

Production process of *Bohey/Chhikkoo* making: Traditional handicraft of Punjab

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The present study focused on the production process of bohey/chhikkoo the traditional handicrafts of Punjab, as these handicrafts are vanishing fast due to commercialization and changes in fashion trends. In rural Punjab, basketry weaving was mainly practiced by women to meet the domestic needs. In fact, the girls were taught to make basketry products at a very young age to prepare these as part of their trousseau. But during the present time, technological developments have made available the various types of durable and easy to care containers and baskets suitable for various end-uses at very affordable prices. As a result the traditional crafts of Punjab are fast losing their distinct individuality in terms of designs and raw materials being used for these. It is imperatives to document type of raw materials and tools that were used for making bohey/chhikkoo and their production process to preserve the traditional handicrafts for the posterity. A sample of 180 respondents of rural women, comprising of 60 women from each of the three selected districts of Malwa region namely, Ludhiana, Patiala and Bathinda, who had developed traditional handicrafts in their life-time, was selected purposively. The results showed that the presently only 13.88 per cent respondents were still practicing this craft, but made the basketry products only occasionally. Efforts in the direction of commercials of the basketry craft of Punjab need to be undertaken for the survival of this beautiful craft as been successfully done for the phulkari craft.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Bohey/chhikkoo, Production process, Raw materials, Traditional handicrafts

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Handicraft making has always been a very basic activity of human society and an integral part of our life. In fact, these are found to be more cohesive in the human relationship than even language and can cross such barriers as the latter may create. The growth of handicrafts in society was the sign of the cultivation of sensitivity, and the stirring and mellowing of humanism. It stood for man's endeavour to bring

elegance and grace to an otherwise harsh and drab human life (Chattopadhyaya, 2002).

Folk songs stand testimony to their cultural importance and reveal how women's emotions were imbibed into these handicrafts. These activities were the important part of their daily life. Though, these crafts were once inseparable part of the rural culture but advancement in technology, education of girls, diminishing

agricultural activities and change in life style have taken a heavy duty charge in the form of handicrafts and led to decline in the age old tradition of making these beautiful crafts (Bisla, 1984).

The man has always been fascinated to develop the woven products from nearby available materials to ease the life since time primeval. Handicraft making activities using the plant and agro-waste materials were practiced in almost all parts of Punjab. These crafts were largely gifted to the daughters as valuable part of trousseau and other relatives during various auspicious occasions (Kaur, 2013). Not withstanding with the changing time, these traditional handicrafts finally became a work of art and craft which are now being used proudly as decorative showpieces in the homes. Thus, now young girls even do not know the technique of making most popular craft of bohey/chhikkoo. The study was aimed at following objective:

- To study the types of raw materials and tools used for making *Bohey/Chhikkoo*.
- To document the process of making *Bohey/Chhikkoo*.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The research study was conducted in three districts of Malwa region (Punjab) namely, Ludhiana, Patiala, and Bhatinda. A total sample of 180 rural women, who had made the plant and agro waste articles in their lifetime, were selected purposively from three randomly selected villages from each of three districts of Malwa region (Punjab) namely, Ludhiana, Patiala, and Bhatinda. Sixty respondents were selected from each district.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The handicrafts utilizing plant waste materials constitute an important traditionally practiced domestic craft of rural Punjab. During pre-partition periods, rural women of Punjab used to make handicrafts from those plant waste materials that were abundantly found nearby rivers or through agricultural activities. The innovations in all these handicrafts were the outputs of efforts made in the process of satisfying certain basic human needs. But over the period time, these innovative products became a medium to reflect their personal taste, skill and artistry. These attained the peak of perfection during the pre-independence period.

Present trends in *Bohey/Chhikkoo* making practice:

The various types of products were made by the rural women from plant waste materials to facilitate the daily life of the rural folk of Punjab. Though these items were purely utilitarian in nature, but women used to put these on walls pegs for their safe and convenient/handy storage in a manner to impress the visitors regarding their skill and taste. The craft of basketry was practiced widely across the state of Punjab. *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *Dull* (large *bohiya*), *Chhabi(an)*, *Katnee(s)* and *Pitari(an)* were some of the products made by them using basketry technique. The artisans in Punjab are specially gifted when it comes to basketry and wood work (Anonymous, 2016).

