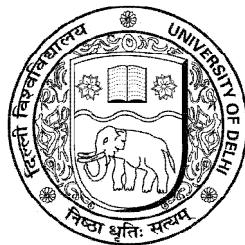


CAPACITY BUILDING OF ARTISANS FOR THE SUSTENANCE OF TRADITIONAL CHAMBA EMBROIDERY

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ROHINI ARORA



**DEPARTMENT OF HOME SCIENCE
FACULTY OF SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chamba state of Himachal Pradesh was known for distinctive embroidery in form of coverlets and hangings generically known as ‘Chamba *rumals*. Chamba *rumals* were usually elaborate compositions on cotton fabrics embroidered with untwisted silk yarns in gay and harmonious colors. The early designs were folk and later with development of *pahari* miniature paintings, the embroidery in miniature style developed which was widely practiced.

Embroidery was carried out in the form of Chamba *rumals* till early part of 20th century but thereafter due to various factors the craft began to languish in Chamba. The factors affecting the standards most adversely were non availability of raw material used traditionally for embroidery, replacement of natural dyes with synthetic dyes, deviation from original designs. Various training centers made an attempt to revive the craft, however, the revival was limited to one kind of stitch rather following the stitches that were used traditionally. Keeping the immense potential of the craft in mind, the present research work on **Capacity Building of Artisans for the Sustenance of Traditional Chamba Embroidery** was undertaken.

The study was conducted in **five phases**. In phase I, secondary information was obtained through review of literature and a detailed study of old *rumals* which were sourced from various museums, libraries and government organizations. Primary information was obtained through exploratory field survey of Chamba town and its periphery which included Sarol, Sidhkund, Badiyankothi, Mangla and Mehla. The sample selected for field survey included master craftsmen in embroidery and miniature painting, trainers, miniature artists, embroiderers and art historians. To obtain detailed information from the respondents in different categories, semi structured interview schedules in Hindi and English were developed. Detailed qualitative analysis was done with respect to the information obtained from secondary and primary sources. In phase II, dyeing of raw material comprised of application of selected natural dyes to develop traditional color palette for base cloth and silk yarns used for embroidery. Dyed raw material was assessed for their color fastness with respect to washing, drycleaning and light. In phase III, a **design catalogue** was developed which comprised of traditional designs, motifs and

could be used by artisans as a ready reckoner. Old museum photographs were collected from various sources and from these original compositions, motifs were segregated and redrawn with assistance of miniature artists as black and white line motifs. The sketched motifs were classified on basis of borders and different types of motifs. In phase IV, product diversification was carried out, for which varied range of fabrics were explored and assessed in terms of thread count and suitability for embroidery. These were documented in the form of **fabric catalogue**. Using the results of the assessment of fabrics, a range of products were designed and developed in categories of traditional *rumals*, coverlets, wall hangings, small souvenirs and apparels. The photographs of the products developed were documented in form of **product catalogue**. The products developed were exhibited during two exhibitions organized with support of Delhi Crafts Council. In phase V focused on intervention with artisans which was carried out concurrently with other phases by conducting workshops and follow up field visits to Chamba. Workshops were carried with all the master craftsmen in Chamba, and embroiderers under them at their respective training centers in Chamba. Embroiderer were introduced to concepts such as awareness for traditional raw material, tracing of traditional designs, dyeing of raw material, technical and decorative aspects of embroidery as well as care and maintenance of the finished product.

Salient findings of the study were as follows:

- From exploratory survey of field, the significant findings gathered through secondary and primary sources revealed that the craft traditions of neighboring countries and states had considerable influence on the development of technique of embroidery in Chamba. The embroidery work prevalent in Chamba in 18th and 19th century which was known as ‘painting with needle’ was also worked in other countries like Iran (Persia), Turkey and China. The craft of Chamba embroidery shared some common traits with the craft of some neighboring states like Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Kangra district etc.

