. This particular form of weaving is practiced by both high and working class women (particularly, the *Jatni*s).[25] Phulkari is not just an art form but a sweet nostalgic memory of pre-independence times. It was cherished and treasured as a heirloom carrying with itself symbolic value. Small girls would watch and learn from their mothers and grandmothers how to ply the needle and, in due course, would become proficient embroiderers. Every stitch and every colour of phulkari is culturally significant. Stitched on the wrong side of the cloth without the use of tracings so that the design would be embroidered automatically on the right side of the cloth is the characteristic feature of phulkari.[26] Phulkari as an auspicious sacred head cover displayed the women's imagination, originality and sense of colour blending. The motifs were also inspired by their rural household settings. Closely related to the life of a Punjabi woman, it symbolized happiness, prosperity and Suhaag[27] of a married woman. Thus, one can notice how the stereotype of feminine and masculine characteristics are expressed patently in the domestic folk art of phulkari.

Some narratives, Michelle Maskiell highlights, saw phulkari as evoking Punjabi women's past performance of traditional handicrafts as a privileged part of national culture, much as early-twentieth-century nationalists had done. Adris Banerji wrote for Marg in 1955 that phulkari "flourished in homes" because women were a "great factor contributing directly to the survival of Hindu society, culture and religion." While Punjabi women were the past performers of traditional handicrafts, the phulkaris themselves became "embroidered memories" of "Old Punjab" after Independence. The irony, in Maskiell's opinion, lies in that fact that, that in the 1950s, phulkari production was often necessary for the immediate physical survival of refugee

women, but their experience of violence and dislocation was erased when the embroidery was appropriated in the discourse of cultural survival. The narrative of Punjabi women transmitting tradition through embroidery has become the late-twentieth-century mainstay of contextualization for phulkari collection and display in both India and abroad.[28]

Some narratives even considered and read phulkari's as texts, treating them as metaphorical story-telling clothes. Seeing phulkari as a means of communication, for Neelam Grewal and Amarjit Grewal, phulkaris were "true-to-life representations of the rural life of Punjab as interpreted by the embroiderer."[29] For S.S. Hitkari, "the embroiderer's views on adultery have been made amply clear by the design showing an adulterous couple being bitten by snakes from all sides."[30] Reading motifs embroidered in the past is fraught with the strong likelihood that phulkaris become mirrors reflecting back the interpreter's concerns rather than windows for historical investigation.

Colonial Commercialization of Phulkari

Commercial success of any craft is decided by the market demand it has. The British rule in India gave a global representation to Indian handicrafts at world exhibitions.[31] Phulkaris were one of the Indian handcraft products popularized through display at the many European and North American world expositions held during the second half of the nineteenth century. *"It was the discovery of the country's 'living traditions' of craftsmanship and decorative design which assigned to India her pride of place in the circuit of world fairs and international exhibitions [after] the 1850s." (Guha-Thakurta 1997, 26)*

Though the vogue of phulkari in its true sense disappeared in the villages a century back, the commercialization of phulkari has helped revive the lost craft. The finest specimens of phulkari were either sold or presented to British officials in the past and now adorn their homes. Phulkaris, now gifted at weddings, are quickly disposed of. It is an obvious fact that the cultural value and taste for traditional craft is lost. Showcasing phulkaris in world fairs, Maskiell argues, emphasized their new location in British narratives of aesthetics and utility.

Major exhibitions were held at Lahore in 1864, 1881, 1893, and 1909, each with a descriptive catalogue through which one could follow the increasing commodification of phulkaris.[32] The 1881 Punjab Industrial Exhibition led to increased demand for their export, and, thereafter, merchants transported phulkaris to London, the United Kingdom, and New York to be used as 'exotic draperies'; that is, curtains, piano covers, or other household furnishings.[33] Of course, the European and U.S. sale of phulkaris through official enterprises such as world

expositions was firmly constrained by Eurocentric economic policies, including the ultimate control through customs duties and other costs of international colonial trade.

