

Different forms of Lord Ganesha in Chamba Rumals: An Overview

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Abstract

Lord Ganesha is one of the favorite subjects among the visual artists. He is also known as Ganapati and Vinayaka and is one of the most worshipped God among Hindus. He is also known as the remover of obstacles and patron of arts and science. Before starting of any rituals or ceremonies, Lord Ganesha is worshipped first. The worship of Ganesha was very popular subject among embroiderers of Chamba specially for the rumal and the paintings. A large number of Chamba Rumals depicting Lord Ganesha in different forms are preserved and are on display in many museums in India and abroad. This paper is an attempt to look at some beautiful rumals, housed in the collection of Canada Museum of Textiles, Canada, Indian Art Museum, Calcutta and Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

Keywords: - Ganesha, Chamba, Threads, Embroidery, Rumal, Pahari Paintings, Kangra, modak, laddoo,

Introduction

Embroidery is the ornamentation of any material with pattern or design done with the needle. Though, the Romans considered embroidery as needle painting and a part of other fine arts, but actually embroidery of a particular region is the reflection of the cultural tradition of that region in which it takes birth and gradually develops. Various regions in India have developed their own distinct style of embroidery. That embroidery, more than any other craft, reflects the local tradition, cultural and physical environments. In the Western Himalayan region, lies a beautiful valley – Chamba, which is famous for its unique art form and embroidered textiles, generally known as Chamba Rumals. The embroidery of Himachal is deeply rooted in the traditional folk culture of that place. The designs, colour combination and techniques have been derived from the original culture and heritage of Himachal.

Chamba Rumals did not enjoy much popularity in the public but it was practiced more privately and was a friendly affair which flourished silently in the inner walls of the palace. A peculiar tradition which remained exclusive to the valley, Chamba Rumal comprises of beautiful and colourful embroidery rendered on an unbleached muslin cloth employing an untwisted silken thread in double satin stitch. It was a pastime activity and ladies of the elite households would spend their leisure time embroidering these Rumals, which is Persian name for handkerchief, primarily used for decorative purposes and later as canopies in the temples.

The most fascinating aspect of these rumals is the depiction of vast subject matter, which is not usually found in any other kind of embroidered rumals. The famous themes are Rasmandala, Love Sports of Radha Krishna, Lakshmi Narayan, Krishna with flute, Raslila, Shiva family, Ganesha, Wedding scenes and many more. Besides these themes there are rumals which illustrate hunting scene, floral and geometric patterns.

Although no example of Indian needlework earlier than the sixteenth century is known to have survived, there is ample evidence that embroidery was widely practiced in India from very early times¹. Bronze needles, possibly used for embroidery, have been excavated at Mohenjo-Daro, and among figurines from this and other Indus Valley Sites there are a number with drapery which is apparently of an embroidered type². It is obvious that embroidered clothes done before 16th century must have decayed with the passage of time, textiles being of a perishable nature³.

The earliest extant specimen of Himalayan embroidery is a *rumal* gifted to Guru Nanak Dev ji, the first guru of Sikhs, by his sister, Bibi Nanki in 1487 A.D. (1544 *samvat*), on his marriage⁴, which is in *paharirumal* style. At present, this *rumal* is in the custody of Baba Kuldip Singh Bedi (15th Generation of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikh religion) and is preserved in a Sikh shrine (*Gurudwara*) along with the *chola* (the holy robe which Guru Nanak ji used to wear) at *Chola Sahib Gurudwara* situated in the city Dera Baba Nanak which is located in Gurdaspur District of Punjab.

¹C. Kamaladevi, Indian Embroidery, Wiley Eastern, 1977, p-2

²Especially see the well-known bust of a bearded man (The Priest), draped in a tri – foil patterned shawl.

³Aryan, S. Himachal Embroidery, New Delhi (1976)

⁴Personal Interview with Baba Kuldip Singh Bedi (15th Generation of Guru Nanak Dev Ji).

Though the craft of Chamba Rumal was prevalent chiefly in the Chamba region, later its influence also extended to the neighboring states of Basohli, Nurpur and Kangra and there too it was identified as the Chamba Rumal. By the end of the 19th c, the craft of Chamba Rumal began to languish even in Chamba district. However, some effort to sustain this craft was made by Raja Bhuri Singh of Chamba, who commissioned several local women to prepare replicas of the old rumals for presentation to the British officials and dignitaries assembled in the Delhi coronation Darbar held in 1907 and 1911⁵.

The Worship of Ganesha as a theme was very prevalent with embroiderers in Chamba, specially for the *rumals* and the paintings. This particular theme and in



**Worship of Ganesha, Size: 68.5 x 70 cm.
Collection: IndianArt Museum, Museum**

various lay-outs and compositions was drawn by the folk and classical painters and embroidered since very early years of this tradition. In this *rumal* the technique is revealed by a very fine and soothing description with a great pictographic effect. As in classical Kangra paintings, the main subject-matter is put under a framework of scalloped arch resting on pillars. The Lord Ganesha is shown seated cross-

legged on a full-blown lotus and is shown in four-armed in this composition. In his upper right hand he holds a lotus, in his upper left an axe, in his lower rights the broken tusk, and in the lower left a sweet - *laddu* (modaka). The stem of the lotus

⁵Sharma Vijay, "Chamba Achamba: Women's Oral Culture", Chapter 6 - Decorative Motifs and Designs in Chamba Rumal, Chamba, pp- 269-272

sprouts from a lotus pond denoted by a few lotus leaves and watery shrubs. On two sides below the seat are two figures of mouse, the vehicle of the deity that to the left is a seated one and the one to the right appears standing. Beyond, there are flowers and flower plants. The two corners left by the scalloped arch in the rectangular framework are filled with floral patterns and designs with a few lotuses scattered around. The Lord Ganesha is shown seated under a green-leafed tree serving as an umbrella from one side but symmetrically placed. The figure is flanked by two female devotees, one to the left swinging *chuari* with her right arm stretched and the other one is holding a plate full of *laddu*. Both the female figures are under willow tree which is a very common feature of Kangra paintings. The dresses of the female devotees are typical Pahari dress which was worn in the 18th – 19th centuries A.D.

