EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INSPIRATIONAL SOURCES USED FOR MOTIFS OF CHIKANKARI EMBROIDERY

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ABSTRACT

The rich treasury of traditional designs developed by Indian artists over thousands of years contains motifs characterised by their close resemblance to their inspirational sources. Motif is the most basic unit with the help of which a design or a composition is developed. The present investigation made an attempt to study type of chikankari motifs and inspirational sources used by the artisans of Lucknow. All three GOs, and ten NGOs in the list of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) Office, Barabanki, Lucknow, and thirty PEs comprising of fifteen enterprises from each of the Aminabad and Chowk market areas were randomly selected for the investigation. The study is based on primary and secondary data collected from the chairpersons/owners of chikankari organizations/enterprises through interview technique and observational method. Kairi (mango shape) and creepers were the most popularly used motif by GOs (mean score 10.5), NGOs (mean score 11.7) and PEs (mean score 11.0). Creepers (bel), fish (mahi), mango (kairi), jasmine and lily (phool boota) were most popular motifs of chikankari.

KEYWORDS: Lucknow, Chikankari, Motifs & Inspirational sources

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INTRODUCTION

The creation of products of utility and beauty has been the basic motivating force in the practical operations of man. Since the day man began to give shape to the materials provided by nature for meeting his basic requirements, he has never been able to resist the inner urge to embellish and beautify his possessions and surroundings (Anon 2011). He skillfully imparted uniqueness to the motifs used in traditional Indian textiles. Generations after generations have followed and contributed to this art to bring it to present state of perfection. It has been providing livelihood to millions involved in this profession. Most of the motifs used in chikankari are floral with association to Mughal art. There are thousands of motifs and designs which ultimately produce millions of design patterns on the final apparel (Anon 2016). These motifs are printed in running pattern with different dyes. Engraved wooden blocks with motifs of chikankari are used to make imprints on fabric on which finally the embroidery is done. To conceptualize the entire design of the apparel, a careful selection of motifs is done.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify inspirational sources of motifs used in chikankari embroidery.
- To explore types of motifs used for chikankari embroidery by GO, NGOs and PEs.
METHODOLOGY

Since total GOs were limited in number, all the three GOs and ten NGOs from 43 NGOs in the list of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) Office, Barabanki, Lucknow was selected. Total thirty PEs comprising of fifteen enterprises from each of the two markets, i.e. Aminabad and Chowk areas, were selected randomly for the investigation. These organizations were functioning for upliftment of rural artisans and promotion of chikankari craft. The selected organizations/enterprises were operating in five blocks of Lucknow district namely, Bakshi Ka Talab, Kakori, Mal, Malihabad and Sarojani Nagar. Collection of data was done personally by the investigator by administering the interview schedules to the chairperson/owner of the organizations/enterprises and analysed statistically. Primary and secondary sources of information were used for the present research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Chikan embroidery is also known by the names of ‘white embroidery’ or ‘shadow work’ due to its characteristic appeal. The subtleness of the embroidery touches every heart and arise equally tender feelings of joy in its possession.

Motifs inspired from flora and fauna

- Motifs generally speak about the decorative image of the design, especially in a repeat setting. Floral motifs in chikankari have either all-over or border setting. Most popular floral motifs included jasmine, lily, sunflower, flowering stems, lotus, etc.
- Information pertaining to the type of motifs used was obtained from the respondents, but for understanding the symbolic significance of motifs, the secondary sources of information were used.
- Plate 1 (b) to Plate 25 (b) clearly picturises how beautifully chikankari embroidered textiles depict the flora and fauna, architectural monuments, geometrical shape, etc. that inspired them.

**Jasmine flower:** The jasmine flowers stand for good luck, purity and happiness making them an important part of any events (Anon 2012). In chikankari, jasmine flower is used as creepers (Plate 1 b).

![Plate 1 (b) Chikankari motifs inspired from Jasmine Flower (a)](image)

**Lily flower:** The strength and beauty of this flower has cemented its place in the most cultures of the world (Plate 2 b). With such graceful look, the flower means royalty and regal bearing, motherhood, purity and the beauty of youth, passion and drive, renewal and rebirth (Anon 2005).
Lotus flower: This flower is used in circular pattern and also as bels (creepers) in borders (Plate 3 b). Lotus flower also denoted as solar symbol in Hinduism and for Buddhist, this flower is a symbol of Lord Buddha (Anon 2011).