However, this commercialization of phulkari did not necessarily imply that it did not need certain improvements. Annie Flora Steel[34] pointed out that what is apparent after having a glance at the phulkari in the exhibition is that in case of any interference with their primary organic structure the result had been disastrous. Terrible results from the exhibits of Lahore, Delhi, Hoshiarpur and Amritsar pointed out the dire need of improvement in phulkari for it to have any kind of favour in the European market. She further pointed out that those who point out petty objections in the mysteries of the high art of phulkari find nor see no beauty in dull shades in "grey green goose" on a green-grey around. Steel pointed out some of the most obvious faults:

1. The texture of the cloth: it did not fall in heavy folds. Done on Khadur and Painsi, it was difficult to increase the quantity of such admirable work of home manufacture. Steel suggested use of fine dosuti of good substance, as Painsi she believed was more flimsy and rarely tolerable.
2. The width of the stuff was so narrow that it required the employment of two and half breadths in one curtain which consequently involved two distinct patterns. This for Steel was most objectionable as most of the village looms were incapable of weaving cloth more than 27 inches wide. An effective radical change to full yard or yard and a half was extremely difficult to expect.
3. The dye was often of poor quality and scamped: it was not a cheap process to dye a phulkari in equal weights of oil, sajji (crude soda) and madder.
4. The work is often most irregular and silk used is of terrible quality. The ordinary silk used for Khudur was sold at rupees 14 weight per rupee but it was uneven and full of knots and most importantly involved loss even if the work was regular. Steel suggested employment for geometrical design of dressed silk to be fixed at rupees 10 weight. For heavy Chope borders of a coarser kind were preferred and for Painsi and Chinsi cloths, silk cloth price was suggested to be fixed at 5 and 6 rupees weight respectively.

In her efforts to promote phulkari she proposed on her return to Gujranwala (Punjab, Pakistan), to start a phulkari school, collect patterns of phulkaris and chopes from the villages that she would eventually pass. Steel used her time to collect phulkaris along with oral tales and titbits of women's folk culture. Maskiell points out how Steel established herself as a

connoisseur of phulkaris through her knowledge of local languages and access to women in purdah. Observing rural women stitch phulkaris, Steel pointed out, as "the work of leisure – the work of women, who, after doing yeoman's service with father or husband in the fields, sit down in the cool of the evening to watch their threshing floors, and leaning, as I have often seen them, against the heaps of golden grain, darn away with patient, clumsy fingers at the roll of ruddy cloth upon their lap."[35]

Thus, one can argue that exhibitions acted as ambitious projects of the British to promote indigenous art. What is interesting to note here is that the promotion of Indian art and textile was happening simultaneously during the inter- war period as India faced a slump in its economy as a result of British economic policies. On one hand, by the end of the 19th century, most of the indigenous industries of the country had either decayed or were on the verge of definitive ruin; on the other hand, the British promoted an object of consumption for a particular class.

It well-known that British rule in India resulted in India becoming a sink of bullion for the West. The economic policies of the British resulted in the decline of Indian industries, increasing dependence on agriculture and a growing unemployment of artisanal workers. This process is termed "de-industrialisation."

The process of de-industrialisation led Indian leaders to propose their own economic policies to reorganize and modernize the traditional industries of the country. Against the backdrop of the de-industrialisation debate and amidst all the nationalist efforts to preserve and revive traditional industries, I have attempted to understand efforts by an individual who appropriated cloth as a symbol of national struggle and through khadi (a hand-woven natural fibre cloth) tried to revive the significance of handicrafts and traditional crafts of the country. M.K. Gandhi saw khadi's potential as a tool to be self-reliant, independent and bringing villages back to life. Gandhi made khadi a social equaliser which came to be represented as a national cloth. Khadi stood for self-being over appearance, substance over form and *character over clothing*,[36] values which the craft of phulkari stood for as well. Gandhi, through his emphasis on production of hand-spun khadi, recognised the need for revival of indigenous arts and crafts.

Individual efforts by Gandhi in the revival of traditional industries were taken up further in a most dedicated manner by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay,[37] who saw herself a disciple of Gandhi. Kamaladevi is best known for taking the leadership of the All India Handicrafts Board. She recognised the skills of craftsmen and thus brought them to par with the status of an artisan. She saw crafts not in isolation but as a part of rich fabric of India's life which involved the

creative expressions of her people. Through her efforts for rehabilitation of people and their craft, she is held responsible for the "great revival" of Indian handicrafts and handlooms in the post-independence era, thus leaving behind her greatest legacy in modern India.

