

Melange of embossed *Chikankari* stitches and *Jali*-work

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Chikankari embroidery is one of the most ancient textile decoration styles. It is a distinctive integral part of the city of Nawabs, Lucknow. It is the intricate art of doing fine and delicate embroidery on cloth by hand which is known for its sheer excellence of skill, texture and delicacy. The present investigation made an attempt to study different types of embossed stitches and their variations used by GOs, NGOs and private enterprises (PEs). 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. Primary data were collected from the chairpersons/owners of chikankari organizations/enterprises through interview technique and observational method, besides the secondary data. There were seventeen types of embossed chikankari stitches and jali-work including their variations and styles, but only eight of these were being used in the embroidery. Majority of PEs (80.00%) carried out jali-work, though it was being done in only 40.00 per cent NGOs and 33.34 per cent GOs.

■ **KEY WORDS**: *Chikankari*, Embroidery, Embossed-stitches, *Jali*-work

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India boasts a range of traditional embroideries from different states embodying their regional, cultural and social influences. Famous as shadow work, *Chikankari* embroidery is a very delicate and intricate work from the city of Lucknow. This embroidery is famous for its timeless grace and gossamer delicacy (Anonymous, 2016). Originally, *Chikan* embroidery was done with white cotton thread on white cotton fabric like muslin and cambric. Today, *Chikankari* is not only done with coloured threads but on all kinds of fabrics like silk, crepe, georgette, organdie chiffon, and tussar. Now-a-days it is also done on net to produce a kind of lace. In *Chikankari*, the design to be embroidered is printed on the fabric using wooden blocks dipped in

fugitive indigo colours. The embroidery has a repertoire of about 32 stitches which can be broadly divided into three heads flat, embossed stitches and *Jali*-work (Anonymous, 2011). This research paper focuses on the embossed stitches and *Jali*-work with their variations. The flat stitches have been discussed previously.

Objectives :

- To study embossed types of *Chikankari* embroidery stitches and their variations.
- To explore the types of *Jali*-work used in *Chikankari*.

RESEARCH METHODS

Three GOs and ten NGOs were selected randomly. Besides, thirty private enterprises (PEs), fifteen each from Aminabad and Chowk market areas, were selected randomly. The selected organizations/enterprises were operating in five blocks of Lucknow district namely, Bakshi Ka Talab, Kakori, Mal, Malihabad and Sarojani Nagar. Data were collected by interviewing the chairpersons/owners of the selected organisations or enterprises. Secondary sources of information were also used.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Flat stitches used in *Chikankari* are comparatively easier and less time consuming than the embossed stitches and *Jali-work*. Use of many of embossed stitches has been discontinued over a period of time due to their intricacy, low productivity and higher labour cost.

Stitches used in different organizations/enterprises:

The most sophisticated look of *Chikankari* is the result of seven basic flat stitches along with five of its variations (total twelve types of flat basic stitches). Apart from these flat stitches, embossed stitches and *Jali-work* enhance the intricacy of work. Six types of embossed stitches including their variations and seven types of the *Jali-work* make the embroidery more intricate. Besides, there are four additional styles of embossed *Chikankari* work which involve combination of stitches.

Embossed basic stitches of *Chikankari* :

Embossed effect in *Chikankari* is achieved by the use of knot stitches as well as larger number of strands of embroidery threads.

Chana patti:

Embroidery work in this stitch is started from the

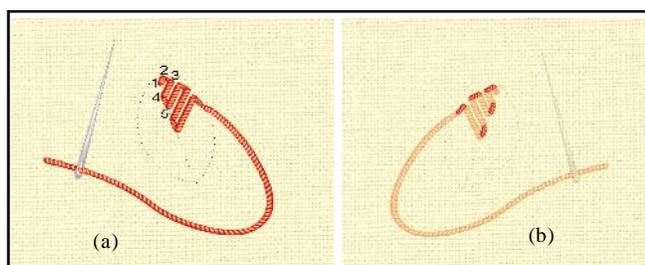


Plate 1 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Chanapatti* (back) stitch

narrowest conical end of the motif. The stitches start from the top of the motif working downwards, taking stitches as shown in the Plate 1 (a-b).

