

# Handicraft Industry and Women's Struggle for Empowerment in Contemporary India: A Case Study of *Phulkari* as a Gendered Work

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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 globalised brands that are the very same across the world. In contrast, the handlooms of India in pure yarns provide exclusive customised 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."*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The existence of a large number of handicrafts in the twenty first century is a feature not only of India but of several other Asian countries as well. As a traditional industry, handicrafts coexist with the modern textile industry. Utilising 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 industry is extremely varied with hand-spun and hand-woven textiles at one end, and capital-intensive, highly developed mills produced textiles at the other.

One of the essential components of the textile industry are the small-scale handloom industries that play a significant role in the economies of developing countries like India by providing employment to craftspeople in rural and semi-urban areas. It also preserves the rich cultural craft heritage of India. A gendered division of labour in handlooms has been and continues to be a significant feature in most parts of India. Traditionally, while men have played a major role in weaving, women were involved in pre-weaving activities such as spinning, warping and winding. Apart from such activities, weaving was never identified with women. Though

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women worked as hard as men, they received less remuneration than men.

However, in contrast to this usual modus operandi, Punjab presents a different picture. In Punjab, weaving as an occupation was dominated exclusively by women. In fact, a very small fraction of these women had to and continue to engage themselves in the dual role of producers and traders. 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.

This paper attempts to understand the gendered division of labour and the attendant socio-economic inequality in the handloom sector of the textile industry in India. In particular, the paper explores the lives of female weavers of Punjab. In this phase of competitive commercialisation and ever-expanding globalisation, the paper throws light on the world of female weavers, their socio-economic conditions, their relationship with the community and their families, wages and their aspirations in a changing market structure.

## A Gendered Division of Labour in Textiles

The glorious saga of the development of textiles has continued unabated for the last four millennia. At present, the textile industry provides a livelihood to millions of textile workers in the country. Providing employment to over 45 million people directly and to over 60 million people indirectly,<sup>2</sup> the Indian textile industry is the second largest employer after agriculture. It is estimated that there are 23 million people engaged in weaving and handicrafts today. The female labour participation rate in India has revealed an increasing trend as well. It increased from 19.7 per cent in 1981 to 25.6 per cent in 2011. However, in Punjab, female work participation has shown a decreasing trend in rural areas and an increasing

trend in urban areas during 2001-2011. The difference in male-female participation vis-à-vis female participation is greater in urban areas as compared to rural areas.<sup>3</sup> However, participation in the handloom sector is dominated by female workers in India. Almost 30 lakhs of the total handloom workers are females, and 88 per cent of them reside in rural areas.<sup>4</sup>

Besides its gendered nature, the Indian textile industry has a number of inherent strengths in terms of rich legacy of textile production, large and expanding production capacities, strong multi-fibre raw material base, low import intensity, massive pool of cheap skilled workers along with technical and managerial personnel, flexible production systems, an expanding domestic market and a vibrant entrepreneurship. Indeed, strong entrepreneurship skills have always been the backbone of the Indian textile industry. The technological obsolescence has also been overcome with modernisation of the manufacturing process, which has led to an increase in production, enhanced the quality, reduced the cost of production, maintenance and the power cost per unit of production.<sup>5</sup>

On a cultural plane, craftspeople are the conveyers of India's tradition in craftsmanship, epitomising the beauty of the handcrafted textile. However, as a socio-economic group, they are at the bottom of the pyramid. Their condition is no better than that of an artisan in the powerloom sector. Harnessing the potential of this sector and to preserve the traditional craft, requires different types of effort, which will in turn help to improve the socio-economic condition of the weavers. 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 also focused on technological upgrades and skill development. There have been continuous endeavours through Government schemes to benefit the workers from time to time.

The interplay of class and gender is also important. The women workers find that their experience as a working class is different from their male counterparts. Though barely having a voice of their own, the working class at particular historical moments, has found numerous heterogeneous spokespersons in the form of the state, trade unionists, capitalists and philanthropists.<sup>6</sup> The voices of women are, however, more distant. As feminisation of labour<sup>7</sup> became a reality in developing countries, 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. According to labour historians, a gendered shift

occurred within labouring households in South Asia after the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> 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. In most of the literature on women's participation in Third World countries, there is a tendency to portray them as victims of class and patriarchal, racial and sexual ideologues.