With the increasing trend towards ethnic clothing and with improvements in the traditional craft, the fortunes of these phulkari workers may well be on the road to more prosperity. Gradual improvements and innovations have been incorporated into this traditional craft. The bright colours are being replaced by subdued strains. Phulkari designs with sober colours are very popular with Indians living in the USA., Canada and UK.

Government Efforts for Craft Revival

Having such a rich and vast range of textiles which suffered a sense of decay with the onset of British colonial rule in India, a need to preserve and revive the traditional textiles was felt by the nationalist's leaders. Having argued that the decay of indigenous industries lay at the root of poverty of India, the Indian nationalists made the protection, rehabilitation, reorganization, and modernization of handicrafts an important plank in their programme for the economic revival of the country. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, as Bipan Chandra points out, the demand for rapid industrialization of the country along modern lines had assumed national proportions. By the 1880s, one can notice a slow but continuous industrial expansion, as a result of which India came to have 36 jute mills and 206 cotton mills. Other industries such as leather, woollen textiles and mineral industries grew too.[38]

This industrial expansion was further provided impetus by central and state schemes aimed at industrial advancement of handicrafts industries in post independent India. A fashion for traditional Indian designs in the first decade after Independence included phulkari. When "variations of the 'phulkari' work" were "adapted to modern needs," there was "a great demand for articles of household goods in these designs." In 1955, the three-year-old Indian Handicrafts Board organized a "Festival of Phulkaries" as part of its mission "to stimulate the appreciation, support and revival of Indian handmade cloth, clothes and craft."[39]

Phulkari festivals and exhibitions being organized in capital provide an impetus in its revival. One such event was held (7th-17th April 2016) at the Indian Habitat Centre called Mela Phulakri. The third series of the exhibition curated by Dr. Alka Pande, the mela identified,

accepted and critiqued Punjab's past and current socio-cultural narratives through the metaphor of phulkari.

The dual colonial efforts to preserve and promote traditional Indian art and culture were continued in independent India by the central and state governments in the form of multiple schemes and policies. Aimed at promoting marketing and sales of textiles, some of the objectives of the handloom-oriented state schemes were to open state emporiums. Since there were no sales depots in Punjab, a proposal was made to open a state emporium and sales depots. The Ministry agreed to meet only 50% of expenditure on sales depots. As Punjab was deficit in production of cotton yarn and was unfavourably situated in the supply of its yarn because the yarn used by handlooms came from places far away, a proposal was made to supply yarn to weavers at a cheap rate in order to enable them to compete with weavers in other states. In order to supply yarn to weavers at a cheap rate, it was suggested that registered weavers would weave according to the specification and advice of assistant marketing officers. There was also a subsidy requested by the Punjab government asking to cover the transport charges on yarn. A recommendation was also made for conversion of looms; that is, conversion of throw shuttle looms to fly shuttle looms. The most important objective of the scheme was the central organization for the handloom industry; that is, a need to appoint the textile officer who would control the activities of the various institutes at the handloom industry. He would plan and coordinate the activities for the development of the handloom industry, and help the industry in giving technical assistance to handloom weavers. The handloom industry in Punjab was experiencing great difficulty in marketing. This is evident from the fact that handloom cloth found no ready market. A proposal for marketing organization was put forth along with a proposal to appoint a marketing officer, assisted by three marketing officers, who would collect industrial and commercial intelligence by studying the market in the country and from foreign countries through trade commissioners. He would get orders for handloom cloth from the state and central governments as well as private agencies and distribute the same to the cottage workers for execution. He would also organize sales depots at Hosihyarpur, Panipat and Ludhiana to market the handloom goods produced. To popularize handloom goods and create a wider market, it was proposed to advertise in newspapers, journals, wall posters, and cinemas. Swadeshi and khadi being the most advocated method to encourage the traditional Indian industries, khadi, too, gained attention for improvements in hand spinning. Punjab used to be the home for cotton spinning and goods produced were used by the rural population universally. But the industry has now shown deterioration. To improve the efficiency of female spinners, training in scientific spinning and improvement in spinning wheels was proposed.[40] Another

such scheme was the 1955 Development of Handloom Industry in PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) grants and loans for scheme which focused on loans sanctioned by the government for development of the handloom industry, providing working capital to cooperative societies so as to financially strengthen them and to bring 40 handlooms under the co-operative fold. (There are 1408 handlooms in the Bassi Pathan area, 199 looms owned by 165 weavers under 13 weavers cooperatives.) These cooperatives would be formed into a union which would carry out the following tasks: procure yarn and make it available to the members, secure contracts for produced goods for supply to merchants and export abroad, give technical advice to the cooperatives in the production of marketable varieties of handloom cloth, and maintain the quality of handloom products. Furthermore, the organization of sale of products of the union and the appointment of a sales organizer to guide the production of handloom cloth was proposed. And for economic interest, the union office was proposed to be set up at Bassi Pathan. [41]