Murri:

The knots made are oval shaped. It resembles the shape of rice, gives a raised effect and is used to fill petals (Plate 2 a-b). The stitches are worked closely in the petal.

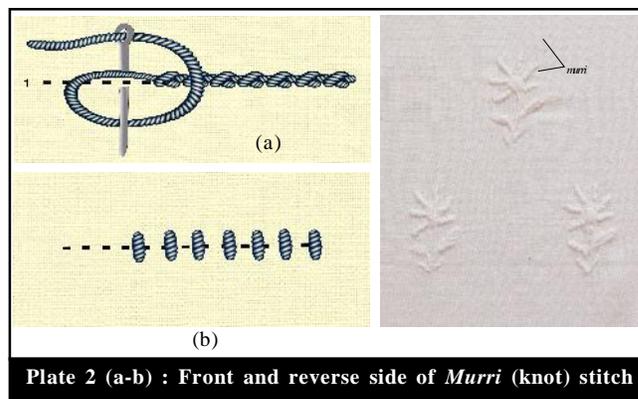


Plate 2 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Murri* (knot) stitch

Phanda:

It is a smaller shortened form of *Murri*. The knots made are spherical and very small. It resembles millets, gives a raised effect and is used to fill petals and leaves. The stitch of *Phanda* is shown in Plate 3 (a-b).

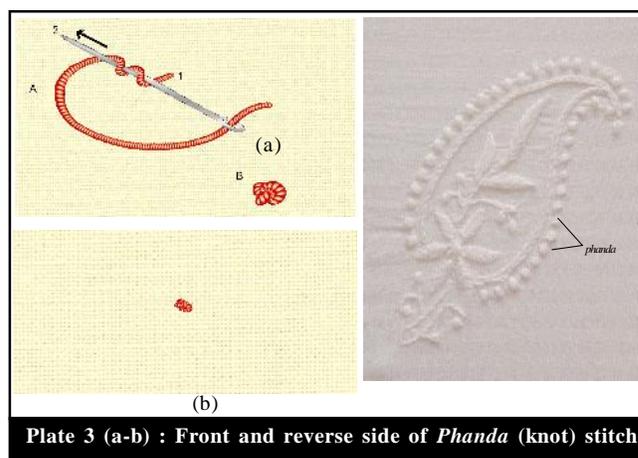
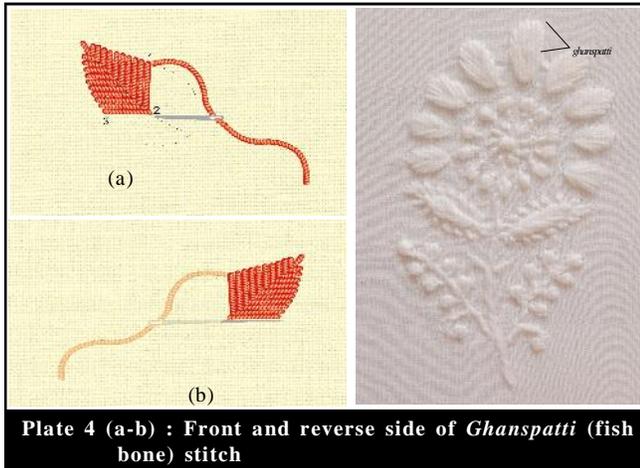


Plate 3 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Phanda* (knot) stitch

Ghans patti:

It is a fish bone stitch frequently used to embroider grass leaves. V-shaped stitches are worked as shown below in Plate 4 a-b.



stitch is embroidered which looks like a spike. It looks like coriander (*Dhania*) seeds.

