



Influence of Architectural elements on Lucknowi Chikankari

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Abstract: The prime purpose of this article is to investigate the link between the cultural integration and architectural inspiration that underpin *Lucknowi Chikankari's* motifs and design patterns, patroned by the *Mughals* and *Navabs*. Chikankari has a long and deep-rooted history from far back to the present. The past glory and vividness of this Indian handcrafted work can be imagined only by traces of original samples preserved in various collections. This is the epitome of 'Mughal and Navabi royal garment tradition' passed down to the common masses due to the colonial changes in organised markets and industries in the modern era. Though nowadays the sophistication of 'White on White' grasped a new featural peculiarity, but the soul of this craft imbibed the age-old classical motifs and designs in its character. Architectural and culture influence of local Lucknow, are the main features frequently used in Chikankari's embroidery and various sewing patterns. The paper reflects this influence in the use of motifs and design patterns, often embroidered for royal Chikankari garments.

Key words: Chikankari, Indian embroidery, Architectural influence on textiles, Indian Textiles, Mughal & Navabi textile tradition, Traditional embroidery

Methodology: The study is qualitative in its nature and descriptive methods are reflected in the data gathering. Mainly primary and secondary sources of data are used to compile the study. Various researches conducted by scholars, books, previous research papers, and news- articles have been used to write down the paper.

Objective of the Study: Objectives of the study are given below;

1. To study the general features of Lucknowi-Chikankari customs under various patronages (Mughals & Navabs)
2. To study the general features of Mughal and Navabi architectural forms and designs & motifs used to decorate it.
3. To establish the influential link between architectural designs & motifs and Chikankari
4. To study the technical aspects of needlework (stitches) and their symbolic representation using architectural forms (design & motifs) on fabrics

1.Introduction: Textiles, fashion and architecture have been separated for a long time. Although the idea of covering the human body is the same, architecture generates enormous, heavy mass, whereas textiles provide delicacy. Clothing and building design have historically been used as body-covering and protective products. Clothes are therefore referred to as the 'second skin' because they protect the human body from the natural harm and have an aesthetic purpose, whereas architecture is called the 'third skin' because it serves the same purposes as clothing but on a larger scale and has an impact on the human body and its private environment. There are several surface embellishment techniques and design patterns to choose from, but the significant point is to understand how artisans were inspired to enrich fabrics with these designs and patterns. The motif, as a unit of

design, is one of the most visible examples of this inspiration (that might be taken from architecture, potteries, philosophical concepts, movements or social-religious customs and tradition etc.) in which two separate ideas can be associated through the visual arts, though the primary source of any design decoration of any art-genre is fundamentally inspired by the nature, that has been incorporated time to time with various sorts of belief systems. Sometimes theological sometimes social-political or other. In visual arts, motifs are defined as confined regions containing designs or recurring combinations of art components such as stamps, tiles, building blocks, or modules (Architectural design) or Buti-Buta (Flora and fauna motifs), Bel (thin or thick borders and Turanj (Carry or paisley motif) etc. (Textile design). Motifs can be arranged numerous times to generate desired effects. Chikankari is one of the best examples to showcase this combination, where architectural decorations and constructions were used as a fabric surface embellishment.

The pre-history and history also suggest the chronology of surface decoration, not merely in India but worldwide. Rock paintings, wall murals in tombs or temples, or wooden panel decoration are a few examples that indicate the use of architectural materials and cultural atmosphere, and these are the very first evidences of surface decoration in human history. The discovery and invention of palm leaves, fabrics, and papers are the second-generation materials on which surface decoration has taken place, according to their purposes and usages. According to this point of view one can say that the relation of architectures and textiles is nothing new, but having the age-old lineage of wonder and mystery. Apart from Mughal and Navabi culture, there are many other traditional crafts where the impact of architecture can be evident, such as the border pattern on 'Kanjivaram sarees', which was woven with inspiration from a temple silhouette (South India). 'Maheshwari sarees'; the border is woven with the inspiration of palace architecture (MP). 'Baluchari sarees' of Dhaka (now Bangla Desh) have the 'pallu' with settled human figures inside the window-like construction. Another example is Maharashtra's famous footwear, Kolhapuri Chappal, which has motif elements taken from the architecture in Kolhapur.