Though the wave for promoting indigenous industries was already present during the 20th century, systematic regulated efforts and schemes were put forth for marketing the handloom-handicraft industry. The handloom-handicraft sector is an unorganized, decentralized, labour intensive cottage industry which provides employment to craftspersons in rural and semi-urban areas and preserves the rich cultural heritage of India. It is estimated that 23 million people are engaged in handicrafts and weaving in the Indian textile industry and it has been the backbone of Indian economy, accounting for 4% of the national GDP, 21% of employment, and 14% of industrial production.

It was the combined efforts of government agencies such as the Planning Commission, the Export Promotion Councils, the Directorate of Tourism and the NGOs that worked for the revival of the handicrafts and the economic resurgence of the artists and the artisans recognizing the importance and potential of this vital part of the rural, non-formal sector. The Ministry of Textiles under the direction of the Office of the Development Commissioner Handicrafts has set up Regional Design & Technical Development Centres in various states to seek new directions for Indian crafts and craftspeople. Handicrafts being a state subject, its development and promotion are the primary responsibility of every state government. However, the Central Government is supplementing their efforts by implementing various developmental schemes. Some of these efforts include heritage festivals, conducting seminars and workshops, initiatives to provide training to weavers, financial aid to the workers, and establishing craft museums, to name a few.

Considering the job opportunities in this sector, the government has focused on technology upgrades and skill development. The examples cited above are some of the continuous endeavours by the ministry to benefit their workers from time to time.

Documenting Individual Lives

The sexual division of labour remains basis of most feminist critiques. The feminization of labour in India has been questioned by scholars due to their low labour participation rates. Despite this, the majority of their workforce is in the informal-unorganized sector. Academic interest in the gendering of labour in India is still recent. An investigation into women's employment is expected to choose areas and industries where women predominate. It's precisely for this reason that women weaving phulkari in the Patiala district of Punjab offer a scope to scrutinize women who undertook non-agricultural employment and yet were excluded from experiences of working class men.

The story of phulkari from Patiala explores the continuing of gendering of work from the colonial period into the present times. During the 1880s, as the consumption of phulkari acquired international market with intense commercialization, it also revived the dying-lost art of phulkari. Patiala has emerged as the main commercial hub of manufacturing both traditional and modern-day phulkari. While the country is still poised between past and future, tradition and technology, the women in Patiala continue to stitch and exchange phulkari which is reflective of their socio-economic milieu amidst their struggle for living.

Though the girls were introduced to the skill at young age as it was not tedious, and the pleasant atmosphere provided an incentive to learning of the skill along with other cultural activities, the embroidery was done more skilfully and beautifully by elderly women. In present times, it is mostly these elderly women who continue to stitch phulkari in their aesthetic form, though machines have taken over this craft as well. Amongst the younger generation, the inquisitiveness to learn the craft is absent as they are unaware of the cultural value it once held. And those who seek to undergo training to learn the skill are only driven by the profit motive of it.

Independence and the partition of Punjab, Maskiell points out, were pivotal in Indian narratives of phulkari heritage. Many of the textiles were lost or destroyed during the rioting and violence accompanying the migration of millions of Sikhs and Hindus from Punjab territory

ceded to the new state of Pakistan to the new Indian state established in the eastern half of the colonial province. Amidst this period of political instability, violence and cultural trauma, what is surprising to note is that these women continued to pursue the craft. Indigent refugees sold many other phulkaris. Refugee women often found themselves living in India but separated from their families and with little financial support. Most possessed few wage-earning skills, but they often knew how to embroider.[42]