Samita Sen argues that ideas of domesticity were appropriated by working class families who associated seclusion with high social status and tended to withdraw women from the labour force.<sup>9</sup> Labour of workers has often been seen in masculinist terms that denote the men's earnings as 'main' and women's earnings as 'supplementary.' As such, women are marginalised from public employment and they retreat into the home and domesticity. But boundaries between the home and outside, the inner and outer are often reworked: the home itself became an arena of wage-work for a large number of women.<sup>10</sup> In a scenario where large traditional industries are declining and there is an expansion of informal work, women's wage labour at home is a source of subsistence for a large number of working-class families. Shram Shakti's report for the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector points towards a minimised workforce with women engaged in a range of activities in households and small industrial units.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Phulkari*: A Traditional Craft Tested by Time**

Handicrafts of a country showcase the rich and artistic history of that nation. The *phulkari* tradition of Punjab is an example of such a craft heritage of India, which is reflected in the art. Artisans and craftspeople make use of a number of techniques combined with exquisite and vibrant designs to make the most intriguing artistic artefacts. Punjab shares *Phulkari* weaving with Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is a form of art 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 *phulkari* together in a group called a 'trijan'.<sup>13</sup> This division 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.

The history of the origin of *phulkari* is not fully known owing to 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 pastoral nomadic tribes of the Jats and Gujars. 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.<sup>14</sup>

Skilful and artistic decoration of textiles is an ancient art of the Indian subcontinent. Rampa Pal argues that a girl's education was not considered complete if she did not know embroidery.<sup>15</sup> Since the medieval period, *phulkari* was made by the bride, in order to flaunt her 'feminine' skills. Anu Gupta and Shalina Mehta point out that embroidery as a form of ornamentation was considered the richest mode of expressing emotions and aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> 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 *Jatnis*).<sup>17</sup> *Phulkari* is not just an art form but a sweet nostalgic memory of pre-independence times. It was cherished and treasured as an 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*. *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 symbolised happiness, prosperity and *suhaag* (symbol of being married)<sup>18</sup> of a married woman. Thus, the gendering of feminine and masculine characteristics is expressed patently in the domestic folk art of *phulkari*.

Michelle Maskiell highlights that *phulkari* evoked Punjabi women's past performance of traditional handicrafts as a privileged part of national culture, much as early twentieth century nationalists had done.<sup>19</sup> Adris Banerji states 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 *phulkari* themselves became 'embroidered memories' of 'old Punjab' after independence.<sup>20</sup> The irony, in Maskiell's opinion, lies in that fact that, in the 1950s, *phulkari* production was often necessary for the immediate physical survival of refugee women, but their experiences of violence and dislocation were 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 contextualisation for *phulkari* collection and display in both India and abroad.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars consider and read *phulkari's* as texts, treating them as metaphorical story-telling clothes. Neelam Grewal and Amarjit Grewal see *phulkari* as a means of communication, which were 'true-to-life representations of the rural life of Punjab as interpreted by the embroiderer.'<sup>22</sup> 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.'<sup>23</sup> Reading motifs embroidered in the past suggests that *phulkaris* become mirrors reflecting the interpreter's concerns rather than windows for historical investigation.

### Colonial Commercialisation 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.<sup>24</sup> *Phulkaris* were one of the Indian handcraft products popularised through display at the many European and North American world expositions held during the second half of the nineteenth century. For Tapati Guha-Thakurta, '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'.<sup>25</sup>

Though the vogue of *phulkari* in its true sense disappeared in the villages a century back, the commercialisation of *phulkari* helped revive the lost craft. The finest specimens of *phulkari* were either sold or presented to British officials and adorned their homes. Showcasing *phulkari* in world fairs, Carol A. Breckenridge argues, emphasised their new location in British narratives of aesthetics and utility.<sup>26</sup> *Phulkari*, now gifted at weddings, are quickly

disposed of. It is a fact that the cultural value and taste for traditional craft is lost.

Major exhibitions were held at Lahore in 1864, 1881, 1893, and 1909, each with a descriptive catalogue which shows the increasing commodification of *phulkari*.<sup>27</sup> The 1881 Punjab Industrial Exhibition led to an increased demand for their export, and, thereafter, merchants transported *phulkari* to London, England, and New York to be used as 'exotic draperies,' that is, as curtains, piano covers, or other household furnishings.<sup>28</sup> The European and United States of America sale of *phulkari* through official enterprises such as world expositions was firmly constrained by Eurocentric economic policies, including the ultimate control by means of customs duties and other costs of international colonial trade.