- Traditionally, in muslin fabrics, fine quality workmanship was seen in smaller stitch size whereas in *khaddar* fabrics, stitch size was bigger and embroidery had raised effect. At present, artisans were using machine made bleached cotton fabric and other fabrics which were easily available to them such as poplin, terycot, polyester, *rubia* etc.
- Conventionally, untwisted silk yarns were used for embroidery as they imparted smooth finish and uniform sheen to embroidery which resembled a painting effect. At present, synthetic twisted yarn after unwinding was being used. When products made from twisted yarns after unwinding were washed in cold water, the same effect was achieved as in case of untwisted yarns. Therefore, it can be said that the type of thread used was not reducing the quality of embroidery as compared to other factors such as quality of drawing, method of administering stitches, detailing and color combinations.
- Traditional method of drawing comprised of first pasting the fabric on the ground with starch paste. The first sketch was made in light watery color so that this color does not show under final sketch. The final sketch was drawn in black color, details were cleared and color preferences were marked for artisans. At the present time, most of the embroiderers were tracing their own designs as very few families of painters were left in town. Furthermore, embroiderers were not well versed in drawing detailed faces and figures. As a result, designs lacked clarity, fineness and detailing. Presently, embroiderers were using tracing papers with pin holes along the outlines of the design and it was transferred on fabric using temporary dye.
- Embroiderer worked in a seated position on the ground and fabric was kept on knees for support. For embroidery sharp pointed, medium length needles were used and yarns were kept short length. No embroidery frame was used during embroidery. The most significant feature of embroidery was to start and end embroidery without knotting.
- Technical characteristics of embroidery were identified from old museum pieces. These were primary components while executing embroidery which included, stitch

type, direction of stitches and outline stitch. In traditional samples three variations of double sided satin stitches were observed viz. long and short stitch, brick stitch and encroaching stitch. However, presently only long and short stitch was being used and other stitches like encroaching stitch and brick stitch were no longer used. In old museum pieces four different directions of stitches were observed such as vertical, horizontal, diagonal and multiple directions. Stitches executed in multiple direction created optical illusion, texture and added visual appeal to simple looking motifs. Currently, artisans were using stitches in vertical and horizontal direction only. Earlier, outlining of motifs had a specific purpose and was used for highlighting, separating and defining specific areas. In majority of old museum pieces, back stitch was observed for outlining in contrasting colors for emphasis or subdued colors for harmonial blending. However, stem stitch was also observed, but it was rarely seen. Presently, outline was made all over the design using stem stitch in black color.

- Decorative characteristics were extensively used in traditional articles to enhance visual appeal and aesthetics in embroidery like ornamentation, textures, colors, finishing stitches and edgings. Traditionally, ornamentation was carried out using metallic yarn or embroidery thread. Presently, ornamentation was seen in few samples and it was carried using embroidery thread. Earlier different textures were created by stitch and color variations, directional stitching and metallic yarn. At present, textures were not seen in majority of samples. The number of colors used in a composition could be identified from its border and multiple use of colors in same motif was also seen in majority of old museum pieces. Currently, colors were guided by trainers and embroiderers. It was found that they were aware of the significance of colors used in earlier times. The shades of colors used at present in embroidery were not in line with those used in traditional times, thus reducing the quality of products made. Earlier, specific stitches were used to enclose embroidery or used for finishing of edges. They included buttonhole stitch, cross stitch, herringbone stitch, running stitch and satin stitch. At present, the edges were finished by hemming. In traditional samples, external edgings were used for decoration for instance fabric frills, tassels,

colored piping and laces. At present, no such edgings were seen in majority of samples.

- Traditionally, themes were embroidery based on vast range of subject matter such as Hindu religion, literature, local traditions, scenes from daily life and floral patterns. However, presently designs made were simplified and less elaborate. It was found that artisans did not have access to traditional themes. Therefore, they were drawing designs which were easily available to them for example from calendars, drawing books etc. Earlier, articles made had specific socio cultural significance but now the articles were made for decoration purpose only.
- In dyeing of base cloth, bleached fabric was dyed with *harad* to simulate the traditionally used unbleached fabric. The findings for color fastness revealed that fabric dyed with *harad* was color fast to washing, dry cleaning and light.
- Shade card in traditional color palette was developed for embroidery yarns which comprised of 38 shades from 11 dyes with different pre and post mordant combinations.
- Most of dyed yarns were color fast to dry cleaning as they showed excellent rating for change in color and for staining of the solvent with the exception of turmeric which was not as good as others. Keeping the above results and the delicacy of the craft in mind dry cleaning was recommended, as most of the dyes were color fast to dry cleaning.
- The color fastness to washing was varied for different dyes and mordants. Most of the dyes showed color fastness to washing between good to fair. However, the rating for staining was lower in some cases. The end use of the products was meant more for decoration purpose rather than personal use. Therefore, regular washing of articles made was not required and embroidered products should be washed separately and gently with minimum agitation.
- The color fastness to light for dyes like *katha*, red onion skin, pine cone, pine wood bark showed rating between good and rather good. Dyes like *heena*, *manjistha*, *tesu* and pomegranate rinds showed average color fastness to light. Dyes such as turmeric,