I present brief individual accounts of women who reside in Tripuri area of Patiala district, Punjab. Apart from the gendered work of phulakri, these women share an important link. The craft remains the mainstay of the Bahawalpur community (Bahawalpur region of West Punjab now Pakistan) which migrated from Pakistan in the aftermath of the Partition. Muslims of the same caste were engaged in this embroidery prior to their flight to Pakistan. Members of this community were settled in Tripuri, a separate township created for them in Patiala by the ruler of Patiala, Maharaja Yadavindra Singh. At least one women in each Tripuri household is engaged in weaving phulakri. Rows of manjis (jute cots) laden with women working on phulkari designs greet you in the alleys and by-lanes of the area.[43]

Tripuri, a remote settlement in the town, has emerged as a cluster of handicraft textile providing livelihood to a number of households. Now every house in every street has a textile weaver. As one crosses the street, one can distinctly see women sitting out in 'trinjan' weaving the textile. Houses of many such small weavers are typically small; just two rooms and a veranda. Interviews show that making a living was a prime motivator for women during that time. Very few women like Janaki Devi could surface as a female entrepreneurs and establish a craft enterprise during the time of changing economies and political transition. Self-employed, the majority of them utilized the weaving skills acquired from their mothers to produce handloom products commercially in order to earn a livelihood.[44]

Interviews of Phulkari weavers in Tripuri area, Patiala, Punjab – 2016

S.No.	Name of the weaver and Age	How was the craft learned?	Knowledge/ fond memories associated with weaving Phulkari	Cause for learning how to weave?	Struggles faced in market trend? Family support on women continuing to pursue the craft of weaving?	Government support? Other remarks?
1.	Janaki Taneja – 68 yr	Learned the craft from her mother along with her sister from a young age of 15. No formal training.	Stiches drew meaning from simple rural setting. Bawalpuri's as being the original community who started the embroidery of Phulkari in west Punjab and in East Punjab.	Initially learned it as an act of leisure activity. Post-independence went door to door, asking for weaving work to help contribute in family income.	Has family support but men have taken charge of commercial aspect of making of Phulkari. Her granddaughter Kudrat, not only understands the cultural significance of Phulkari but also comes across as the most enthusiastic participant of the whole Phulkari business.	Janaki is claiming legal recognition for her mother Kundan Devi who commercialized Phulkari in Patiala after 1947. Her passion for Phulkari got her state support to exhibit Phulkari all over India and international cliental. She learned craft as a part of cultural skill, now she has an impressive wholesale manufacturing unit of Phulkari, providing employment to more than 200 women (35- 70years), which she operates the unit from home.
2.	Jayvanti – 70 yr	Learned the skill from Kundan Devi after marriage (22yr)	She is nostalgic of times when she used to wear it herself and the times when stitching of Phulkari was a ritualistic affair for her daughter. Her enthusiasm to stitch a Phulkari was never profit driven. She pursued the skill purely out of interest which she could do during her leisure time.	Jayvanti pursuedher interest to stitch Phulkari as it allowed her to exchanging the gossip of everyday life and social relations with other women (who weaved Phulkari) in a group called Trijan.	she passed on her knowledge of the embroidery to ladies of her house i.e. daughter, daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Howvere none of them were able to devote the required time and dedication to the craft because of their busy life schedule and other social engagements.	On a happy note she remarks, "Jo phulkari dekhega khush rehega". On translated it meant, whosoever would see phulkari would become happy
3.	Draupadi Batra – 80 yr Oldest among all	she like Jayvanti too learnt the skill after marriage which she was able to further develop during her leisure time due to her interest.	Learned it on her own by looking at other women stitch Phulkari, and passed the knowledge to her daughters and daughter- in laws. Stitched Phulkari for her daughter's wedding	Learned for leisure.	Draupadi had no pressure to sustain the family. There is also no interest in learning the skill for the cultural importance is	However she points out a stark change in the market trend. initially she used to go to the traders and get the duppattas on which Phulkari had to be stitched, after a certain period the traders/shopkeepers used to come outsourcing the labour and material through them.
4.	Kamya Kinger and Vinky Pawa – 22 yr and 24 yr respectively	Both skilled in the stitch, learned how to stitch out of their interest for the embroidery.	Realizing the cultural stigma the craft had, the sisters weren't fond of adorning the same themselves. The reason they gave was if worn, they would be mocked for wearing such a heavy garment in daily life. Thus leaving highly embroidered garments leaving it to be a to be a garment suiting only to the ladies of metropolitan cities and high class.	Vinky Pawa married and settled in Rajpura district continues stitching Phulkari in that region. In Rajura the Phulkari is called Parontha.	Contributing to the family income, Vinky isn't too keen to take up the task of embroidery stitching full time. Competition from the other weavers and underpayment of the skill are her main reasons for not devoting herself to Phulkari.	Unaware of govt. effort in terms of various schemes.

