

Traditional potpourri of *Chikankari* flat stitches: glory of Lucknow

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Received: 03.06.2017; Revised: 15.10.2017; Accepted: 29.10.2017

■ **ABSTRACT** : Embroidery adds grace and elegance to the articles of everyday use. Indian embroidery takes its inspiration from nature and the products of various regions reflect the colours of the flora and fauna of that area. *Chikankari* embroidery is one of the most ancient textile decoration style, crafted in the city of Nawabs, Lucknow. The present investigation made an attempt to study different types of flat stitches used, their variations and different types of embroidery threads used by GOs, NGOs and private enterprises (PEs). 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. Majority of organisations/enterprises were using polyester and mercerised cotton embroidery threads for embroidery. There were fifteen types of flat *Chikankari* stitches including their variations and styles. Daraz-work was not found to be used by any of the organisations/enterprises.

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■ **KEY WORDS**: *Chikankari*, Embroidery, Threads, Flat-stitches

■ **HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER** : Agrahari, Ritu and Brar, Kanwaljit Kaur (2017). Traditional potpourri of *chikankari* flat stitches: glory of Lucknow. *Asian J. Home Sci.*, 12 (2) : 489-495, DOI: 10.15740/HAS/AJHS/12.2/489-495.

Lucknow is the main centre of *Chikankari* craft. The processes of product development of *Chikankari* include dyeing of fabric, preliminary stitching, block printing of design to be embroidered, embroidery work, final stitching and finishing. Among these processes embroidery is most important and sophisticated process of value addition because the style of *Chikankari* embroidery is quite famous for its delicacy and intricate designs (Anonymous, 2015). The embroidery is done after printing the design and using

the frame, needle and thread (Arya, 2002). The *Chikankari* embroidery can be broadly divided into flat stitches, embossed stitches and *Jali*-work including their variations and styles. All this gives a stylish look to the designer piece, besides having a traditional touch. Traditionally, it was done on muslin cloth which when embroidered used to appear opaque only in those specific design areas to lend it its characteristic appeal. In this research paper only flat stitches and their variations and styles have been presented.

Objectives :

- To explore different types of threads used for *Chikankari* embroidery of Uttar Pradesh.
- To study flat type of *Chikankari* embroidery stitches and their variations.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

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 were selected. Total thirty PEs comprising of fifteen enterprises from each of the two market, *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.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Chikan embroidery is also known by the names of 'white embroidery' or 'shadow work' due to its characteristic features.

Preferences of organizations/enterprises for different types of embroidery threads :

The enrichment of the embroidery pattern largely depends on the thread selection. *Chikankari* is the most sophisticated textile decorative art as white thread was used on white cloth. Contemporarily with growing

popularity of *Chikankari* in the attire sector, multi-coloured threads of rayon, silk and polyester are also in use for elegant shade effects. Texture of fabric, type of embroidery stitches and selling price were the deciding factors for the use of multi-stranded threads for *Chikankari* work (Table 1).

Polyester embroidery thread was most preferred for *Chikankari* by GOs (mean score 5.3), NGOs (mean score 4.5) and PEs (mean score 4.9). Besides, mercerised cotton embroidery thread was also ranked first by NGOs (mean score 4.5). The second rank was given to mercerised cotton embroidery thread by GOs (mean score 3.7) and PEs (mean score 4.0). The unmercerised cotton embroidery thread got third rank in NGOs (mean score 4.4) and PEs (mean score 2.9). Artificial silk embroidery thread obtained third rank by GOs (mean score 3.4) and fourth rank in NGOs (mean score 3.6) and PEs (mean score 2.7). *Kuccha dhaga* (low twist, C/P blend) embroidery thread was least used embroidery thread by GOs, NGOs and PEs. A highly significant association was found between GOs and NGOs; GOs and PEs; and NGOs and PEs regarding the use of embroidery threads. It was concluded that the cotton and polyester threads were mostly used for *Chikankari* embroidery by all the organisations/enterprises. Threads were procured from the local Chowk market in Lucknow.