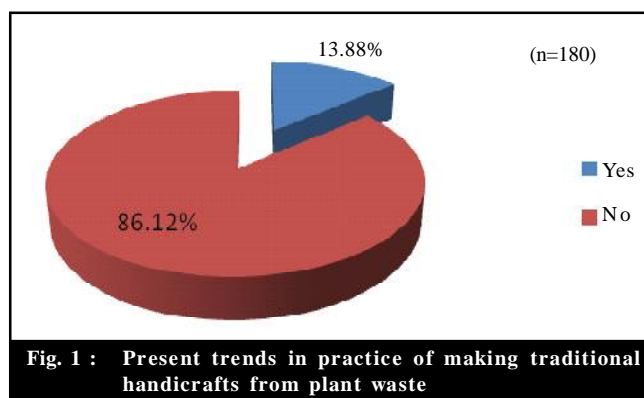


Fig. 1 : Present trends in practice of making traditional handicrafts from plant waste

The majority of the respondents (86.12%) were not currently making these traditional handicrafts from plant waste materials. Though a small segment (13.88%) of the respondents was found to be continuing the practice of making only *Bohey/Chhikkoo*, but they made these occasionally to meet the demand from their daughters or relatives, who wanted to use these as decoration items or just for sake of possession of valuable heritage items. None of the respondents was practicing this craft regularly as was done by the rural women during old days. These products have sustained over generations due to their being utilitarian in nature in addition to attractive typical indigenous looks. However, during the age of technological excellence, people discontinued the practice of handicraft making as many of them became very busy in meeting the current challenges of contemporary lifestyle, while other rural women became more comfort loving and started indulging in watching T.V. shows or socializing. They prefer to indulge in other activities during leisure time, than being busy in working

on any of the traditional crafts as a variety of goods in different price ranges were easily available to them.

Type of raw materials used for handicraft products:

The illiterate rural women used stripped date palm leaves, *Bubber* grass, *Munj* grass, *Kanne*, etc. to make articles of utility such as baskets, *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *dull* (large *bohiya*), *Katnee(s)* and *Pitari(an)*, etc. in beautiful traditional patterns which made these articles coveted owing of the exquisite craftsmanship (Plate 16-20). The golden hands of craftsmen use different parts of plant materials to twist and turn them to shape in basket like forms which looked beautiful besides being utilitarian in nature (Mohammad, 2014).

Agro-waste materials used for making the traditional handicrafts included wheat straw (*Triticum aestivum* L.), paddy straw (*Oryza sativa* L.) and corn (*Zea mays*) husks, wheat being the major crop of Punjab. Punjab is an agricultural state and rural people of Punjab are more dependent on agriculture, its straws were used extensively to make large baskets (for storing clothes, grains, and dates) *Changair*, *Chhabi* and other products. The natural golden luster of wheat straw was further accentuated by interweaving different colours for a greater effect. Dried wheat straws were peeled to obtain the *teeli*/reed. Like palm leaf, dried wheat straws were also used for wrapping around the core of grass to make baskets. Besides, wheat and corn husks, cotton is one of the major crops cultivated in this state. The majority of the respondents, *i.e.* 77.15 per cent, used corn husks (*Zea*

mays) as wrapping material for *Chhabi(an)* (66.67%) *Changair* and *Pitari(an)*, followed by the respondents (42.30%) who used these for *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *dull* (large *bohiya*). The largest percentage of the respondents (60.00%) used paddy straw for *Chhabi(an)* followed by 42.85 per cent who used it for *Changair* (Table 1). Also, 36.11 per cent respondents used paddy straw for *Pitari(an)* and 25.00 per cent for *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *dull* (large *bohiya*). The data highlighted that all the respondents had used wheat straws for making *Changair* and *Pitari(an)*, while 61.53 per cent respondents had used wheat straws for *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *Dull* (large *bohiya*) and *Chhabi(an)* (51.43%).

All the respondents (100%) used the *Bubber* grass (*Eulaliopsis binata*) for filling and date palm leaves (*Phoenix dactylifera*) for wrapping of the corded materials as well as applying stitches at interval (Plate 2-4). All the respondents had used *Kana* (*Tilli* or *sarkanda*) for making of the *Katnee(s)* or *Suhag pitari(an)* which were gifted to the girl as trousseau item.