However, this commercialisation of *phulkari* did not necessarily imply that it did not need certain improvements. Annie Flora Steel<sup>29</sup> pointed out that any interference with their primary organic structure had been disastrous. Terrible results from the exhibits of Lahore, Delhi, Hoshiarpur, and Amritsar necessitated the dire need for improvement in *phulkari* for it to have a demand in the European markets. She further argues that those who pointed out petty objections in the mysteries of the high art of *phulkari* neither found nor saw any beauty in dull shades of 'grey green goose' on a green-grey background. In her efforts to promote *phulkari* she proposed on her return to Gujranwala (Punjab, Pakistan), to start a *phulkari* school, collect patterns of *phulkari* and *chope* from the villages. Steel used her time to collect *phulkari* along with oral tales and tidbits of women's folk culture. Maskiell points out how Steel established herself as a connoisseur of *phulkari* through her knowledge of local languages and access to women in *pardah*. Observing rural women stitch *phulkari*, Steel pointed out, '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.'<sup>30</sup> It may be argued that exhibitions acted as ambitious projects of the British to promote indigenous art. Thus, on the one hand, by the end of the nineteenth century, most of the indigenous industries of the country had either decayed or were on the verge of definitive ruin and on the other hand, the British promoted *phulkari* as an object of consumption for a particular class.

### Post-Colonial Efforts at Craft Revival

Such a rich and vast range of textiles which suffered a decay with the onset of British colonial rule in India;

the nationalist leaders felt a need to preserve and revive the traditional textiles. Having argued that the decay of indigenous industries lay at the root of poverty of India, the Indian nationalists made the protection, rehabilitation, reorganisation, and modernisation of handicrafts an important plank in their programme for the economic revival of the country. By the end of the nineteenth century, as Bipan Chandra points out, the demand for rapid industrialisation 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.<sup>31</sup>

This industrial expansion was provided an impetus by various Government schemes aimed at advancement of handicrafts industries in the post-independence period. 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 organised a 'festival of *phulkari*' as part of its mission 'to stimulate the appreciation, support and revival of Indian handmade cloth, clothes and craft.'<sup>32</sup> The organisation of *phulkari* festivals and exhibitions in the Capital provide an impetus to its revival. One such event called the *Mela Phulkari* was held at the Indian Habitat Centre in April 2016. At the third series of the exhibition curated by Alka Pande, the fair identified, accepted and critiqued Punjab's past and current socio-cultural narratives through the *phulkari*.

The Central and State Governments, through multiple schemes and policies, sought to preserve and promote traditional Indian art and culture in independent India. Some of the objectives of the handloom-oriented schemes were to open state emporiums, aimed at promoting, marketing and increasing the sale of textiles. Since there were no sales depots in Punjab, a proposal was made to open a state emporium and sales depots. The Ministry for Commerce and Industry agreed to meet only 50 per cent of the expenditure on sales depots. Punjab was both deficit in production of cotton yarn as well as being unfavourably situated in the supply of its yarn because the yarn used by handlooms came from far away places. Therefore, 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. A recommendation was also made for conversion of throw shuttle looms to fly shuttle looms. The most important objective of the

scheme was the central organisation for the handloom industry, that is, a need to appoint a textile officer, who would control the activities of the various institutes in 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 was evident from the fact that handloom cloth found no ready market. A proposal for marketing organisation was put forth along with a proposal to appoint a marketing officer, who would collect industrial and commercial intelligence by studying the markets both in the country and in foreign countries through trade commissioners. In order to popularise handloom goods and to create a wider market, it was proposed to advertise in newspapers, journals, wall posters, and cinemas.

Punjab used to be the home for cotton spinning and goods produced were used by the rural population universally. But the industry showed deterioration. To improve the efficiency of female spinners, training in scientific spinning and improvement in spinning wheels was proposed. Another such scheme was the 1955 Development of Handloom Industry in PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) 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 1,408 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: (1) procure yarn and make it available to the members, (2) secure contracts for produced goods for supply to merchants and export abroad, (3) give technical advice to the cooperatives in the production of marketable varieties of handloom cloth, and (4) maintain the quality of handloom products.<sup>33</sup>

Though the promotion of indigenous industries was already present from the beginning of the twentieth century, systematic regulated efforts and schemes were put forth for marketing the handloom-handicraft industry after 1947. The handloom-handicraft sector, which provides employment to craftspeople in rural and semi-urban areas and preserves the rich cultural heritage of India, is unorganised, decentralised, and labour intensive. 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 per cent of the National Gross Domestic Product, 21 per cent of employment, and 14 per cent of industrial production.

It was Government agencies such as the Planning Commission, the Export Promotion Councils, the Directorate of Tourism and the Non-Governmental Organisations that worked for the revival of handicrafts and the economic resurgence of the artists and the artisans, recognising 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 responsibilities of every state Government. The Central Government is also supplementing their efforts by implementing various developmental schemes such as organising 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.

### Documenting Individual Lives of Phulkari Weavers

The story of *phulkari* from Patiala shows the continuing of gendering of work from the colonial period into the present times. During the 1880s, as the consumption of *phulkari* acquired an international market with intense commercialization, it also revived the dying art of *phulkari*. Patiala has emerged as the main commercial hub for 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.