5.	Sheila Railen – 52 yr	No formal training to be given to learn the stitch. Learned by looking at other women weave.	She's more comfortable in doing the traditional Phulakri which is done without print, trace or frame.	Learned to sustain her family. Having stitched Phulakri half her life for others, Sheila doesn't remember wearing one herself or stitching it for weddings in her family.	No time restriction for completion of a Phulkari by the trader, till day she is paid according to the design which isn't directly proportional to her labour, time and health.	Outsourcing the labour for Phulkari acts as a major challenge to their livelihood and market circle. Another challenge posed by high caste Punjabi women, who stitch Phulkari in their homes out of dual motive of self-interest and profit. It is these women who get favoured by caste and class category, as they are paid more for their Phulkari.
6.	Vimala Rani – 65 yr	Got married at young age of 16 year and learned the stitch only after marriage from ladies in neighbourhood.	Vimala too preferred the traditional Phulkari without any frame or print as it displays the embroidery in its most authentic form.	She misses being the part of the group which was the only active social life she had out of domestic household. Getting operated for cataract doesn't allow her to do a stitch that puts stain on the eyesight.	Satisfied being paid according for her hard-work. She further points out to the fact that rate were fixed by the women themselves, though rates for the designs varying accordingly.	Family is supportive of her still wanting to stitch as little as possible. All she manages to do now are the borders of the pallu or would share the happiness of stitching just by looking her daughter-in-law stitch some Phulkari designs for her own use.
7.	Savitri Devi - 72 yr	Like others, learned from women in neighborhood.	Her caze for Phulkari that though she couldn't afford to get Phulkari stitched for her wedding trousseau, she stitched the Phulkari garment all by herself. She is well skilled in Phulkari stitches of various designs.	Had to take it up due to economic hardship, yet gave full devotion and time to the craft.	Saddened by lack of enthusiasm from the family in the craft. However there is no restriction from the family at her willingness to continue weaving.	She continues to stitch Phulkari and encourage young kids to sit-look-learn the skill.
8.	Draupadi and Bimla Kinger 62 yr and 67 yr respectively	Learned from women in neighborhood without any formal training.	Well aware of the increasing market value of Phulkari in cities like Chandigarh, Delhi, Bombay and foreign for these two sisters, Phulkari didn't bring any joy or happiness as it did for other women.	To support the family household, they learned the craft. Despite that didn't receive the family support for weaving Phulkari For the Kinger family in particular, women's working was taken as an insult and thus didn't allow women to go to big cities in search of job.	Fixed rates by the market and traders and tough competition from ladies stitching Phulkari Kinger sisters didn't bargain much for the minimal price they got for their hard-work. Unaware of govt initiatives aimed to help women weavers, Kinger sisters for a long time faced economic exploitation at the hands of intermediaries and traders.	Since the Phulkari produced was outsourced by women working from home, the Kinger sisters managed to learn and do the stitch.

Though commercialisation has resulted in employment for thousands of women, the quality of work has been affected and the income of embroiders dropped.

"We hardly get anything—just about Rs 35 to Rs 45 per suit. A dupatta, which may take a month to embroider, brings in only Rs 500 for us. Even though we know that it will be sold in the market for as much as Rs 3,000, we can't negotiate the price," complains Sheela, a local embroiderer. Most women point out to their inability to negotiate the price as it may end up in losing the assignment to someone else. Local shopkeepers, on the other hand, state that with a virtual mushrooming of people doing business in phulkari, their profit margins have been reduced to less than Rs 10 per salwar suit. [45]

Underpaid, unacknowledged, these women remain confined to home as domestic labour and exist as a gendered category, keeping the craft alive. Their problems do not end here. Despite facing the gendered work difference, these women face competition from migratory labours from other states, specifically Bihar. Using lower quality cloth and unequalled fineness of the intricate weaving, these workers imitate the craft of stitching and making phulkari, selling it at a lower price to the trader in order to sustain themselves. It is this fear of losing the work that is why these female workers often did not engage in negotiating their wages and agreed to the rates fixed by the traders or middlemen. This outsourcing of labour by the migrant community, Sheelan Devi points out, acts as a major challenge to their livelihood and market circles. Modern day mechanization too adds to the competition they face, as men are favoured to do all the mechanized work, leaving less-skilled work for women in this scenario. Though this craft is the source of livelihood of thousands in the city, few craftspersons have been able to take full advantage of its popularity oversees. However, trading houses in Delhi dominate the export scene.