Sunflower: This flower is used in the field as well as borders to give the product a rich look (Plate 4 b). Sunflower symbolises the idea of longevity, reflecting the flower bud’s tendency to follow the sun across the sky (Forney 2010).

Sadabahaar flower (*Catharanthus roseus*): The five-petalled wild flower is used in borders in the repetition. Sadabahaar means evergreen and all seasonal. It stands for prosperity and gay feelings throughout life (Plate 5 b).
Shimul flower: This flower represents the natural nectar that brings growth, fulfillment, new and prosperous beginnings into our lives (Plate 6-b).

Four-petalled flowers: Petals are modified leaves that surround the reproductive parts of flowers. The four-petalled flowers are like sadabahaar flower, dogwood flower, ladybird flower, etc. Shape of the petal might have been the inspirational source in this design (Plate 7 b) which is repeated six times.

Spring star-flower: The six-petalled white form, star-shaped white petals, flower in late winter and spring, (Anon 2015) all on thin stems over grass-like foliage (Plate 8 b).
Exploratory Study of Inspirational Sources used for Motifs of Chikankari Embroidery

**Motif inspired from foliage**

**Paan ka patta (Betal leaves):** The design of betal leaf is used in the neck, borders and all over the garment (Plate 9 b). Betel leaf or *paan patta* plays a prominent role in the religious life of the Hindus. No auspicious Vedic occasion moves ahead without a ritual concerning *paan patta* in it (Kaleeswari 2014).

**Imli patta (tamarind leaves):** It is used in borders and neck line (Plate 10 b).

**Peepal patta (Ashvattha leaf):** The design of *peepal patta* (ashvattha leaf) is used in the neck, borders and all over the garment. The *peepal patta* has a huge importance in the religions and culture of India. Its heart-shaped leaves have long,
tapering tips. The slightest breeze makes them rustle (Anon 2014). The *peepal* is used extensively in *Ayurveda*. Its bark yields tannin which is used in treating leather. It is no wonder that such a tree that is full of cultural significance and history is chosen for *chikankari* embroidery work (Plate 11 b).

Plate 11 (b) *Chikankari* motifs inspired from *peepal patta* (ashvattha leaf-a)

Motif inspired from birds and animals

**Peacock (mor):** In *chikankari*, embroidery *mor boota* (peacock design) is especially used in *sarees* borders (Plate 12 b). Peacock is a symbol of integrity, nobility, holiness, guidance, protection and watchfulness (Anon 2005).

Plate 12 (b) *Chikankari* motifs inspired from *peacock (mor-a)*

**Butterfly:** Butterflies are deep and powerful representations of life. Many cultures associate the butterfly with our souls (Plate 13 b). Around the world, people view the butterfly as representing change, hope, and life (Edwards 2008).
Swan: Swan symbolizes grace and beauty on many levels (Plate 14 b). It is associated with love, music, harmony, and poetry. In Roman mythology, swan was sacred to Venus, the goddess of love. In Greek tradition, this bird was often pictured singing to a lyre (Anon 2009).

Snake: Snake symbolizes fertility and rebirth. As snakes shed their skin through sloughing, they are symbols of rebirth, conversion, immortality, and healing (Burston 1994). In chikankari embroidery, the motifs of snake are used in creeper form (Plate 15 b).
Fish: Fish, represented both in realistic as well as symbolic form, is valued for being treated as goodwill and related to water which is a symbol of life (Sharma 2015). It can be seen frequently in mughal architecture (Plate 16 b).

Motifs inspired from Fruits

Promogranate: This fruit is represented both in realistic as well as symbolic form. It is treated as symbol of fertility, goodwill and rebirth. It can be seen in borders of suits and sarees (Plate 17 b).
Strawberry: The flowers and berries together symbolize morality and spiritual merit in Christian art (Anon 2005). It can also be seen in borders of suits and sarees (Plate 18 b).

Cotton bud: Cotton is a soft, fluffy staple fiber that grows in a boll, or protective case. Cotton is soft, absorbent, breathable and versatile fabric that everyone enjoys to wear from work to play, athletic wear to evening wear (Plate 19 b).

Mango (kairi): Kairi is the representation of mango which symbolises prosperity, happiness, love, wealth, fertility and even immortality. In India, the leaves of mango trees are used in wedding ceremonies in order to ensure that the couple bears many children (Plate 20 b).
Motifs inspired from Geometrical Shapes

Crescent shape (moon shape): Crescent shape of moon, a motif which has a religious significance used for few outfits. The moon; a symbol of subtlety, clarity and reflection (Plate 21 b).