The rectangular space inside is further confined by rectilinear bands crossing each other at the four corners, showing formal and stylized floral patterns which is in a typical Chamba embroidery style, Except for the floral petals, deep red is seldom used. The over-all impression of the composition which is spread out with flowers is of green and light-green bringing about a very soothing visual effect.

A more stylized form of the composition in a folk style shows a central figure of Ganesha within a framework of rectangular bands with cross-petalled floral patterns in each section which also resembles to Phulkari embroidery of the neighboring state Punjab. There is a broader band of geometrical patterns in multicolored arranged in zigzag lines. The deity at the centre, crowned, has decorative umbrella with bells or fringes, supported on a metal rod, with two flowering banana trees in their natural colour flanking it from the two sides. Flowering banana trees, a veritable sign of plenty and auspiciousness,

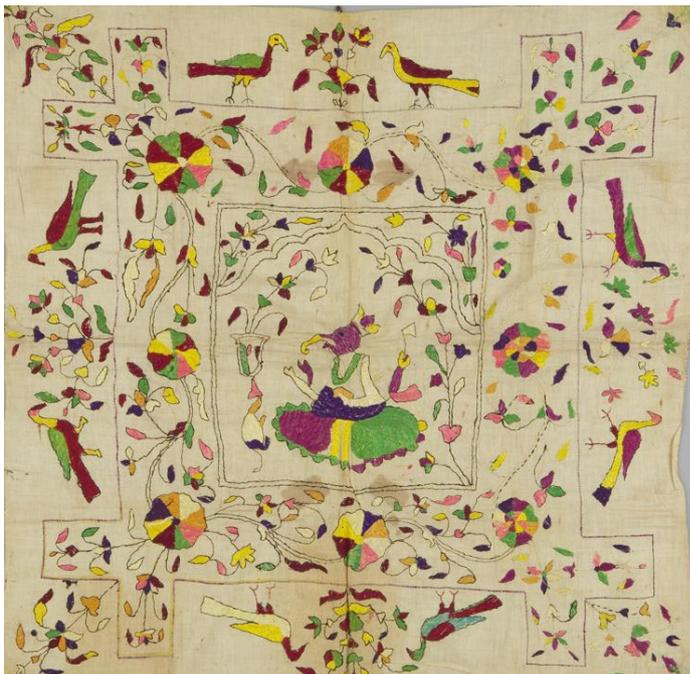


Worship of Ganesha, Size: 53 x 49 cm.
Collection: BhuriSinghMuseum, Chamba

two sides. Flowering banana trees, a veritable sign of plenty and auspiciousness,

was favourite of Chamba embroiderers, or Pahari painters. A specially designed and highly decorative lamp hangs from the back wall lending an elegance of its own to the entire set-up. The devotee at the left waves the *chowri* over the deity by the left hand while the right hand holds a garland. The right hand of the devotee holds in his upper right hand an axe, while his lower right hand has a lotus. The upper left carries *laddu* (modaka) the lower left has the rosary of beads (akshamala). Lord Ganesha sits on a lotus embroidered in blue with a dish of offering confronting him on the ground. Apart from a small bowl of offering there is a jug of water with a sprout and a handle which is typical of similar water-pots obtainable in Pahari paintings and is clearly taken from the Mughal Proto-types. The small mouse, the vehicle of Lord Ganesha is shown seated on the ground.

The typical Chamba feature of *ghagra* is noticeable here in the pieces worn by the female devotees attending Lord Ganesha.



Ganesha in Folk Style Seated on Lotus
Size: 77cm x 77cm, Cotton embroidered with silk threads
Collection: CanadaMuseum of Textiles, Canada

A specially designed and well-arranged rumal of Chamba is an example of keen observation of its maker. Lord Ganesha or Sidhivinayak seated on a multi-petal lotus like *dhyanasana*, embroidered in folk style in green and deep red colour threads. The small mouse is exactly before Ganesha. Two different coloured threads are used by the craftsman who embroidered

Ganesha seated in a balcony or Chhatri type architectural concept, which can directly be

enjoyed from Pahari painting. The *Mehrab* is like that of Kangra painting where artists usually arrange female models of extreme beauty. Here spiritual concept is more playful and meaningful because of colours and design sense. There is a deity at the centre of the composition of rumal. There is no dish of *laddoos* that usually we

can see along with Ganesha's Vahana, (Rat). Vahana colour is multi-coloured rather than usually black. The image of Lord Ganesha carries an axe, but his other hands are not justifying any symbol that further explains the Uttrayana concept of Ganesha. There is a rosary of beads (Akshamala) in his neck as garland rather than in his hand. There is one *ladoo* in his hand very near to his trunk. The total composition is like Alpana design that carries 4 sacred bushes and 8 images of falcon. Total square border design is decorated with creeper-like designed floral design. Play of colourful threads is the most prominent aspect of Ganesha's image and floral design. There are two floral plants one with a flower-pot another sprouting out of the Arch corner . Image of Lord Ganesha is in folk style,graciously rendered in colourful threads. The border design is within the images of birds and plants rather than near to the edge of the rumal. The image of Ganesha within a framework is a square concept of Chamba rumal with decorative patterns of floral design.

Bibliography:

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