Very few had the zeal to carry forward the craft a means for independent living or to establish their own enterprise. What is surprising to note is that even the slightest invisible effort of these women aimed at their self-empowerment does not have any patriarchal limit, except for the Kinger sisters. For the majority of them, though family support is lacking on one hand, on the other hand, these women are not bound or restricted by any social patriarchal norms of society. This could led to these women being liberal Indian woman. As Rupa Oza points out, the most effective ways in which the new liberal Indian woman's consumer and sexual identity is crafted is through her 'relationship with the patriarchal household – a mother, a wife, a sister'. These roles not only in her opinion prescribe her relationship with men, but also anchor her to

the home. The formation of the 'new women' does not reconstitute the old structures of oppression; rather, to follow Sarkar's formulation, she is subject to new forms of patriarchal oppression.[46]

Craftspeople are always seen as picturesque exhibits of our past, rather than dynamic entrepreneurs of our present and future. Social prejudices and taboos are thrown away when women discover their own power. Surpassing the limitations of being underpaid, unable to negotiate market prices occasionally, or being categorized as informal labour category, it is fascinating to see these women still continue to pursue their craft with unshaken dedication. They use these limitations to their advantage as with no time factor at play (like in a factory system), they weave phulkari at their leisure, which helps them bring out the best of the craft's beauty. This allows them to balance their lives as phulkari wage workers in a patrilineal family and the lack of family acknowledgment for their craft and skill does not disappoint them. Deficient in any formal training in the craft, these women humbly impart training to students of various design institutes who acknowledge the stronghold of these women. These women, though aware of their own work potential and labour, and facing competition from other migrant labour, have not been successful in forming a joint cooperative society. Yet, they share a bond of sisterhood which allows them to exchange their narratives of everyday lives and sympathise and provide comfort to each other in times of need. Weaving phulkari for them is not only a cultural agent of a rich past, but also an extension of their household which they share with each other.

A lot more needs to been done to explore the field, but what comes out clearly are the efforts by the state to revive what was once a dying or lost craft and the passion and dedication of these women to come together and stitch phulkari, overcoming all the challenges in their way. It is extraordinarily exciting and moving to see the traditional hand skills of women, used to craft products for themselves and their families, gradually changing into a contemporary, urban, market-led product, but still strongly reflecting the cultural identity and individual skills of the makers. Though there are power looms and mills in the state today, these women are to be accredited for preserving Punjab's heritage by working laboriously, producing traditional textiles. Continuing efforts at empowering these skilled women is the ideal solution.

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[1] Jaya Jaitly, Handlooms in India: Past, Present and Future, Yojana: Textiles: Weaving a New story, October 2016

[2] These are the industrial undertakings having fixed investment in plant and machinery, whether held on ownership basis or lease basis or hire purchase basis not exceeding Rs. 1 crore.

[3] It is estimated that 23 million people (both men and women) are engaged in handicrafts and weaving (instead of today use present times).

[4] Gupta Kavita, Accelerating growth in Indian Textiles, Yojana: Textiles: Weaving a New story, October 2016

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[17] Samita Sen, Women and Labour in Colonial India, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 21-53, 89-141. Sen in her women in jute mills of Bengal in the colonial period brought two issues into focus: first is the significance of ideological issues in understanding the gendered composition of the labour force and the second is the connection between rural work and women's lives.

[18] Chitra Joshi, 'Deindustrialization and the crisis of male identities', International review of social history, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 159-175.

[19] Punjab saw massive integration of people into the freedom struggle after the Jallianwala Bagh with Approximately over 6 million settled in Punjab as a consequence of partition of Punjab in 1947. Most of the scholarship on Punjab has focused on tensions within the dominant communities - Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. Arts and crafts have begun to receive attention only very recently.