Stitches used in different organizations/enterprises:

The marvelous look of *Chikankari* is the outcome of combination of different types of stitches and their variations. The embroidery has a repertoire of thirty two different stitches that can be broadly divided into flat stitches, embossed stitches and *Jali*-work. Some stitches are rendered from the top side of fabric and others from the back of it. Stitches like *Bakhia*, *Rahet*, *Java*,

Types of threads	Table 1 : Preferences of organizations/enterprises for different types of embroidery threads (n=43)*					
	GOs (n ₁ =03)		NGOs (n ₂ =10)		PEs (n ₃ =30)	
	WMS	Rank	WMS	Rank	WMS	Rank
<i>Kuccha dhaga</i> (Low twist, C/P blend)	1.5	V	1.5	V	1.8	V
Mercerized cotton	3.7	II	4.5	I	4.0	II
Unmercerized cotton	1.6	IV	4.4	III	2.9	III
Artificial silk	3.4	III	3.6	IV	2.7	IV
Polyester (<i>Jali</i> -work thread)	5.3	I	4.5	I	4.9	I

r=.96 (GOs and NGOs), r=.99 (GOs and PEs), r=.99 (NGOs and PEs) f=Frequency, *multiple response
 %=Percentage *PEs=Private Enterprises *C/P= Cotton and polyester

Shiddaur jali are worked from the wrong side of the fabric, while *Dhoom*, *Tepchi*, *Zanzeera*, etc. are worked from the right side. *Chikankari* has a characteristics style of using its stitches along with special considerations as to where these stitches could be used. For example, the chain stitches (*Zanjeera*) are to be used only for the final outline of a leaf, petal, or stem (Anonymous, 2012). The names of stitches get changed with little variation in rendering these, thus some of the stitches had close resemblance.

Flat basic stitches of *Chikankari* :

Bakhia:

Bakhia is similar to the herringbone stitch done on backside to give a shadow effect from the front side of fabric (Plate 1 a-b). Embroidering the herringbone stitches closely on the reverse side of the fabric result in compact mass of thread on that side in contrast to fine outlining stitches visible from the front side looking like back stitches. The transparent *Muslin* becomes opaque in selected embroidered sections and provides a beautiful effect of light and shade.

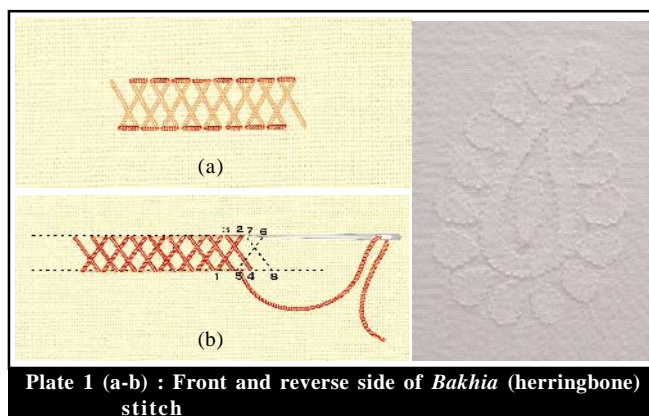


Plate 1 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Bakhia* (herringbone) stitch

Tepchi:

It is simplest of all stitches rendered from front side of fabric in the form of very short running stitches. It is occasionally done within parallel rows to fill petals and leaves. Sometimes, *Tepchi* is used to make the *Bel-booti* all over the fabric. This is the simplest *Chikankari* stitch (Plate 2 a-b).

Zanzeera:

The word ‘*Zanzeera*’ refers to ‘chain’. The ‘*Zanzeera*’ (chain) stitches are frequently used along with few closely worked rows of *Tepchi* stitches (Plate 3 a-b).

