



Detail of Fig.18.7

*Phulkari* is an exquisite hand-embroidered craft that constitutes several styles and stitches. To understand the widespread use of this embroidery in different parts of Punjab it is important to review the geographical location of the region. The present Punjab region has been divided twice in the past: first in 1947, at the time of India's Independence when the country was divided between India and Pakistan. Second time, in 1966 from the then-Punjab, the new states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were created. Punjab was further subdivided geographically into three major regions: Majha, Malwa, and Doaba, Fig.18.1. This division of Punjab was basically due to the rivers Sutlej and Beas flowing through the land of Punjab. The interaction between the people living in these geographically-separated areas was limited. Due to this, there was a difference between the language and culture of the people living in these regions.

According to a review of literature, after the partition of India the original house of Punjab *Phulkari* was said to be the Malwa region, which was South and Eastern Punjab. However, the craft of embroidery was also practised in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, as well as in Pakistan. The districts in India were namely Amritsar and Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Faridkot, Kapurthala, Nabha, Ambala, Jind, Rohtak, Hissar, Gurgaon, Karnal, Delhi, Chamba and Kangra. The districts in Pakistan were Chakwal, Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Sialkot, Faisalabad, Lahore, Sindh, and Baluchistan. The map is charted out by locating various centers where the craft was practiced, Fig.18.2. Embroidery carried in Hazara, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Faisalabad, Sindh and Baluchistan in Pakistan was different from that of the Malwa region in India. Also, along the frontier from Peshawar to Baluchistan a very different style was seen executed with different techniques. In totality, the embroidery showcases immense potential for the takers of this embroidery tradition who used to re-interpret the impeccable geometric designs with great precision. Appropriate selection of raw materials, colours, and techniques made the contemporary versions achieve a distinctive character.

#### **Classification of Styles of *Phulkari* According to Stitches Employed**

Indian needlework by the tribes and artisans belonging to the nomadic communities display remarkable degree of perfection and innovation. The stitches employed and the design conceptions used by these tribal artisans display hereditary knowledge possessed by the people of India. This is evident in *Phulkari*. The creative utilization of a set of stitches has surprisingly created a wide range of styles in this embroidery tradition such as *Phulkari*, *Bagh* and *Chope*. Within each style there are certain prominent features in terms of layout of design and stitches, differentiating these from each other.

Interestingly, darning stitches have been seen in the form of simple darning, brick darning and pattern darning to create wide variety of patterns seen in *Phulkari* and *Bagh*. *Chope* is altogether worked differently in double running stitches. It is noted that all these stitches are variants of running stitches, which are specifically selected in each style by the artisans. Some of these stitches appear very much similar on the face of the fabric

while differences could only be identified by seeing the stitches from the back of the fabric. Thus, every cataloguing of stitches in *Phulkari* generalized variants of stitches with darning stitches only.

PLATE 1 STYLES OF EMBROIDERY

	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div>		
Style	<i>Phulkari</i>	<i>Bagh</i>	<i>Chope</i>
Stitch	Darning Stitch Brick Darning Surface satin stitch	Pattern Darning Brick Darning	Double running stitch
Common themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Sainchiphulkari</i></li> <li>- <i>Phulkari</i> from hazara (<i>thirma</i>)</li> <li>- <i>Darshandwar</i></li> <li>- <i>Morpankhi</i></li> <li>- <i>Chawalbutiphulkari</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Bhawanbagh</i></li> <li>- <i>Chand Bagh</i></li> <li>- <i>Vari da bagh</i></li> <li>- <i>Shishabagh</i></li> <li>- <i>Panchrangabagh</i></li> </ul>	
Finishing Stitches	Cross stitch, cretan stitch, herringbone stitch, double running stitch		
Stitch for Joining strips of fabric	Running stitch or lacing stitch		

***Phulkari***

In general layout of *Phulkaris*, the field remains covered with repeats of motifs with a gap in between their spacing, i.e., the patterns are dispersed at intervals over the fabric. There are broad borders in widthwise direction called *pallu*; which are elaborate and have diverse designs created by using different set of stitches. The lengthwise borders are usually narrow.

In *Phulkari*, four main stitches are identified for creating field designs such as darning stitch, brick darning, surface satin stitch, and straight stitches. Any of these stitches could be used chiefly as the main stitch for creating designs in the central field while additional stitches are used alongside in borders namely running-stitch, cretan-stitch, cross-stitch, and herringbone-stitch.

**Darning Stitch:** It is several rows of running stitches of equal length spread over subsequent rows. Each row of running stitches consists of a long float on top with few or single fabric-thread picked up by the needle in succeeding rows. A close observation reveals, Fig.18.3, floral repeats worked throughout in the field; on the backside the vertical stitches are observed. In top layers and at the extreme ends few horizontal stitches are also seen. It would be clear from the line drawing that after completing one line of stitches and to move to the new line the embroiderer takes horizontal stitches, which are formed at the base. At the ends, few satin stitches are taken to complete the length of rows in line with succeeding rows, Fig.18.4. This is commonly seen in most of the *Phulkaris* as the main filling stitch along with a combination of few satin stitches in smaller areas.

**Brick Darning Stitch:** Brick darning stitches are laid in brick arrangement in which continuous rows of



Majha, Malwa & Doaba (Regions of Punjab)

Fig.18.1 : Subdivisions of Punjab

Fig.18.2 : States (marked in red) where Phulkari was practiced in undivided Punjab



States marked in red were phulkari practicing states

stitches are not formed, Fig.18.5. This kind of stitch has a very structured appearance and is prominently seen in the embroideries from the Swat valley in North West province of Pakistan, *Phulkaris* from Hazara as well as in *cholies* from *pahari* region.

**Surface Satin Stitch:** This is another prevalent stitch like darning stitches. In surface satin stitch, straight stitches are worked in horizontal rows and the next row is commenced after the completion of the previous row. The horizontal stitches are seen at the backside of the fabric, Figs.18.6 & 18.7. This stitch is significantly worked in *Sainchi Phulkari*, particularly in free-hand curved motifs.