Other styles of embossed *Chikankari* stitches:

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

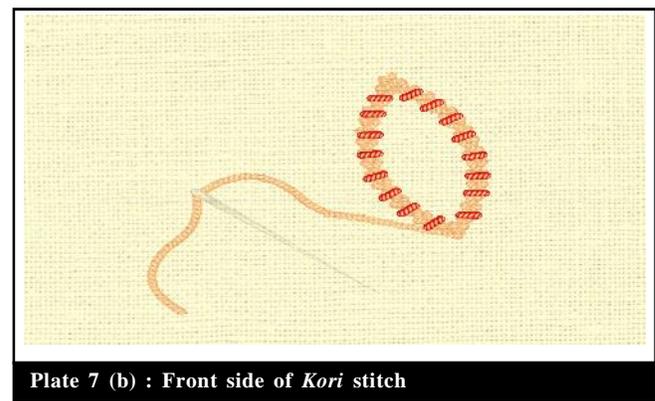
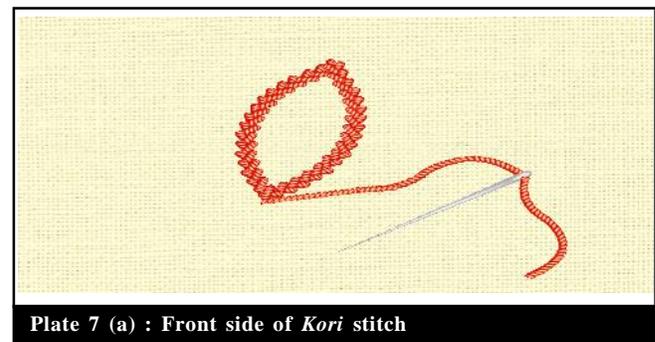
***Kori*:**

Kori or a small shell measures one inch in size. In *Chikankari* embroidery, the centre of the *Kori* has an opening of about 3 cm which is left unembroidered. Both the sides of the shell have an elongated smooth surface. The shape of the motif looks like *Kori*. It is closely filled with *Pechani* stitch and then, covered with satin stitches (Plate 7 a-b).

Variations of embossed stitches :

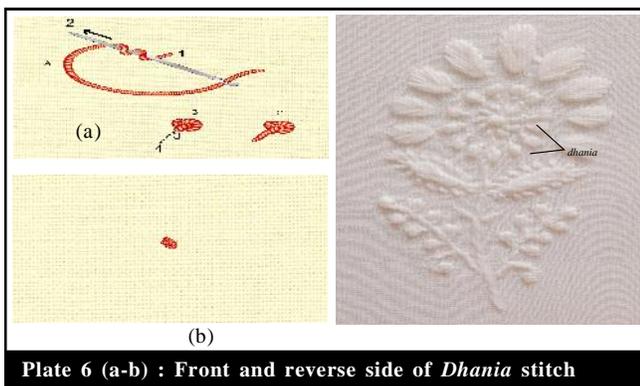
***Keel*:**

Keel resembles a round nose pin and is comparatively less raised from surface than *Phanda* or *Dhania* (Plate 5). To make this stitch, a very tiny stitch is picked up on the fabric with the needle and the *Phanda* stitch is embroidered.



***Dhania*:**

This stitch is the same as the *Phanda* (Plate 6 a-b). It is a knot stitch and on the top of it small straight



***Joda*:**

This *Booti* looks very similar to *Kori* but it is embroidered in pairs (*Joda*). It appears like two *Koris* independently planted on the same stem. It is filled in with button-hole stitches (Arya, 2002). The use of *Joda* has been discontinued.

***Karan phool*:**

'*Phool*' refers to 'flower' and '*Karan*' to the 'ears'.

In *Chikankari*, the big flower in the center is embroidered with *Phanda* and the elongated leaves are embroidered in *Pechani* and *Murri*. This stud is known as the *Karan-phool* (Sharma, 2015). Even it was not found to be used by the respondents.



Plate 8 : Stitch of *Karan-phool*

Meharki:

It is the same as *Karan phool*, but has another line of circular *Dhania patti* embroidered around the *Karan phool*. This stitch was also not found to be used by the respondents.

Jali-work

The *Jali* created in *Chikankari* is a unique specialty of this craft. It gives an effect of open mesh or net created by carefully pushing of warps and wefts apart by needle without cutting or drawing of threads from fabric. Small stitches pull apart the yarns of fabric in different directions, which results in neat regular holes or *Jali* on the fabric. Embroidery for *Jali-work* is done from back side of fabric (Anonymous, 2012). There are various kinds of *Jali-work*, each *Jali* being made in different patterns. The most common and popular is *Siddhaur Jali*.