[20] It is also called *Bagh* which means a garden.

[21] Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta, *Phulkari and Bagh folk art of Punjab: a study of changing designs from traditional to contemporary time,* American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, 2014, p. 36.

[22] Rampa Pal, The Phulkari, a lost craft, Delhi, 1995, p. 14.

[23] Rampa Pal, *The Phulkari, a lost craft,* Delhi, 1955, p. 22.

[24] Anu H. Gupta and Shalina Mehta, *Patterns of Phulkari: Then and now,* Bonfring International Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management Science, 2014, p. 1.

[25] Ibid, p.24.

[26] A garment as beautiful and intricate as phulkari cannot be limited to a single design or motif. These varied kinds of phulkari, S.S.Hitkari highlights are very much stylized of the nature of darning stitch which is done in straight lines and not curves.[26] Being the most favourite shawls during winters, the best phulkaris are believed to be found in the districts of Peshawar, Sialkot, Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Hazara in West Punjab and in the regions of Amritsar, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Ambala and the P.E.P.S.U region in East Punjab.

[27] Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta, *Phulkari and Bagh folk art of Punjab: a study of changing designs from traditional to contemporary time,* American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, 2014, p. 36.

[28] Michelle Maskiell, Embroidering the Past: Phulkari Textiles and Gendered Work as "Tradition" and "Heritage" in Colonial and Contemporary Punjab, The Journal of Asian Studies ,Vol. 58, No. 2 , May, 1999, p. 376

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[30] S.S. Hitkari, Phulkari: The Folk Art of the Punjab, New Delhi, Phulkari Publications, 1980

[31] According to Breckenridge showcasing phulkaris in world fairs emphasized on Britain's new location in British narratives of aesthetics and utility, 1989.

[32] For these exhibitions, see Report ... 1910; Hoffenberg 1993, Appendix A

[33] Maskiell Michelle, Embroidering the Past: Phulkari Textiles and Gendered Work as "Tradition" and "Heritage" in Colonial and Contemporary Punjab, The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 58, No. 2, 1999

[34] Mrs. Steel was an English lady married to Henry William Steel, a member of the Indian civil service. She lived in India for 22 years, mainly in Punjab and this got her interested in the rural life of Punjab and indigenous crafts and culture of the region. She aided colonial states' efforts aimed at fostering Indian arts and crafts.

[35] Michelle Maskiell, Embroidering the Past: Phulkari Textiles and Gendered Work as "Tradition" and "Heritage" in Colonial and Contemporary Punjab, The Journal of Asian Studies ,Vol. 58, No. 2 , May, 1999, p. 370

[36] Ektaa Jain, Khadi: A cloth and beyond, Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal and Gandhi Research Foundation, p. 1.

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[42] Michelle Maskiell, Embroidering the Past: Phulkari Textiles and Gendered Work as "Tradition" and "Heritage" in Colonial and Contemporary Punjab, The Journal of Asian Studies ,Vol. 58, No. 2 , May, 1999, pp. 374-375

[43] These interviews were conducted in 2016 in a small neighborhood of Tripri, Patiala, Punjab. The area was created by the ruler of Patiala for the community of Bahawalpur from west Punjab now Pakistan.

[44] Helen Mcarthy, Women , Marriage and Paid work in post war Britain, Women's History Review, New York and London, VOL. 26, NO. 1, 2017, p. 46. points out that some scholars argued 'optimistically that the employment of the wives strengthened marriage through the material security guaranteed by a second wage and by building greater commonality of interests between spouses'. Other sources saw 'working women as imperil to marital harmony because of the change they posed to the men's traditional identity as providers and to the legitimacy and modernity of wife to full time housewife worker in home. However from the interviews it is clear, that in case of these individual Phulkari workers such complexities were not enforced on the identity and agency of a woman. Despite the lack of family support, all of them continue to

work as Phulkari weavers at their own convenience as they managed the household along with the task of being an embroiderer.

[45] Gagandeep Kaur, 'Society: Rich art, Poor astisans', The Tribune, 30 March, 2008 http://www.tribuneindia.com/2008/20080330/spectrum/society.htm

[46] Rupal Oza, The making of Neoliberal India: Nationalism, Gender, and the Paradoxes of Globalization, London and New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 30.