**Straight Stitch:** Straight stitches are single satin stitch that can be of any length and worked in any direction, Fig.18.8. It is used to give freedom for creating a wide variety of designs other than regular geometrical designs. The embroiderer used this stitch to create circular or semicircular floral motifs, petals, inverted triangles or any other motifs. This kind of stitch can be executed in the desired way on the surface of the fabric. The motifs made with straight stitches usually cover the entire surface in embroidery or smaller areas or while forming design in borders in *Phulkari*, Fig.18.9.

### *Bagh*

The *Bagh* are made for ceremonial occasions. In this style the entire surface of the fabric is ornamented with embroidery. The *Bagh* literally means a garden or *bagicha*. The central field is extended; with narrow *pallu* ends and front side borders. The embroidered pieces usually display pattern darning for covering field area. However, to stand out certain narrow areas like front side borders and *pallu*; darning stitch and surface satin stitch are also seen. This kind of creating pattern with stitches is observed in the analysis of *bawan bagh*, *chand bagh* and other famous themes. Also, stitches are taken in different directions, which produced illusion of tints and shades of colour being used. In *thirma*, brick darning is also used to create completely filled designs usually seen in *Bagh* style of embroidery.

**Pattern Darning Stitch:** In pattern darning, the darning stitches are taken in varying lengths in each row



Fig.18.3 : *Phulkari* fragment showing darning stitches, Eastern Punjab, early 19<sup>th</sup> century hand-spun *khaddar* and untwisted silk yarns for embroidery, Private Collection