Siddhaur Jali:

Siddhaur jali is the simplest form in which the stitches are worked diagonally to the warp and the weft threads (Plate 9 a-b).

Hathkati:

Another form of *Jali* stitches used to form a row of square holes is known as *Hatkati*. This can be seen

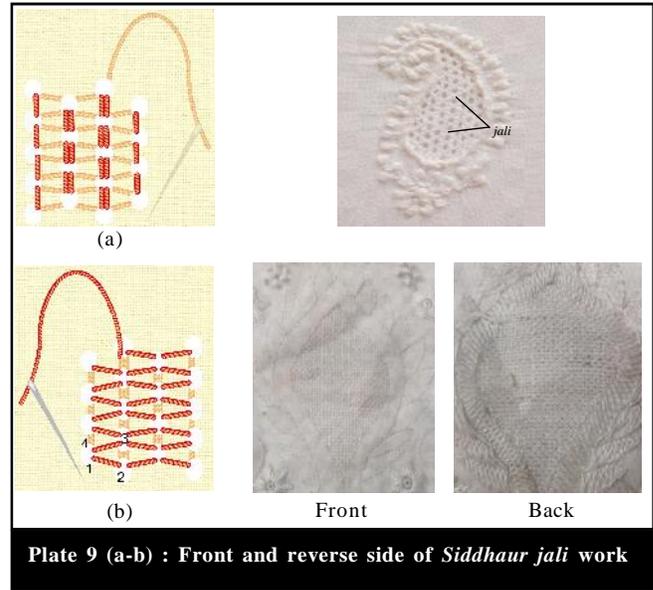


Plate 9 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Siddhaur jali* work

around the borders of handkerchiefs, centers of flowers and petals, neck and the shoulders of gents *kurtas* (Plate 10 a-b).

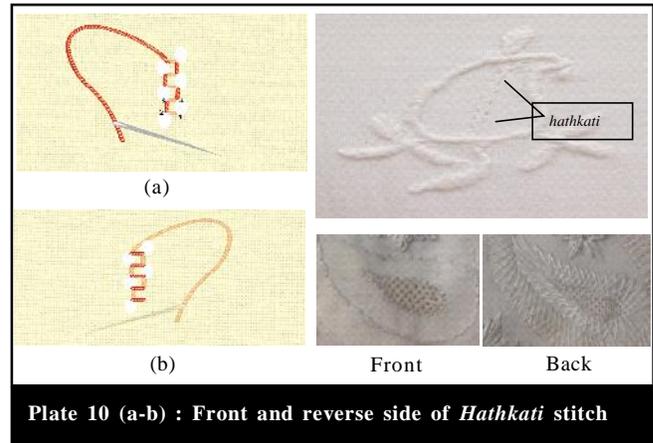


Plate 10 (a-b) : Front and reverse side of *Hathkati* stitch

Variations of Jali-work :

Bangala Jali:*

It is popularly believed that the Bengali and Madras (also known as *Madrasi*) *Jalis* were brought from Bengal and Madras which were probably modified to suit *Chikankari*. In *bangla Jali* the square holes are smaller than *Madrasi jali* and the holes are alternately opened and unopened in parallel bands (Anonymous, 2002).

Chattaiya Jali:*

In *Chattaiya*, the *Jali* is opened in the same style,

but mat like patterns are formed in the net.

Makrajali:*

This *Jali* is opened about 1\16th of an inch in a circular pattern and the centre is left unopened giving it a look of a web. This is repeated till the open spacing of the flower is filled with this *Makra jali* (Anonymous, 2012).

Mandrazi Jali:*

This *Jali* is the most intricate among the others. Here one hole is opened about 1\16th of an inch and another is left unopened, still another is opened in four parts and the next is again left unopened. The pattern is thus repeated. In the second row, parallel to the fully opened hole, a *Jali* with four parts is worked out. In the third row, the top hole is left unopened. This sequence is again repeated thus creating an interesting texture.