All the respondents had used *kanss* grass (*Saccharum spontaneum*) for making the *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *dull* (large *bohiya*). The majority of the respondents (72.23%) had used *Kanss* grass for making *pitari(an)* followed by 71.43 per cent who had used *Kanss* grass for making *Changair* (Plate 1). The least percentage of the respondents (65.71%) had used *kanss* grass for making *Chhabi(an)*.

Table 1 : Type of raw materials used for traditional basketry products of Punjab						(n=180)*
Type of raw materials	Products	Bohey/Chhikkoo and dull (large bohiya) n=52*	Chhabian n=35	Changair n=21*	Katnee n=27	Pitirian n=36
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Agro-waste						
Corn husks (<i>Zea mays</i>)		22 (42.30)	27 (77.15)	14 (66.67)	-	24 (66.67)
Paddy straw (<i>Oryza sativa</i> L.)		13 (25.00)	21 (60.00)	9 (42.85)	-	13 (36.11)
Wheat straw (<i>Triticum aestivum</i> L.)		32 (61.53)	18 (51.43)	21 (100.00)	-	36 (100.00)
Other plant waste						
<i>Bubber</i> grass (<i>Eulaliopsis binata</i>)		52 (100.00)	35 (100.00)	21 (100.00)	-	36 (100.00)
Date palm leaves (<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>)		52 (100.00)	35 (100.00)	21 (100.00)	-	36 (100.00)
<i>Kana</i> (<i>tilli</i> or <i>sarkanda</i>) (<i>Saccharum bengalense</i>)		-	-	-	27 (100.00)	-
<i>Kanss</i> grass (<i>Saccharum spontaneum</i>)		52 (100.00)	23 (65.71)	15 (71.43)	-	26 (72.23)
<i>Munj</i> grass/raffia (<i>Saccharum munj</i>)		52 (100.00)	28 (80.00)	12 (57.15)	-	12 (33.34)
Textile material						
Cotton yarns		52 (100.00)	35 (100.00)	21 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	23 (63.89)

F= Frequency *= Multiple responses

Plate 1 : *Kanss* grass (core material)Plate 2 : *Bubber* grass (core material)Plate 3 : *Munj* grass (wrapping material)

Plate 4 : Date palm leaves (wrapping material)

Plate 1-4 : Type of raw materials used for *bohey/chhikkoo* making

Munj grass/raffia (*Saccharum munj*) was also used for making the *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *Dull* (large *bohiya*) followed by 80.00 per cent of the respondents who used *Munj* grass for making *Chhabi(an)*. The maximum percentage of the respondents 57.15 per cent had used *Munj* grass for making *Changair*, while 33.34 per cent of the respondents had used *Munj* grass (Plate 3) for making of the *Pitari(an)*.

All the respondents had used cotton yarn as well for making of the *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *Dull* (large *bohiya*), *Chhabian*, *Changair*, and *Katnee(s)* or *Suhag Pitari(an)*. The least percentage of the respondents (63.89%) had used cotton yarns for making *Pitari(an)*.

Types of techniques used :

The largest percentage of the respondents, *i.e.* 72.77 per cent, reported that they had used the coiling and stitching technique to make these handicraft products, while 67.22 per cent had employed coiling, wrapping and sewing techniques. Coiling is an ancient method to

develop these traditional handicrafts to form different shapes and designs suitable to their utility. Rosengarten (1987) reported that coiling was one of the basketry techniques which involved sewing. Straw and reed were wrapped with raffia and stitched together. The base material was spiraled into a coil and wrapped or sewn to form a base with successively wider coils. Reducing and enlarging the circumference of coils helped in creating various shapes. Hebert (2001) rather explained the coiled basket as a technique of winding up the fibres like a coiled snake while stitching it at a distance of every quarter of an inch.