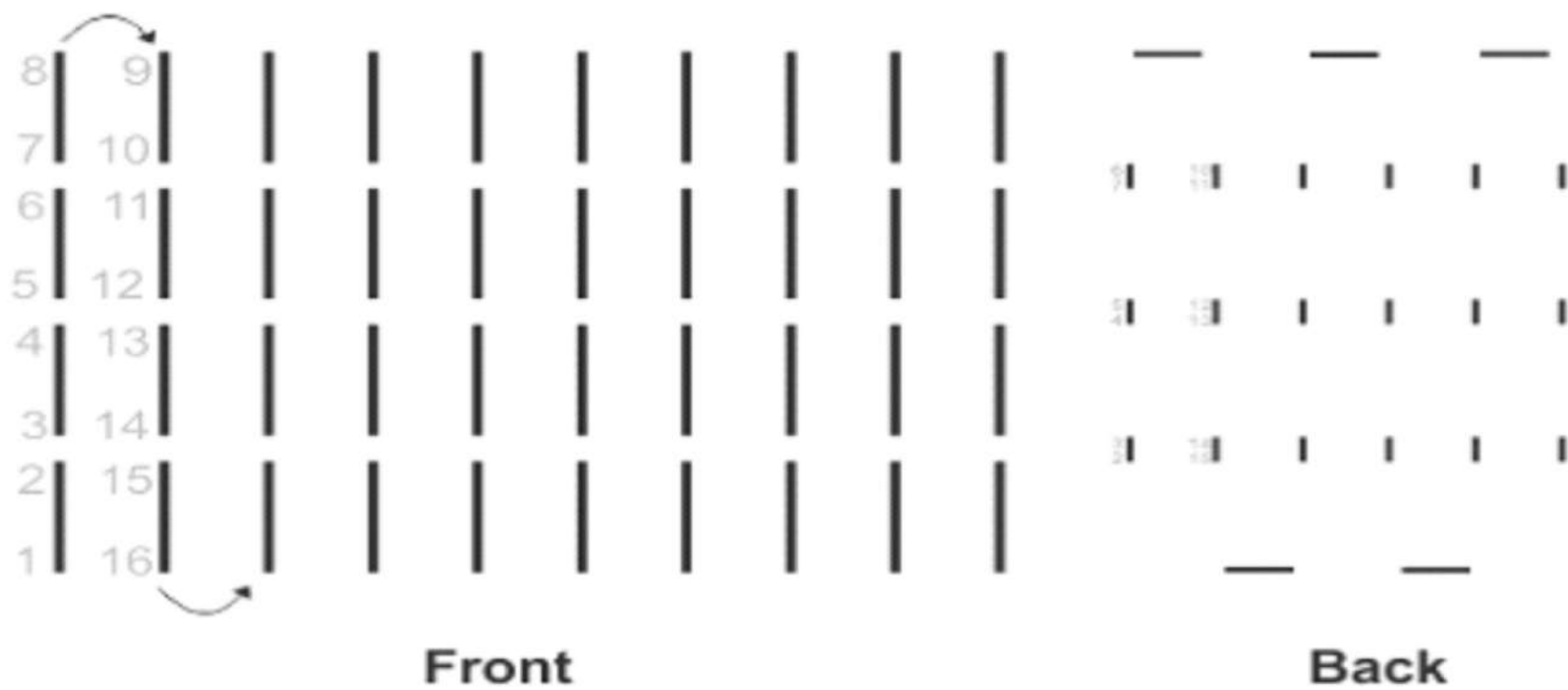


Fig.18.4 : Line drawing of darning stitches in front and back side of the fabric

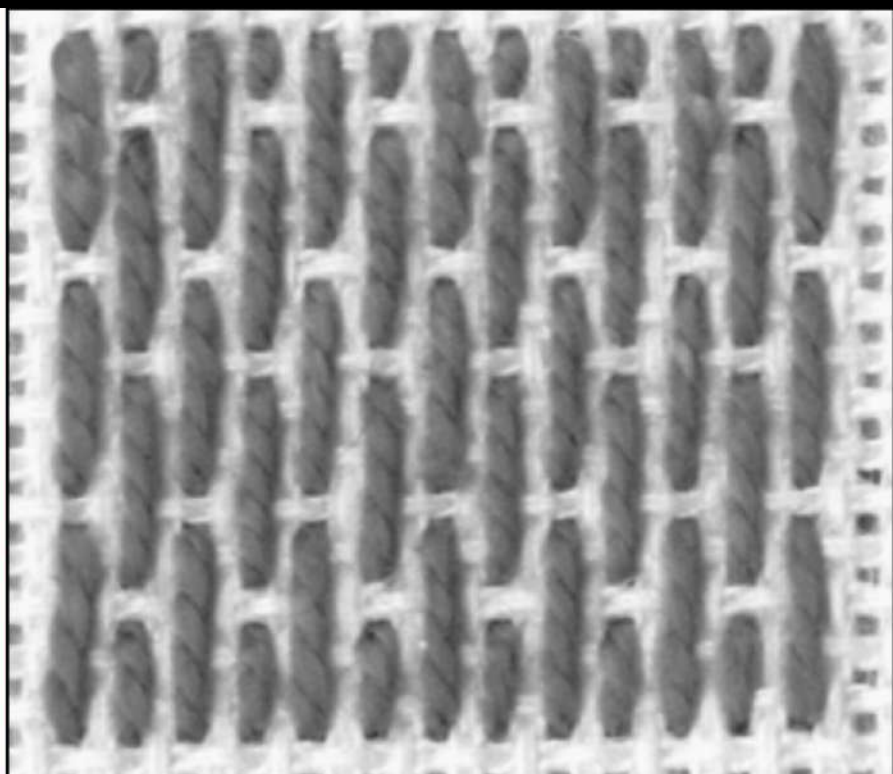
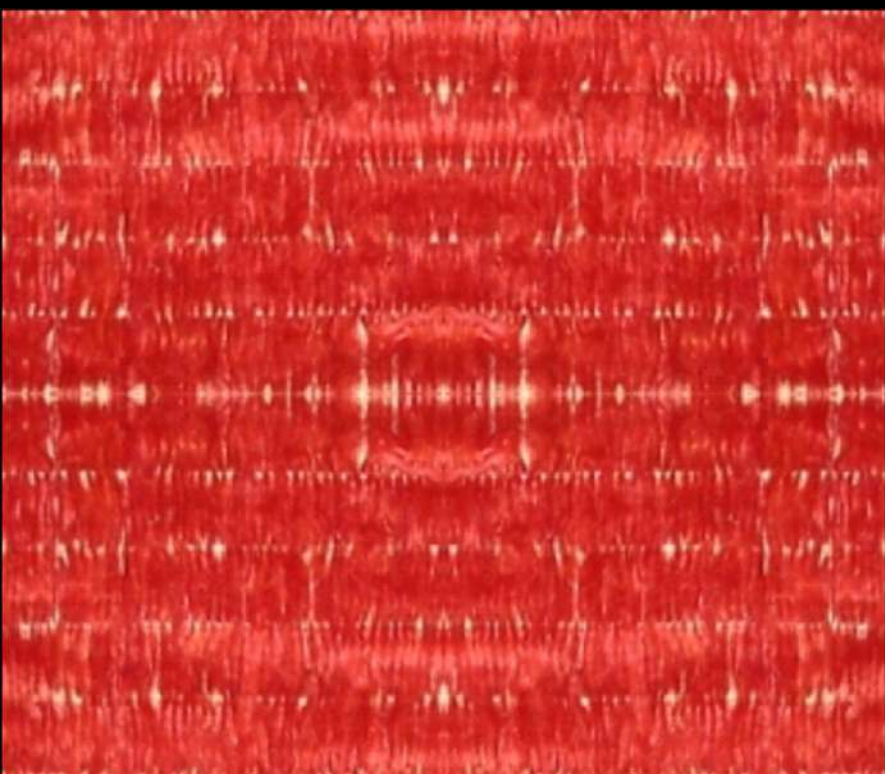


Fig.18.5 : *Phulkari* from Hazara fragment showing brick darning stitches and its line drawing, hand-woven *khaddar* darn stitched with silk floss  
Hazara, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Acc. No. IS 1-2014



Fig.18.6 : Line drawing of satin stitches showing horizontal stitches on the reverse

according to the pattern to be created. In the first, Fig.18.10a, the darning stitches are placed in fixed order and length to create two different patterns, Fig.18.10b.

The darning pattern required expertise and trained execution of stitches on the part of embroiderer to achieve the desired effect. The stitches are closely spaced and completely cover the ground of the fabric with minute patterns alongside. Two different styles of working pattern darning are observed in the embroidery such as the structured arrangement of stitches in *vari da bagh* and the other variation is seen in *darshandwar*, Figs.18.11 & 18.12. In *vari da bagh* symmetrical design is created using small size pattern darning stitches apparent on reverse side of the fabric, Fig.18.11. In *darshandwar* negative space is created in the form of small lozenges in the field, which appear as floats on the reverse side, Fig.18.12.

### **Chope**

In *Chope* very distinct designs are created using double running stitch. The base cloth is invariably red and embroidery is done in yellow. According to Jasleen Dhamija, it is a bridal shawl made by the maternal grandmother for ceremonial use. The intricate double-sided architectonic pattern is composed of motifs of the temple and the peacock, which has long been associated with marital love, longing and desire.