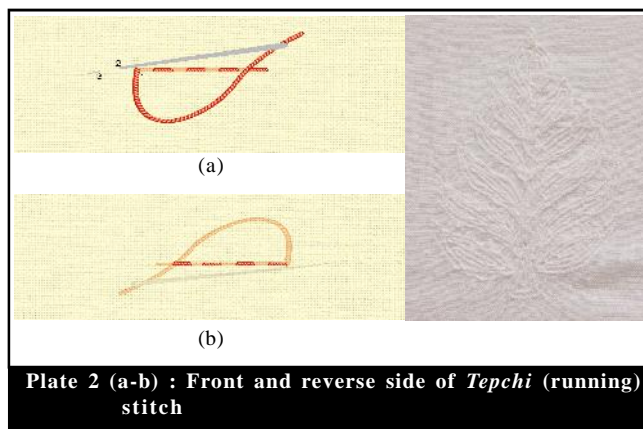


Plate 2 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Tepchi* (running) stitch

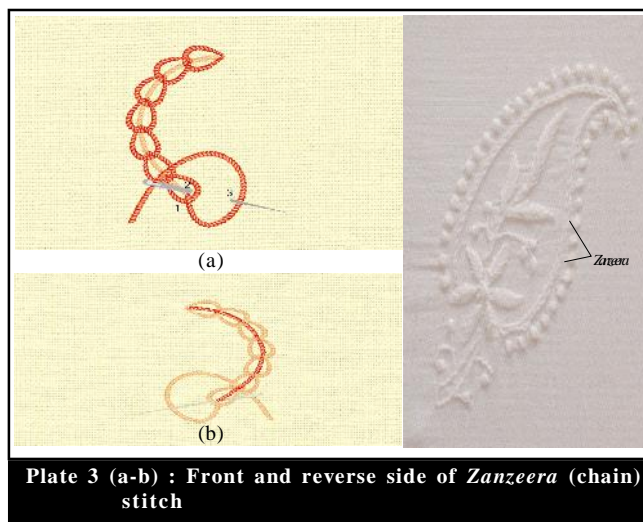


Plate 3 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Zanzeera* (chain) stitch

Kaaj:

The word ‘*Kaaj*’ refers to the button-holes. Thus, *Kaaj* stitches are same as used for finishing button-holes (Plate 4 a-b). It is frequently embroidered on the edging of a handkerchief and tablemats for scalloping.

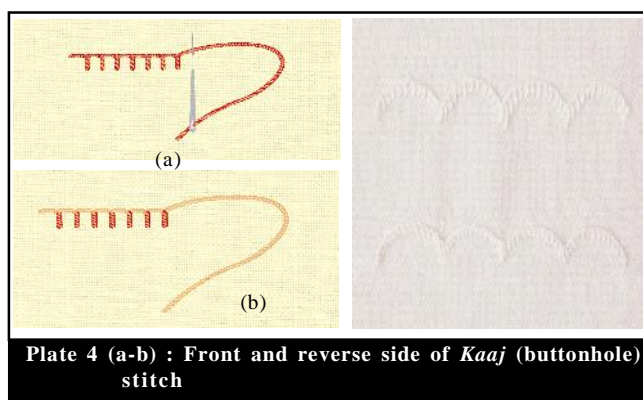


Plate 4 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Kaaj* (buttonhole) stitch

Rahet:

These are simple stem stitches worked in six stranded embroidery thread from the reverse side of the fabric which show a row of back-stitches from the front (Plate 5 a-b).

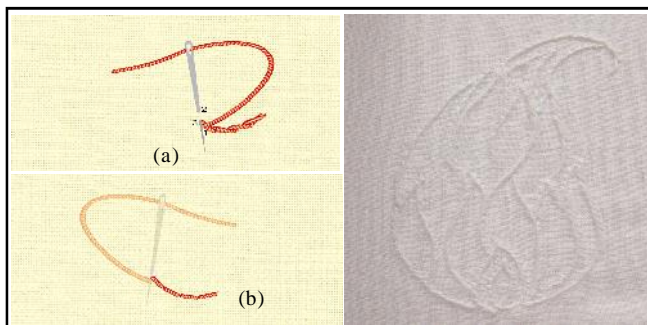


Plate 5 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Rahet* (stem) stitch

Hool:

Hool is a fine eyelet stitch. A hole is punched in the fabric to pull apart the threads. Small satin stitches are embroidered all around the circumference of the hole from right side of the fabric to hold the threads tightly in place (Plate 6 a-b). The word '*Hool*' seems to be colloquial misrepresentation of the word 'hole'.