Equipment and tools used :

All the respondents used sheers (*Kanichi*) or *Churi* (Knife) for making the *Bohey/Chhikkoo* and *dull* (large *bohiya*), *Chhabian*, and *Pitari(an)* followed by 91.42, 52.78, 48.78, and 31.91 per cent of the respondents who had used long needles to make *Chhabi(an)*, *Pitari(an)*, *Chhikkoo*, and *Bohey*, respectively. *Aarhi* (kundi) was



Plate 5&6 : Equipments used for *bohey* making

Table 2 : Equipment and tools used for making traditional handicraft products

Tools	Products	Bohey/chhikko and dull (large bohiya) n=52*	Chhabian n=35*	Changair n=21*	Pitarian n=36*
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Long needles		15 (31.91)	32 (91.42)	20 (48.78)	19 (52.78)
<i>Kanichi</i> (Scissors)		52 (100.00)	35 (100.00)	21 (100.00)	36 (100.00)
<i>Aarhi</i> (Kundi)		23 (48.93)	14 (40.00)	17 (41.47)	24 (60.86)

f= Frequency * Multiple response

used for making *Pitarian*, *Bohey/chhikkoo* and dull (large *bohiya*) and *Chhabian* by 60.86, 48.93, 41.47 and 40.00 per cent respondents, respectively (Plate 5-6).

Process of making *bohey/chhikkoo* :

The process of wrapping and stitching varied with the type of raw materials used. Whatever the materials were, coiling remained the most popular technique of basketry. The foundation was laid by looping the coil around the central core and building up the spiral, gradually widening the base, until the desired shape and size were reached. The coils were fixed with each other by sewing. In many cases, coils were held together by wrapping palm leaves or straw around them. The process of making traditional *Bohey/Chhikkoo* using date palm leaves/straws has been given below :

Pre-preparation of wrapping materials :

- Sorting of raw materials like date palm leaves/straws according to colour and size was carried out followed by cleaning and arranging of the leaves or straws length-wise.
- Wetted the raw materials and wrapped in wet cotton cloth to maintain the softness and flexibility of the material.
- Straightened the leaves with hands and then cut/

split them evenly into desirable width using knife, scissors, blades, etc.

Preparation of base (*talla*) :

- Core-material was so selected and taken in hands that desirable thickness could be obtained.
- Folded approximately a half inch of wrapping material to tuck in its end intactly and started wrapping the core held in left hand.

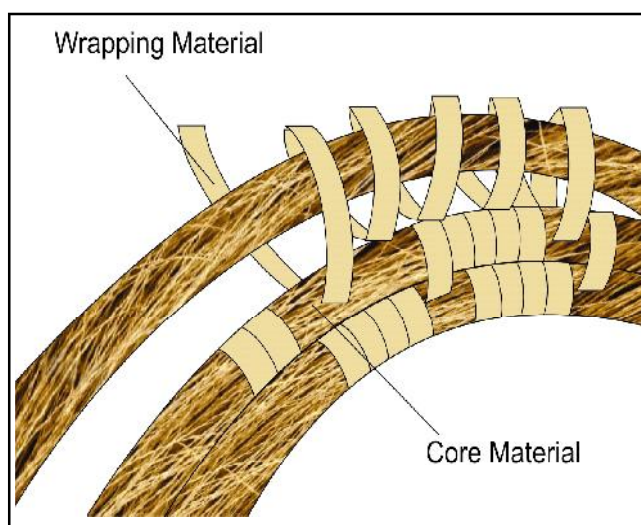


Fig. 2 : Stitching in the process of coiling

– Wrapped till length of innermost ring of the coil was attained and shaped it in the form of coil while working.

– Continued wrapping for the next ring during the second round of coil while simultaneously taking the stitches as shown in Fig. 2.