Plate 21 (b-d) Chikankari motifs inspired from moon (a-c)
Circular shape: The circle is a universal symbol with extensive meanings. It represents the notions of entirety, unity, original excellence, the self and timelessness (Plate 22 b).

![Circular shape](image)

Plate 22 (b) Chikankari motifs inspired from circle shape (a)

Rectangular and square shape: These shapes represent stability, honesty, solidity and stability (Plate 23 b). These shapes scream rational, practical and conformity aspects (Anon 2014).

![Rectangular shape](image)

Plate 23 (b) Chikankari motifs inspired from rectangular shape (a)

Triangular shape: Triangles have energy and power associated with them as they can point out direction, (Plate 24 b) depending on where their base is placed (Anon 2014).

![Triangular shape](image)

Plate 24 (b) Chikankari motifs inspired from triangular shape (a)

VI. Motifs inspired from Architecture

Jalis (net-work) revealed the underneath skin or coloured fabric to give an accent of colour to alternate white of chikankari (Plate 25 b). These jalis were also the parts of Islamic architecture (Sharma 2015).
Motifs were often inspired from nature, flora and fauna, architectural geometrical and religious shapes. The designs/motifs in chikankari are predominantly influenced by mughal art. The bel or creeper was found to be the most commonly used motif or buti. Fruits, flowers and grains, kairi (mango), dhaniya (coriander seed), ghans patti (grass leaves), murri (grain motif), etc. were very abundantly used motifs. Wooden blocks with engraved motifs are used to prints the design on fabric for doing the chikankari embroidery. Motifs were repeated in different ways to create a design. Natural motifs were represented as direct duplication of things as they existed in nature such as...
creepers, flowers, animals, and other natural objects (Table 4.1).

*Kairi* (mango shape) and creepers were the most popularly used motifs by GOs (mean score 10.5), NGOs (mean score 11.7) and PEs (mean score 11.0). GOs gave third rank to motifs of both jasmine and lily flowers (*phool boota*) with the mean score 9.6, while NGOs gave third rank to lily flower with the mean score 9.7 and fourth rank to both jasmine flower and the fish (*mahi*) motif with the mean score 9.5 each. Besides, jasmine flower was also ranked third in PEs mean score (9.4). Both lily and fish motif obtained fourth rank with the mean score 9.3 each.

Motifs of *paan ka patta* (betal leaf) and fish (*mahi*) were ranked fifth in GOs with the mean score 9.3 each. *Paan ka patta* motif was ranked sixth in PEs (mean score 6.5) and seventh in NGOs (mean score 5.9). Motifs inspired by sunflower, lotus, *peepal ka patta*, promogranate, peers and strawberry fruits were also used by organisations/enterprises. Thus, creepers (*bel*), fish (*mahi*), mango (*kairi*), jasmine and lily (*phool boota*) were most popular motifs of *chikankari*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1: Type of Embroidery Motifs used by <em>chikankari</em> GOs, NGOs and PEs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Embroidery motifs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realistic or natural</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Floral</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunflower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lotus (<em>kamal boota</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creepers (<em>bel</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foliage</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Paan patta</em> (betal leaves)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamarind leaves (<em>pattedar boota</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Peepal patta</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fruits</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mango (<em>kairi</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomegranate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberry</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Birds and animal</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peacock (<em>mor</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish (<em>mahi</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geometrical</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square</td>
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<tr>
<td>Triangle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rectangular</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lozenges shape (<em>burfi</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crescent (moon shape)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Onion (ogee) shape</td>
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**WMS** = Weighted Mean Score
*PEs=Private Enterprises

Geometric motifs included lines in various forms, such as vertical, horizontal, diagonal and curved lines. These divide the background in sections and formed as strips, plaids, checks and circles, etc. Amongst the geometrical motifs, circle was the most commonly used motif by GOs (mean score 1.23), NGOs (mean score 1.36) and PEs (mean score 1.33). Semi-circles were also ranked first in GOs with the mean score 1.23. Motifs in Rectangular and triangular shapes were also ranked third and fourth with the mean score 2.5 and 3.2, respectively. Motifs in crescent and ogee shapes obtained fifth rank in GOs with the mean score 5.4, while among NGOs, crescent and ogee shape obtained second and third rank with the mean score 1.39 and 2.5, respectively. Thus, circular motifs were commonly used in GOs, NGOs and PEs.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it can be seen that how artistically all these objects of inspirational sources have been manipulated into embroidery. Knowledge of motifs and their inspirational sources enhances the designing capabilities.

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