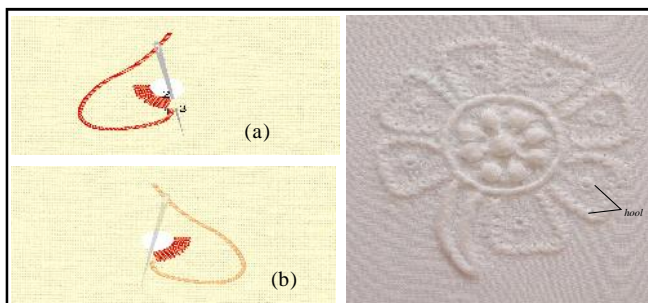


Plate 6 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Hool* (detached eyelet) stitch

Katao:

It is a form of appliqué. Two pieces of fine cotton are superimposed and the top layer is then cut away. The edges of the designs are finished neatly with hemming (Plate 7 a-b).

Variations of Chikankari flat stitches :

Balda:

Tepchi is worked to outline a motif from front side of the fabric and then it is covered with small vertical

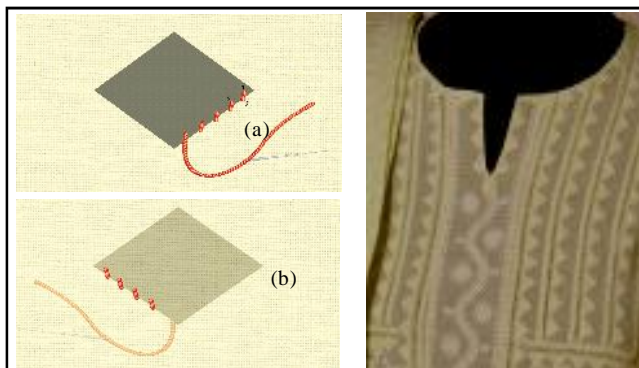


Plate 7 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Katao* (patch-work) work

satin stitches starting from the left side. Generally two strands were used for it. The steps of *Balda* stitch are shown in Plate 8 (a-c).

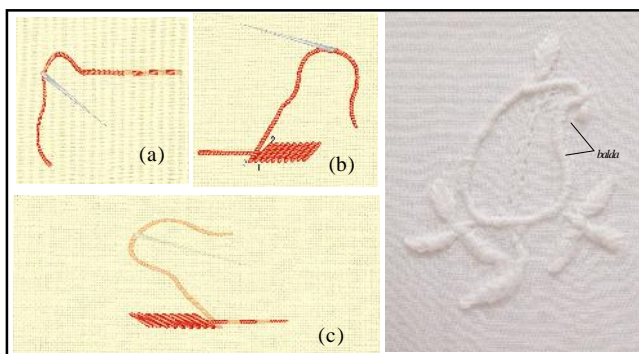


Plate 8 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Balda* stitch

Bijli:

Locally the term '*Bijli*' is used for specific kind of gold or silver earring which became the source of inspiration to render the stitches in specific shape (Plate 9 a-b). To embroider these stitches, a small hole is made in the fabric with a needle, and then, short satin stitches are taken around this hole in a semi-circle.

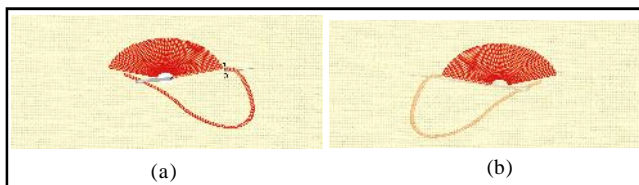


Plate 9 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Bijli* stitch

Pechani:

This is normally used for making an outline of a pattern or enclosing a border. Very tiny running stitches

are taken along the line and once the line is completed, each stitch is picked up again without disturbing the underlying fabric. Only the thread of the stitch is picked up giving an impression of a fine line (Plate 10 a-b).