**Double Running Stitch:** The double running stitch is worked with two journeys of running stitches, Figs.18.13 & 18.14. On the first journey, evenly spaced running stitches are worked and in return journey, the stitches are laid over spaces left by the first journey. The embroidery starts and ends at the same point. Other than *Chope* these motifs are seen in *Sainchi Phulkari* such as in a peacock's tail, Fig.18.15, as well as in the triangular motifs and ornaments in *darshandwar*, Fig.18.24. This stitch is often used to stand apart certain areas from the rest of the field design as it had a very characteristic appearance.

### **Finishing Stitches**

Other stitches frequently used in *Phulkari* style of embroidery are as cross-stitch, cretan stitch, herringbone stitch and double running stitch used for making narrow borders, enclosing design areas and finishing borders. Buttonhole stitch is used for finishing edges. In Fig.18.16, central field is divided with narrow borders of herringbone stitch. There is a separates running ornamentation over the border worked in cretan stitch along with petals made in straight stitches. In the elaborate border darning stitch, straight stitch and rows of herringbone are used.

### **Stitch Used for Joining Strips of Fabric**

In past, according to Jasleen Dhamija, the "fabric (*khaddar*) was woven on a pit loom and therefore lengths were stitched along the selvedge." There are numerous examples that show perfect matching of embroidery by joining strips of fabric prior to embroidery. Often strips of the *khaddar* had been embroidered first and joined later after finishing the embroidery work. In general, the strips are joined using running stitch or lacing stitch, Fig.18.17.