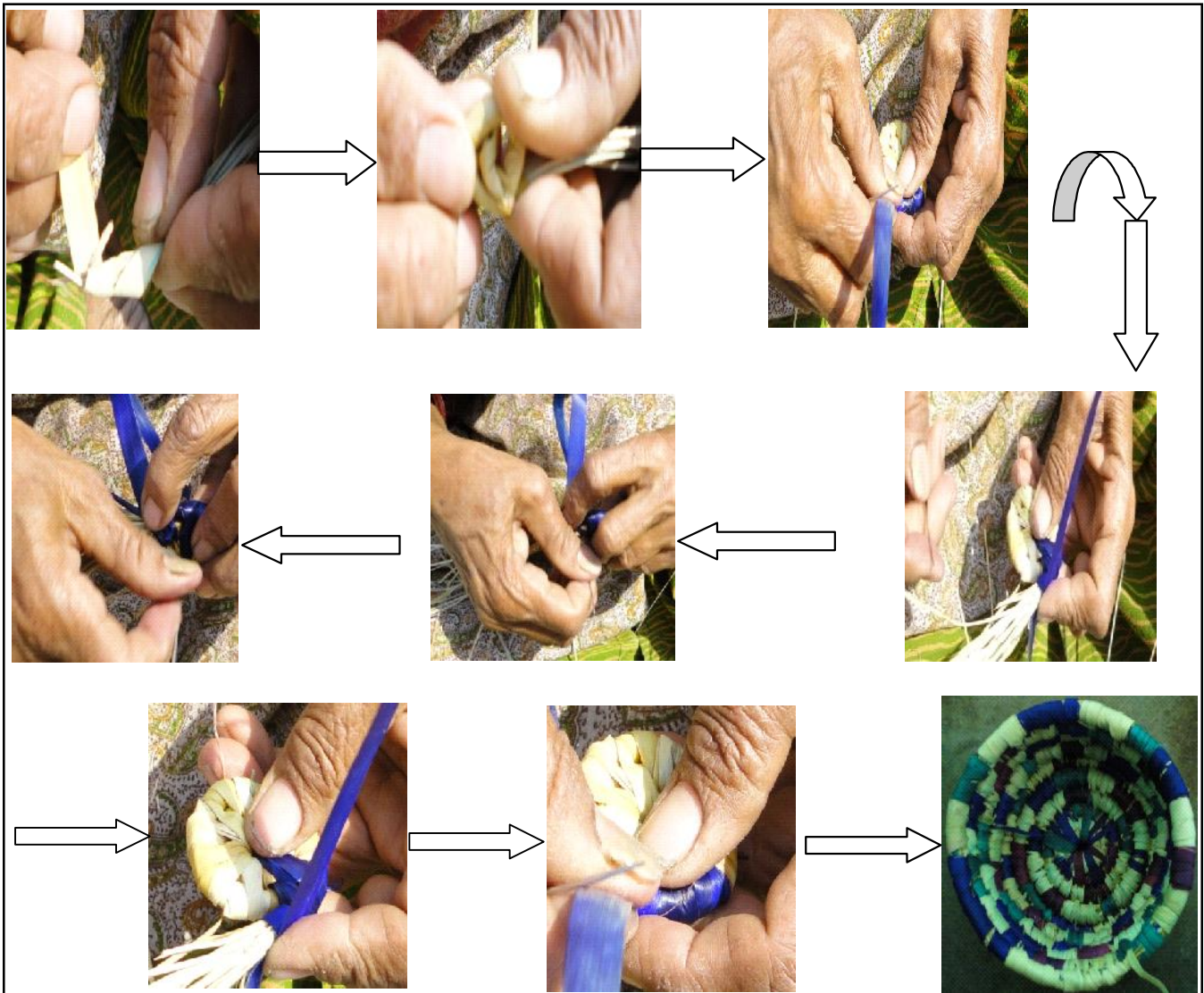


Plate 7-15 : Processing of traditional coiled basketry using data palm leaves/straws



Plate 16-19 : *Bohey/chhikkoo* and *dull* (large *bohiya*), *pitari(an) katnee* or *suhag pitari(an)* and *chhabi(an)*

- Desirable shape was controlled by the placement and size of each concentric ring of the coil.
- While working on any design, coloured wrapping materials were used in a set order.
- Thickness of the coil was again tapered in the last row so, that the end could merge into the previous row (Plate 7-15).

Note:

- The coiling of the core materials always started from the centre of the base. Minimum thickness of core was used to initiate the coiling process so that negligible gap remains at the starting point. The thickness was gradually increased in a way that the regular thickness was attained after the coiled portion measured one inch diameter. This gave a very attractive look to the central part of base when worked neatly.
- Each end of these materials was tapered with knife which allowed for smooth transition. New straws were inserted into the bundle of material already taken for increasing the length and maintaining the size of coil. Insertion of new core material was and wrapping material required throughout during work.

Conclusion :

During an increasingly mechanized, homogenized world, ensuring the sustainability of skill, techniques and the traditional knowledge behind India's myriad handicrafts is a major challenge. Rural youth are increasingly disenchanted with family craft traditions, being exposed to the struggles to find markets and fair

prices. Public need to be sensitized about the importance of these traditional crafts. Efforts need to be directed towards the diversification of this eco-friendly craft to suit the contemporary needs.

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