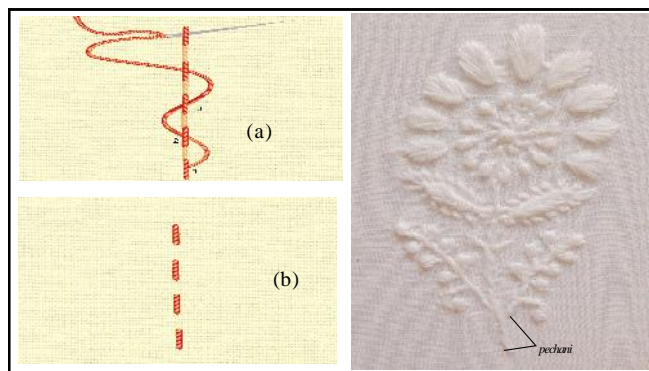


Plate 10 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Pechani* stitch

Dhoom:

It is similar to *Bakhia*, but double herringbone stitches are embroidered from front side of the fabric (Plate 11 a-b). After filling the motif with herring bone stitches once, the first step is repeated, i.e. herringbone stitches are re-done in the same motif in the inbetween spaces of previously worked herringbone stitches.

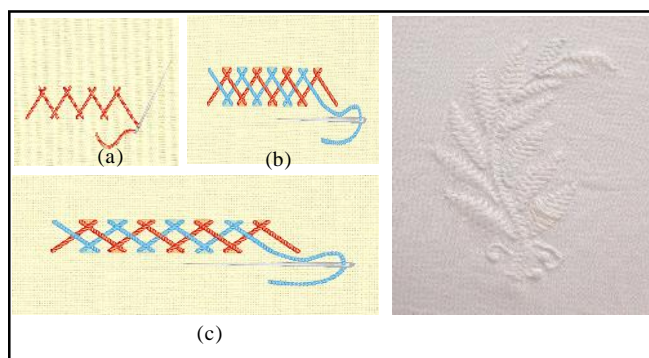


Plate 11 (a-c) : Front and reverse side of *Dhoom* (double-herringbone) stitch

Kangan:

The source of inspiration for this stitch was '*Kangan*' which is a heavy round bangle. The *Kangan* stitch is a variation of tiny running stitches used to form 'Y' shape, called '*Kanta*' (Plate 12 a-b). It is invariably used with '*Keel*' in the centre. *Kanta* stitches when repeated to form a circular shape around '*Keel*' gave the appearance of *Kangan*.

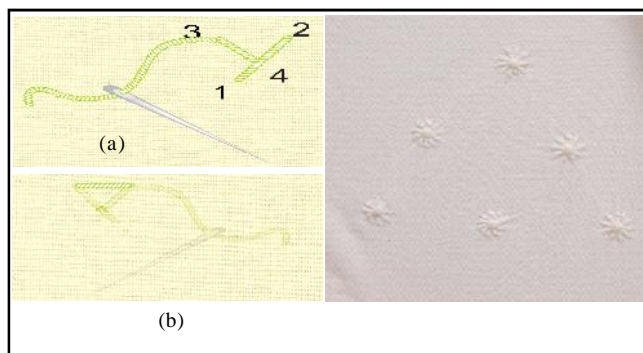


Plate 12 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Keel-kangan* stitch

Though there were fifteen styles of *Chikankari* stitches. Only *Daraz*-work was not found to be used by any of the organisations/enterprises. Stitches like *Bakhia*, *Tepchi*, *Zanzeera*, *Kaaj* and *Rahet* were used by all organizations/enterprises. Both *Hool* and *Katao*-work were used by only 33.34 per cent GOs. Amongst all organisations/enterprises, *Hool* (70.00%) and *Katao*-work (43.00%) were used by the maximum PEs. Besides, variations of flat stitches such as *Pechani*, *Dhoom* and *Keel-kangan* were used by all the organisations/enterprises. *Gitti* was embroidered by all organisations/enterprises.

Balda was least used among these variations : Other styles of flat Chikankari stitches:

Some stitches in *Chikankari* are combined together in a particular style and named accordingly.

Gitti:

It is a combination of buttonhole and long satin stitch usually used to make a wheel-like motif with a tiny hole in the center (Plate 13 a-c).