### **Conclusion**

The popular styles of *Phulkari* illustrate specific characteristics where stitches played significant role. This is apparent even in the present scenario. *Phulkari* and *Bagh* explicitly illustrate creative manipulation of running stitches in form of simple darning, brick darning and pattern darning along

with satin stitches. The combination of these stitches particularly surface satin stitch and straight stitches had given freedom to artisans to create a variety of patterns. On the contrary, *Chope* shows very distinct arrangement of running stitches. Another equally important aspect is to identify subtle details of theme within each style, which is specific to certain community and region. For instance, there are many themes that are only embroidered in *Phulkari* style of embroidery, i.e., in darning stitches or surface satin stitch or straight stitches. The main example of this category is *Sainchi Phulkari*. In other category, several themes are only embroidered in *Bagh* style of embroidery using pattern darning stitches significantly. The popular themes are *vari da bagh*, *panchrangabagh*, *lehriyabagh*, *chandbagh*, etc. Interestingly, it is also seen that many times a theme like *darshandwar* is worked in both *Phulkari* and *Bagh* style of embroidery, depending on the choice, ability or skill of a person embroidering the piece. The basic stitches and colours are followed keeping the essence of the theme intact. For example in *Bagh* style of *darshandwar*, the entire surface is filled in pattern-darning creating mesh like appearance and diamond shape motifs. On the other hand, in *Phulkari* style of *darshandwar*, the pattern stitch creating characteristic mesh like appearance and diamond motifs is marginally used in front side borders with field design filled in darning stitches. The main motifs like geometrical shapes, jewelry motifs, colours used in *darshandwar* are similar in both styles of embroidery. Nonetheless, *Phulkari* from Hazara or *thirma* are also worked in both *Phulkari* and *Bagh* style of embroidery displaying brick-darning stitches more than regular simple darning.

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▲ Fig.18.7 : *Sainchi Phulkari* fragment showing motifs worked in surface satin stitch filled in rows eastern Punjab, early 20<sup>th</sup> century hand-spun plain weave *khaddar* fabric embroidered with silk yarns Philadelphia Museum of Art Acc. No. 2017-9-18

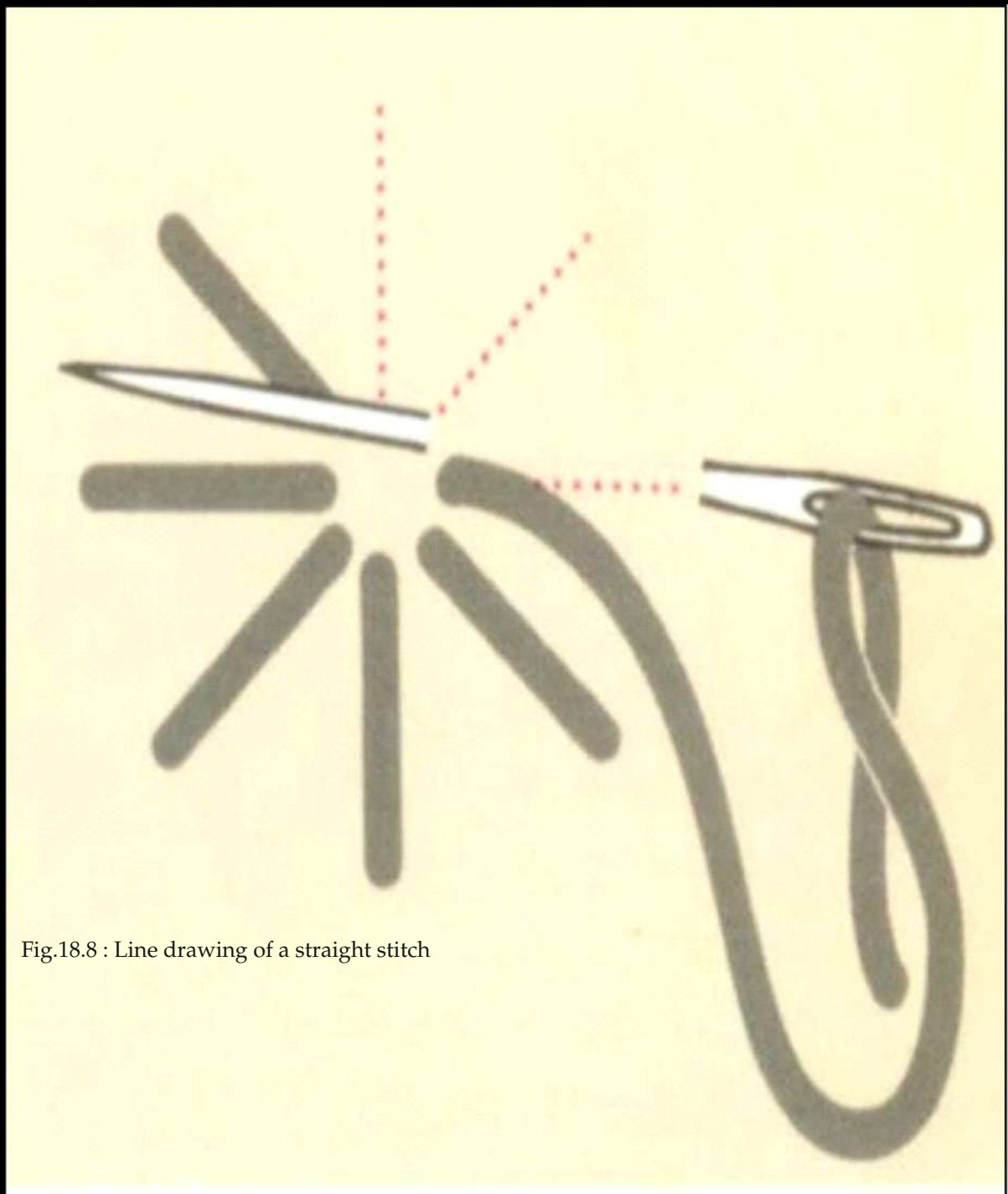
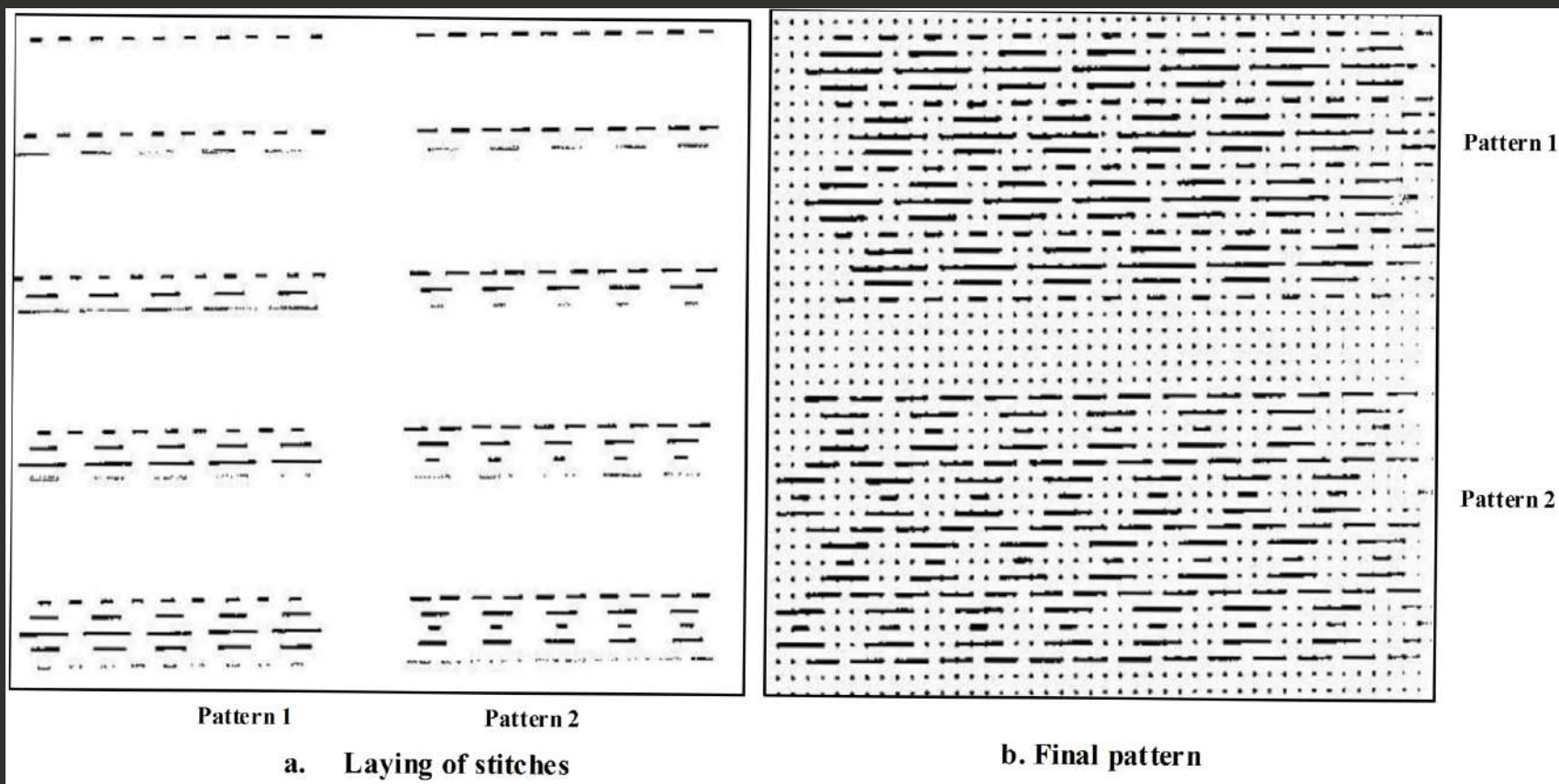