ratanjot, calcium carbonate +turmeric showed color fastness between average to low with few exceptions. Keeping the results of light fastness in mind most of the articles were developed for indoor use.

- For design catalogue, 137 photographs of original museum pieces were processed to develop design catalogue. Designs were classified as varied kind of borders and motifs. In borders four different types of borders (76) were observed. Different types of motifs comprised of bird motifs (62), animal motifs (40), tree motifs (58), household objects (41) and miscellaneous motifs (11). In addition floral motifs (157) were classified as basic foliage motifs, single floral motifs in aerial view and lateral view, stylized floral motifs, flowering plants, *tulsi* plant motifs, diagonal and square corner floral motifs. Figurative motifs comprised of male figures (52), female figure (103) male and female in pair (10), music players (46), different forms of gods (69), gods in pair (43) and demons (6). These motifs were observed in two different styles viz. folk and miniature style. The motifs in folk style and miniature style were distinctively different. Motifs in folk style were simplified with less detailing whereas in miniature style motifs were highly stylized with intricate detailing. The design catalogue was developed in printed form which comprised of 768 motifs as black and white line sketches.
- The analysis of various types of cotton, silk and chanderi fabrics revealed that higher the thread count, finer the fabric and better quality of workmanship could be achieved. Cotton, fabrics with thread count 70-100 were not found suitable for embroidery. Fabrics with thread count 101- 120 were suitable for single sided and folk style embroidery. Fabrics with thread count 121- 160 were suitable for medium size *rumals* with less detailed work. Fabrics with thread count 161 and above were found suitable for miniature style embroidery with elaborate themes, fine quality workmanship and minute detailing.
- Silk fabrics with thread count 160 and above were suitable for fine quality workmanship and miniature style embroidery. *Chanderi* fabrics were found suitable

for medium size coverlets and were not used for elaborate themes as slippage of yarns might occur in case of heavy embroidery.

- Range of products was developed in categories like traditional *rumals*, coverlets, wall hangings, small souvenirs and apparel. It was observed that products made on colored background with different type of edging were appreciated most. It was also observed that embroidery on silk was equally appealing as compared to unbleached muslin. Monotone color schemes for dark colored backgrounds were found most suitable and appealing.
- Appropriate display of products ensured that visitors could appreciate the double sided beauty of the alluring Chamba *rumal*. The workshop and interactive session during one of the exhibition exposed the artisans to different design sensibilities. The feedback of the visitors and the orders placed made it clear that the articles developed were appreciated and accepted by the people who visited exhibition and there was a huge potential for development of the craft.
- Intervention in form of workshops resulted in capacity building of the artisans with respect to the subtle nuisances of the traditional form of the craft. This in turn helped in reorient the artisans for sustenance of the traditional craft.

It can be concluded that exploratory field survey helped in identifying various traditional aspects of the craft which were no longer being used in embroidery. Keeping these traditional aspects in mind, the study was carried out and these features were incorporated by intervention with artisans which helped in capacity building of artisans, such as dyeing with easily available dyes and ease of application helped in sustaining the craft at household level. Development of design catalogue provided access to traditional themes, designs and motifs. Fabric catalogue exposed artisans to other substitutes similar to traditional fabrics and broaden their choice for base cloth. Product diversification exposed them to new design sensibilities and provided job avenues and enabled them to showcase their work at wider platform during exhibitions. The study, thus, carried out helped in revitalization and promotion of traditional craft as well as reassociating artisans with traditional form of craft.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The dyeing of fabric and embroidery yarns was limited to obtaining traditional color palette rather than optimization of dyeing conditions.
- Intervention was limited only to 36 artisans out of total population of 183. This enabled closer interactive session with the artisans at every stage of the work.
- Fabric range for product diversification was limited to some varieties of cotton, silk and chanderi fabric.