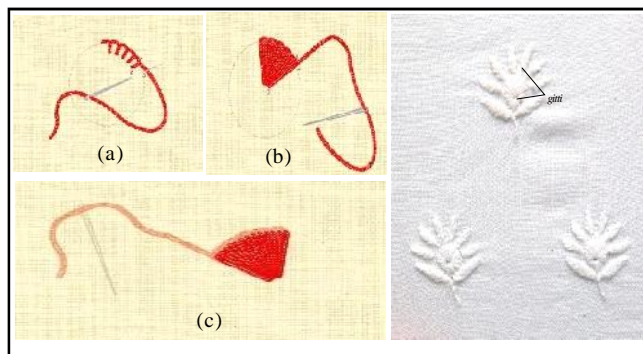


Plate 13 (a-c) : Front and reverse side of *Gitti* stitch

Table 2 : Types of flat stitches used for <i>Chikankari</i> embroidery in different organizations/enterprises				(n=43)*
Stitches	GOs	NGOs	PEs	Total
	(n ₁ =03)	(n ₂ =10)	(n ₃ =30)	n ₁ + n ₂ + n ₃ =43*
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Flat basic stitches				
<i>Bakhia</i> (herring bone)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Tepchi</i> (running)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Zanzeera</i> (chain)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Kaaj</i> (button hole)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Rahet</i> (stem)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Hool</i> (eyelet)	1 (33.33)	7 (70.00)	21 (70.00)	29 (67.44)
<i>Katao</i> (patch-work)	1 (33.33)	4 (40.00)	13 (43.33)	18 (41.86)
Variations of flat stitches				
<i>Balda</i>	1 (33.33)	4 (40.00)	13 (43.33)	18 (41.86)
<i>Bijli</i>	2 (66.67)	7 (70.00)	18 (60.00)	27 (62.79)
<i>Pechani</i>	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Dhoom</i>	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Keel-kangan</i>	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
Other styles				
<i>Gitti</i>	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Java</i>	1 (33.33)	4 (40.00)	13 (43.33)	18 (41.86)

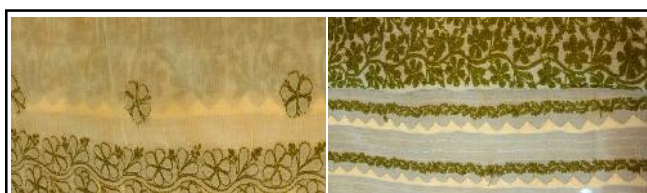
f=Frequency, *Multiple response

% =Percentage

*PEs=Private Enterprises

Java:

Java is very popular in *Chikankari* embroidery and it has a near resemblance to applique, as the technique is similar. This is preferably done on the reverse side of the fabric giving it a shadow look on the right side of the fabric like *Bakhia* (Plate 14 a-b).

Plate 14 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Java***Daraz:**

Same technique as java is used for attaching a strip of fabric on the reverse side and there are three main designs in this style. This work was not being used by the respondents.

Plate 15 : Front side of *Daraz* (*Tara patti*) stitch**Tara patti:**

This work has star like flowers with leaves. This is inspired from nature as curved stem and flowers like a creeper running horizontally or vertically on the fabric. These tracings are cut neatly along the lines and finely hemmed giving the impression of *Bel butti* running across the fabric (Plate 15). The center of the flower has a *Hool* that breaks the monotony.

Neem patti :

This is same as the *Tara patti*; the only difference being that it is in the shape of elongated leaves. These strips are neatly attached in a straight line, but the finished product looks like curved *Bel* running on either side of the *Kurta*. The joining of the strips is invisible.

Fish:

The fish *Daraz* is the most fascinating among all of them. One fish follows the other in slight curves (but the fabric is joined in a straight line) and fish appeared to be swimming in water. The three types of *Daraz* are done in the same technique except that the shape changes.

Conclusion:

Hand embroidery may be tedious and slow work,

however compared to the mass cloned machine embroidery work the finesse and intricacy of *Chikankari* stitches has an appeal and charm which is unparalleled.

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