Fig.18.8 : Line drawing of a straight stitch



Fig.18.9 : *Phulkari* fragment showing straight ▲  
 stitch floral motifs in the field, eastern Punjab  
 early 20<sup>th</sup> century, hand-spun plain weave  
*khaddar* embroidered with silk yarns  
 Philadelphia Museum of Art, Acc. No. 2017-9-6

▼ Fig.18.10 : Line drawing of stitches in Pattern Darning

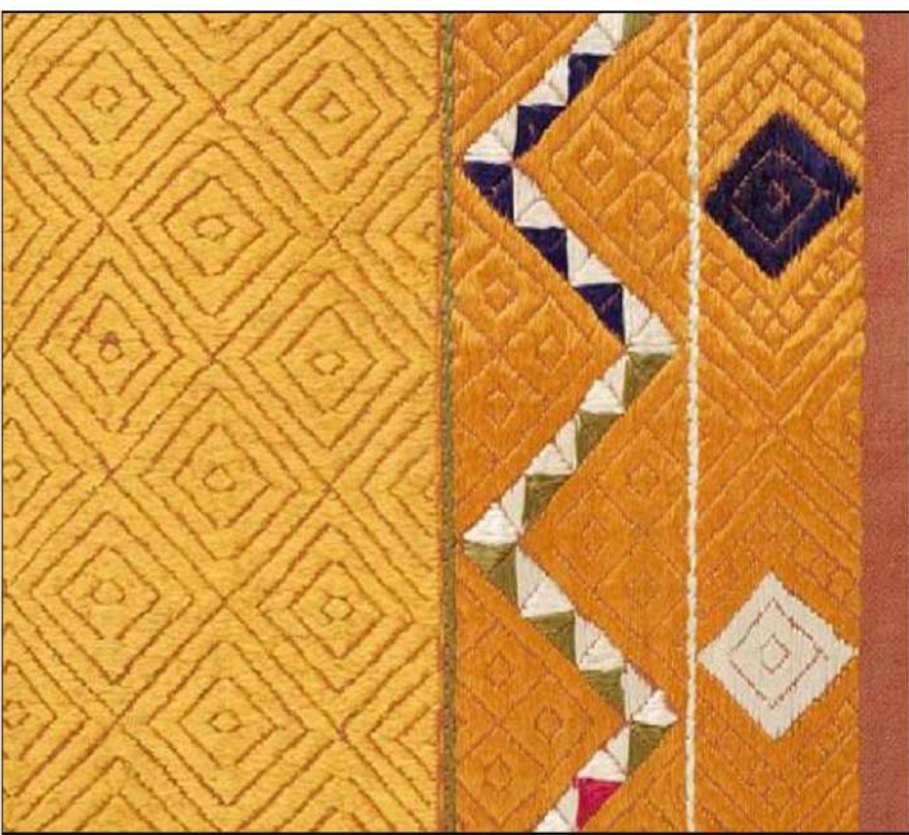


Pattern 1

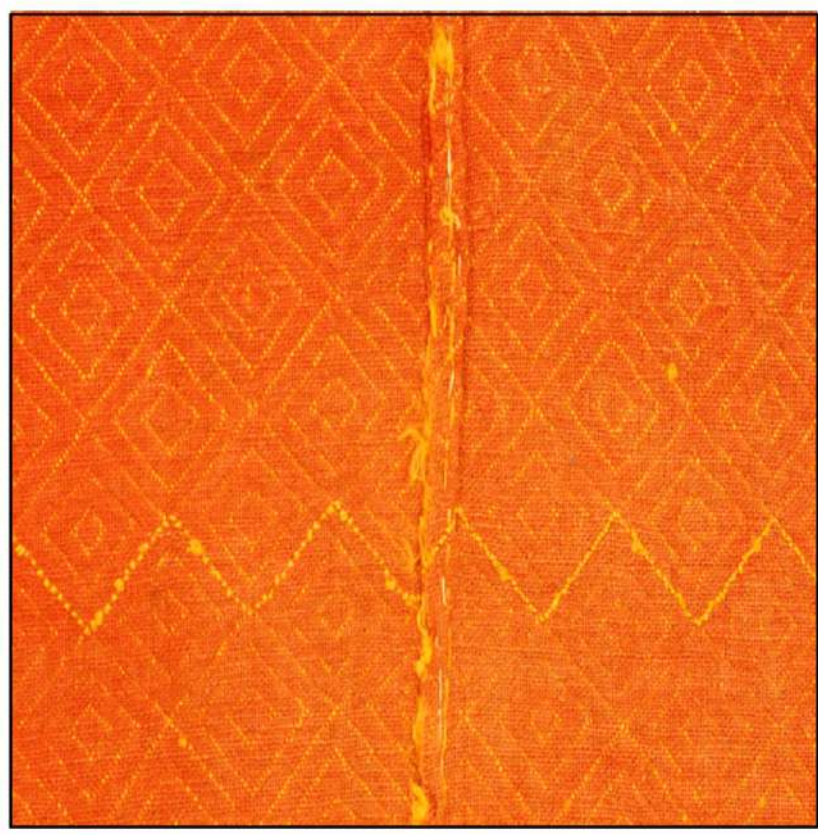
Pattern 2

a. Laying of stitches

b. Final pattern



Front

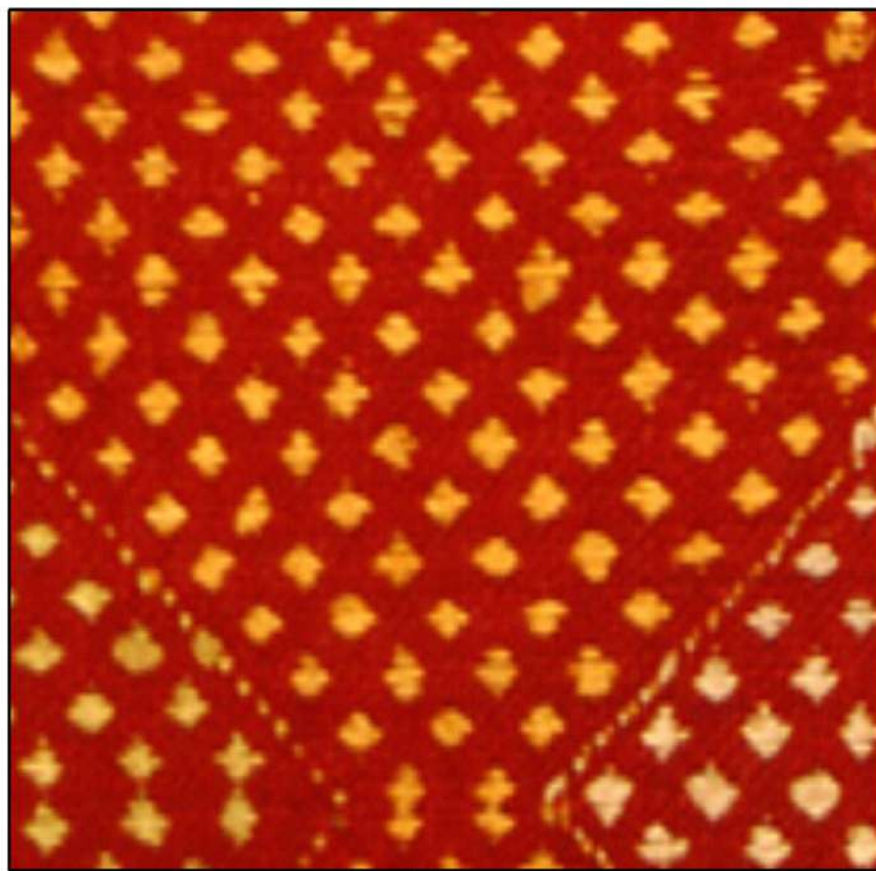


Back

Fig.18.11 : *Vari da bagh* fragment in pattern darning stitches, Punjab early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *khaddar*, floss silk, Private Collection of Sarajo, TX4645