Although girls were introduced to the skill at a young age and the pleasant atmosphere provided an incentive to learning the skill along with other cultural activities, the embroidery was done skilfully and beautifully by elderly women. At present, 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.

Michelle Maskiell points out that independence and the partition of Punjab were pivotal in the Indian narratives of *phulkari* heritage. Many of the textiles were lost or destroyed during the rioting and violence accompanying. However, these women continued to pursue the craft amidst political instability, violence and cultural trauma

of the period. The poor and needy refugees sold many other *phulkaris*. Refugee women living in India often found themselves separated from their families and with little financial support. Most of them possessed few wage-earning skills, but they often knew how to embroider.<sup>34</sup>

The women who reside in Tripuri area of Patiala District, Punjab, a remote settlement in the town, share an important link apart from the gendered nature of *phulkari* work. The craft remains the mainstay of the Bahawalpur community (Bahawalpur region of West Punjab now in Pakistan) who had migrated from Pakistan in the aftermath of the Partition of India. The Muslims of the same weaving caste were engaged in this embroidery prior to their flight from India 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 woman in each Tripuri household is engaged in weaving *phulkari*. Rows of manjis (jute cots) laden with women working on *phulkari* designs greet you in the alleys and by-lanes of the area.<sup>35</sup>

Tripuri 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 the prime motivator for women during that time. Very few women like Janaki Devi, could surface as a female entrepreneur and establish a craft enterprise during the time of changing economies and political transition. Self-employed, the majority of them utilised the weaving skills acquired from their mothers, to produce handloom products commercially, in order to earn a livelihood.

Though commercialisation has resulted in employment of 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 cannot negotiate the price,' complained Vimala Rani<sup>36</sup>, a local embroiderer of Tripuri. Most women also pointed to their inability to negotiate the price as they might end up losing the assignment to someone else. Local shopkeepers, on the other hand, state that with a virtual mushrooming of people doing business in *phulkari*, they hardly get any margins out of the profit made by traders.

Underpaid, unacknowledged, these women remain confined to their homes 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 migrant 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 work to these migrant labourers that made the Tripuri female workers not negotiate their wages and agree to the rates fixed by the traders or middlemen. Sheila Railen<sup>37</sup> laments that this outsourcing of labour by the migrant community acts as a major challenge to their livelihood and market circles. Moreover, modern-day mechanisation adds to the competition they face, because men are favoured to do all the mechanised work in the mills and factories, leaving the less-skilled work for women in such a scenario.

Very few had the zeal to carry forward the craft as a means for independent living or to establish their own enterprise. Though for the majority of these women, family support is lacking, they are not bound or restricted by any social patriarchal norms of society. This could lead to these women being liberal. As Rupal 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, in her opinion, not only 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 Tanika Sarkar's formulation, she is subjected to new forms of patriarchal oppression.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

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 categorised as informal labour category, it is fascinating to see these women of Punjab still continue to pursue their craft with unshaken dedication. They use these limitations to their advantage. With no time factor at play, as is the case in the factories and mills, 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. Despite being 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, however 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. These women weave *phulkari*, not only as a cultural agent of a rich past, but also as an extension of their households, which they share with each other.

It is important to note the efforts made by the state to revive a dying craft and the passion and dedication of these women to come together and weave *phulkari*, overcoming all the challenges. However, the traditional hand skills of women, used to craft products for themselves and their families, are gradually changing into a contemporary, urban, market-led product, while 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.

## Notes

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26. Breckenridge, 'Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting.'
27. For these exhibitions, see Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, Appendix A, pp. 279-80.
28. Flora Annie Steel, 'Appendix', in H. C. Cookson, (ed.), *Monograph on the Silk Industry of Punjab, 1886-87*, Lahore, Punjab Government Press, 1887; John Lockwood Kipling, 'Industries of the Punjab,' *Journal of Indian Art*, Vol. 2, No. 20, 1888, p. 35.
29. Annie Flora 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 the colonial state's efforts aimed at fostering Indian arts and crafts.
30. Maskiell, 'Embroidering the Past,' p. 370.
31. Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1966, pp. 64-65, 72.
32. Maskiell, 'Embroidering the Past,' pp. 365-70.
33. Government of India, Department of Commerce and Industry, File No. 48(51)-CT(C)53, Punjab Scheme for Handloom Industry, 1955, National Archives of India, New Delhi, India.

34. Maskiell, 'Embroidering the Past,' pp. 374-375.
35. I had conducted these interviews in 2016 in a small neighborhood of Tripuri, Patiala, Punjab.
36. One of the interviewees, Tripuri, Patiala, Punjab, 2016
37. One of the interviewees, Tripuri, Patiala, Punjab, 2016
38. Rupal Oza, *The Making of Neoliberal India: Nationalism, Gender, and the Paradoxes of Globalization*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 30.