Bulbul Chashma:*

This *Jali* seems to be compound of the *Siddhaur* and the *Makra jali*. In the alternative rows, there are the *Siddhaur* like openings ascending vertically. In the other row are square holes with diagonally intersecting threads. This *Jali* also appears very delicate (Anonymous, 2002).

*These *Jails* were not found to be in practice now-a-days due to the unavailability of artisans skilled in embroidering these.

Lucknow *Chikankari* embroidery is highly time consuming but has always been in high fashion demand.

To reduce the lead time more intricate stitches like *Joda*, *Karan phool*, *Kori*, etc. were not being used these days by the artisans. Also, some of the stitches were either simplified or replaced by embellishments. *Phanda* stitch in *Kairi* motif replaced by *Mukaish* work has been shown below (Plate 11). Most of the artisans in the cluster were specialized in only 4-5 stitches of *Chikankari*.

Though there were seventeen types of embossed *Chikankari* stitches and *jali*-work but total eight of them were being used in the embroidery. Stitches like *Murri*, *Phanda*, *Dhania*, *Keel* and *Hathkati* were used by all organizations/enterprises. Majority of PEs (80.00%) also did *Jali*-work, but it was being done in only 40.00 per cent NGOs and 33.34 per cent GOs. *Ghanspatti* was also used in 66.67 per cent GOs, 70.00 per cent NGOs and 60.00 per cent PEs. Thus, there is utmost need to revive all styles of *Chikankari* stitches to pass these on to the posterity.



Plate 11 : Contemporary look of *Chikankari* designs with using *Mukaish*-work

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 (%)
Embossed basic stitches				
<i>Murri</i> (knot)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Phanda</i> (knot)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Chanapatti</i>	2 (66.67)	7 (70.00)	18 (60.00)	27 (62.79)
<i>Ghans patti</i> (fish bone)	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
Variations of embossed stitches				
<i>Dhania</i>	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
<i>Jali</i> -work				
<i>Shiddhaur-jali</i> work	1 (33.33)	6 (60.00)	24 (70.00)	32 (74.41)
<i>Hathkati</i>	3 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	43 (100.00)
Other styles of stitches				
<i>Kori</i>	1 (33.33)	4 (40.00)	13 (43.33)	18 (41.86)

f=Frequency,

*Multiple response

%=Percentage

*PEs=Private Enterprises



Plate 12 : *Chikankari* suit embellished with lace

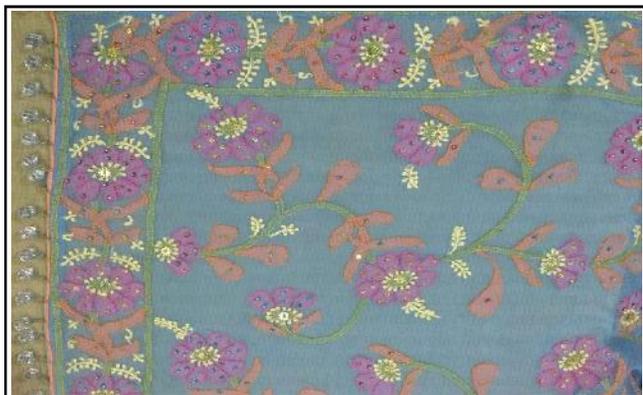


Plate 13 : Contemporary look of *Chikankari* design embellished with sequins and beads

Contemporary style of *Chikankari* embroidery :

New fusions in coloured fabrics and threads have been introduced by producers and designers to impart trendy look in a more efficient way. They opened new doors for the embroidery to let it come out of its restricted technique of designing, and developed an innovative and contemporary image of the embroidery. They introduced designs or motifs having a fashionable touch of value addition by the use of sequins, mirror work, *Zardozi*,

Mukaish kamdani, sequins, *lace*, etc. to satisfy fashionable tendencies, but on the darker side the actual work of traditional craft has started vanishing.

Conclusion:

Though this living craft tradition has remained rooted in the city of origin, since it is continuously evolving in terms of colours, textiles and innovative use of embellishments. But, at the same time its traditional sheen has been subdued as many of the stitches are not in use contemporarily.

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