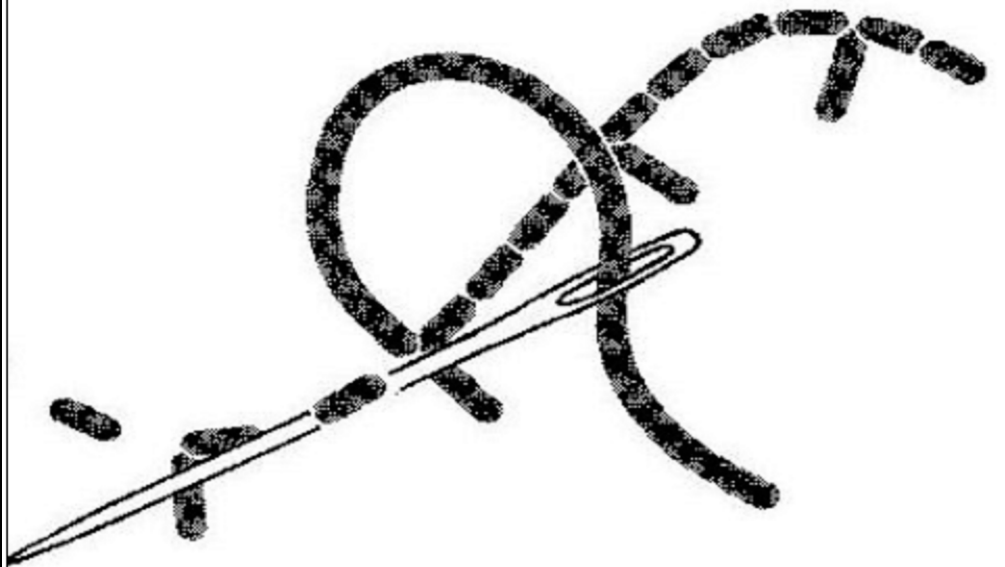
Front



Back

▲ Fig.18.12 : *Darshandwar* fragment in pattern darning, Punjab, early 20<sup>th</sup> century *khaddar*, floss silk Private Collection of Sarajo, TX 4344

Fig.18.13 : Line drawing: double running stitch





▲ Fig.18.14 : *Chope Phulkari* fragment showings motifs made in double running stitch in *chope*, Eastern Punjab, late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century *khaddar* embroidered with silk floss Philadelphia Museum of Art, Acc. No. 2011-21-1



▶ Fig.18.15 : *Sainchi Phulkari* fragment detail of a border showing peacock tail in double running stitch, Punjab early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *khaddar* embroidered with silk floss, Private Collection

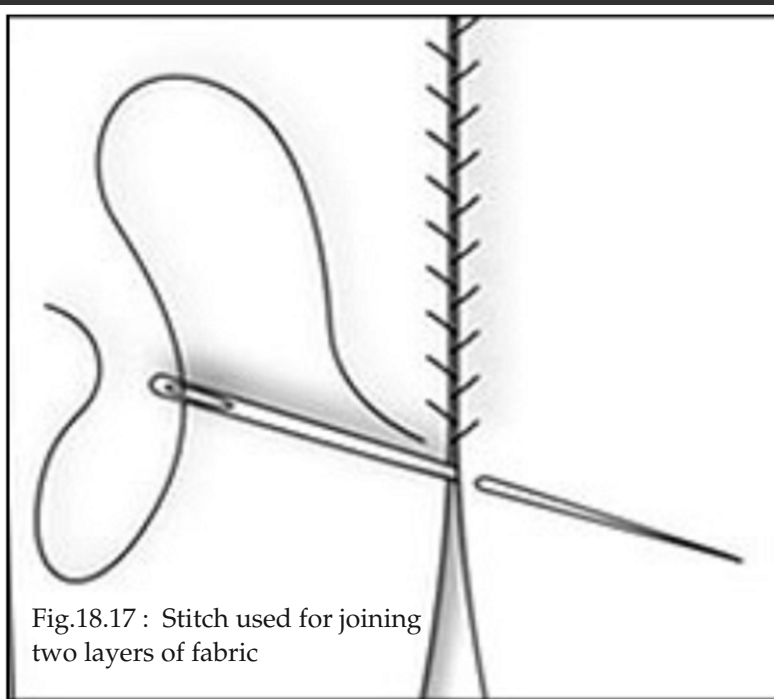
Narrow borders of herringbone stitch

Straight stitch

Cretan stitch

Darning stitch

Straight stitch



▲ Fig.18.16 : *Phulkari* fragment showing use of additional stitches like herringbone, straight cretan, darning stitches, Eastern Punjab early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *khaddar* embroidered with silk floss, in Private Collection of Rugrabbat

Fig.18.18 : *Phulkari* of Hazara displayed in Indian Art At Delhi, Exhibition Catalogue, 1903 by Sir George Watt ▼

Phulkari of Hazara

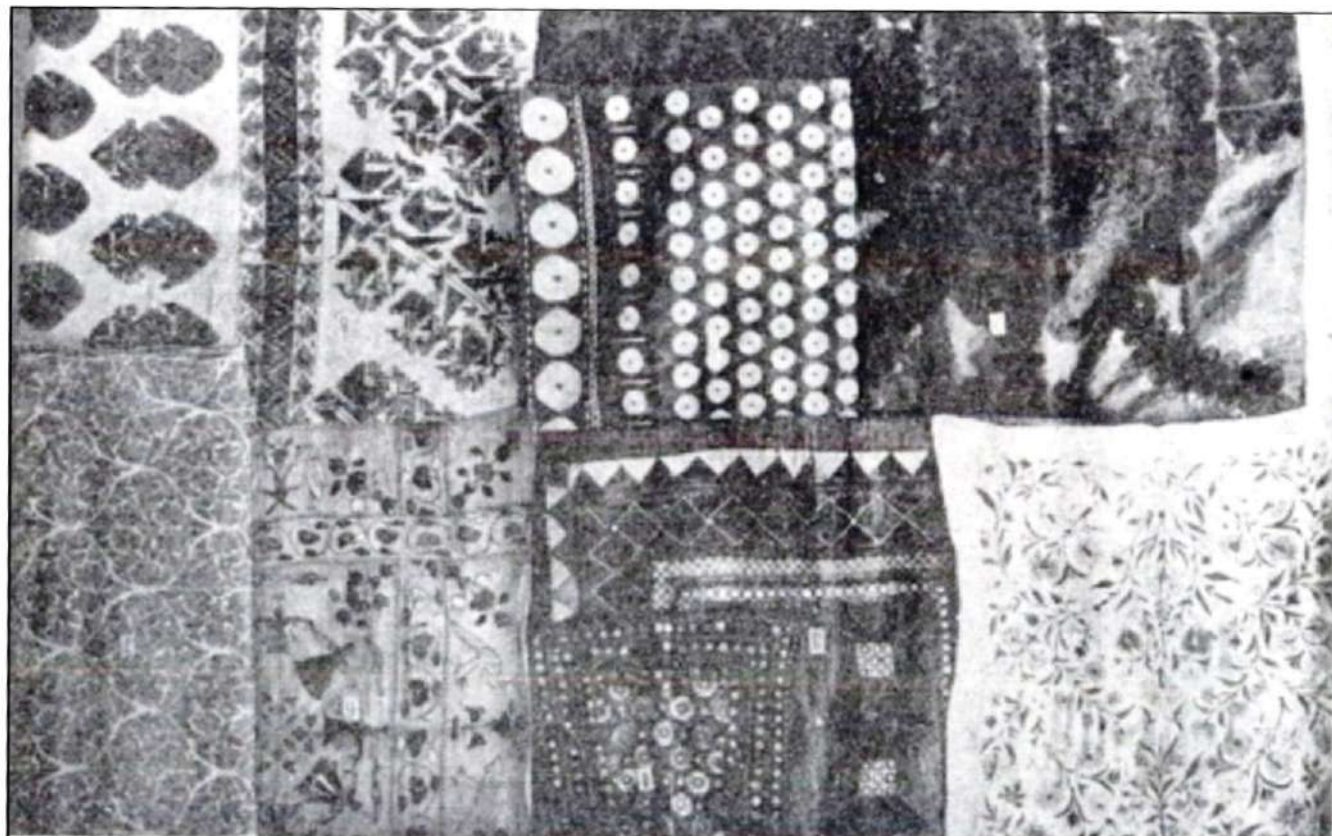


Fig.18.19 : *Thirma Bagh*  
Sialkot, 1868 CE  
*khaddar* embroidered with silk floss  
Personal Collection: Author



Fig.18.19a : Front border details in *Thirma Bagh*, Sialkot, 1868, *khaddar* embroidered with silk floss, Personal Collection: Author

Fig.18.20 : *Phulkari* from Hazara  
early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
*khaddar* embroidered with silk floss  
Government Museum and Art Gallery  
Chandigarh





Fig.18.21 : *Phulkari* from Hazara fragment showing two different borders and central field motif early 19<sup>th</sup> century, *khaddar* embroidered floss silk, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh



Fig.18.22 : Fragment of *Darshandwar* showing characteristic features, Eastern Punjab late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, *khaddar* embroidered with floss silk, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Acc. No. 2017-9-15

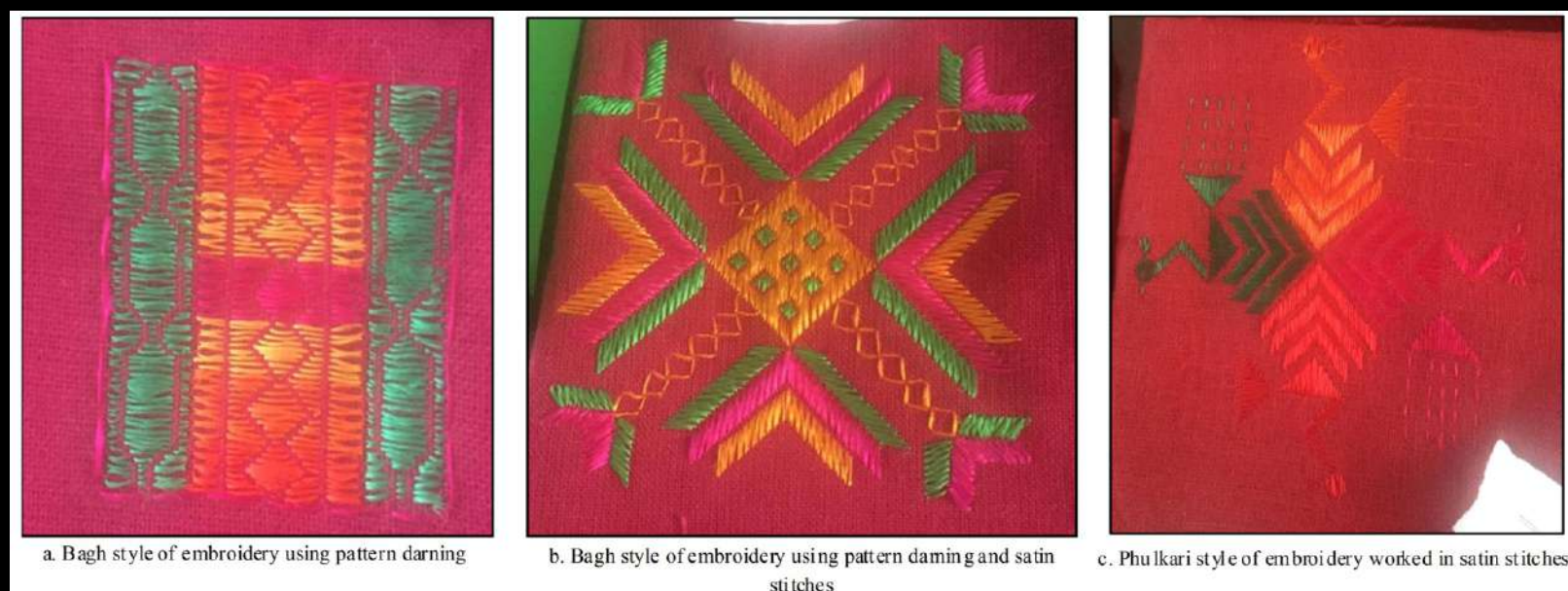


Fig.18.23 : Samples by the students in Punjab University during Zonal Youth and Heritage Festival, Chandigarh, 2018, *khaddar* embroidered with rayon untwisted yarns, Image: Author



Fig.18.24 : Fragment showing surface satin stitch used in contemporary *phulkari*, Punjab 21<sup>st</sup> century, georgette worked with rayon untwisted yarns, after Gupta, 2014

Fig.18.25 : Method of administering surface satin stitches in contemporary *phulkari*, Punjab 21<sup>st</sup> century, *khaddar* with rayon untwisted yarns, Image: Author