2.Review Literature: The delicate and detailed white stitching known as 'classical' on fine white muslin, utilising a variety of stitches to produce an endless array of subtle combinations and textures. Despite being so well known and almost iconic in Lucknow, descriptive studies or in-depth studies on Chikan embroidery have seldom been conducted. The majority of later articles have used George Watt's 1903 publication, *Indian Art in Delhi*, as their primary source, as it is the oldest comprehensive description and serves as a crucial point of reference. Jasleen Dhamija supplied an essay with priceless firsthand accounts from accomplished artisans in the early 1960s. Even now, Sheila Paine's little book, *Chikan Embroidery: The Floral Whitework of India*, which she wrote in the early 1980s, is the primary source on the topic. The most comprehensive and enlightening scholarly study on this art is Clare Wilkinson-Weber's *Embroidering Lives: Women's Work and Skill in the Lucknow Embroidery Industry* (1999), which took a feminist stance while focusing on the chikan craftswomen. *Romancing with Chikankari* by Veena Singh made an effort to fill a local knowledge gap on the topic. A few brief writings on chikan are also accessible; they were mostly written before the internet became widely used and may be found in a variety of periodicals and journals, many of which are no longer online or in print. The most readable and educational ones were written by me, Laila Tyabji, Tereza Kuldova, Ruth Chakravarty, and Clare Wilkinson-Weber, among other authors. Paola Manfredi's 30 years of dedication, has been published in '*Chikankari: A Lucknowi Tradition*' (2017) in this order, is an authentic source of the study of local tradition of Lucknowi Chikankari. It was the result of 'Dastkar project' in 90s at SEWA-Lucknow to create handbooks on Indian embroideries' traditions for craftspeople. Laila Tyabji was also involved in this project. Apart from this recently, the State Museum and Crafts Museum in Lucknow, the Indian Museum in Kolkata and the Crafts Museum in Delhi have rich collection of intricate vintage pieces of Chikankari. In addition, Private collectors, antique textiles dealers, and museums abroad particularly the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Royal Museum in Edinburgh, the A.E.D.T.A. (whose collections were later bequeathed to the Oriental Arts Museum, Musée Guimet in Paris) also have the pieces of old Chikankaris.

3.Historical perspective of Chikankari: The word 'Chikan' is derived from the Iranian language and, according to ancient inscriptions, it has been interpreted as a type of 'Qasida' (Embroidery), which was done in many places and each place had its own distinct stylistic feature. Indian textiles related monographs, commercial records and also colonial era catalogues of 19th–20th century, indicate the word Chikan that refers to various

types of needle-work. The word Chikankari appears for the first time in India in John Richardson's Iranian Englis Dictionary, published in Calcutta in 1806. In 1852, the Iranian/English dictionary was published twice again by Stingos and Richardson, in which it was named 'Sona' (Gold). In modern times, according to Hindi dictionary, Chikan means 'Small ballad on white muslin' and 'Chikandoz', which is related to it, has been taken to mean 'Colorless ballad' in Peshawar, but in Quetta and Bhopal, 'Lihaf' (Quilt), which was a type of tassel, also considered similar to chicken. The word 'Chikandoz' was also given by some craftsmen of the 19th century who were from the north-west and some artisans of Surat and some towns of Sindh as well. The origin of the word Chicken is also believed to be in Bengal, where it means 'Very fine work'.

According to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, working in the field of textile art, it is a fine or subtle embroidery done on white muslin cloth with white thread. In the opinion of Laila Tyab ji, Chikankari came to India in the form of 'White on White' qasida from 'Shiraz' (A city in south central Iran) in the Mughal court and preserved by Nurjahan, wife of Jahangeer. However, the Chikankari, typical of Lucknow, is reputed to be among the finest traditional embroidery from India. The keen lovers and patron of this craft, 'Nawabs of Awadh' gained their independence from the Delhi court during the Mughals' decline in the later part of the 18th century. They redefined the meaning of court splendour and royal patronage, developed their own aesthetic and style, and provided legitimacy to the fabled extravagances of eastern kingdoms. It is also known as Indo European white work and has been clearly influenced by the elements of Indian Mughal and Nawabi art as well as European white work embroidery. This style became very popular in the West towards the end of the 18th century, but Indian Chikankari has certainly been deeply influenced by the local life, culture and social identity of the local place. Mainly the natural components including flowers and leaves are seen scattered all over in design compositions. The fusion of Mughal, Nawabi and Western cultures left its stamp mark on the life of Lucknow. The royal court life, the harmony of the interests of the wealthy houses and the British art lovers kept the freshness of the Chikankari everlasting in Lucknow.

4.The influence of architectures on Chikankari: Mughals and Navabs both had a flavour for arts and crafts and they played a vital role to enrich the craft of Chikankari.

4.1The Mughals: The imprint of Mughal life and artistic metaphors can be clearly evident in the various types of patterns and designs found in Chikankari. Mughal architecture reflects the spirit of a timeless era. It is an expression of the aesthetics of their times. With the emergence of the Mughals, India witnessed a remarkable change in architectural styles and art forms. By the end of the 16th century, the Mughal rulers had firmly established themselves and began building mosques, forts, and palaces as visible symbols of their grandeur. The Mughal rulers were largely tolerant and refused to follow the leadership of the Ulema, and this led to the cultural liberalism of the time. The Mughals openly accepted the fusion of the arts, going against strict religious rules. It seems that they also believed in Hindu astrology, divination, magic, and tantra. Over time, the Mughal rulers became exceptional patrons of the arts with an excellent cultural outlook. They not only created beautiful monuments but also used a variety of motifs on them, which played an important role in providing beauty to the monuments. The Mughals gave a new direction and perspective to the mediaeval architecture of India. The Mughals adopted new methods of ornamentation because of their love for sophisticated decoration.

The form of Mughal ornamentation is mainly geometric and naturally stylized. Mughal aesthetics was not only limited to architecture but also included clothes, jewelries, painting, and all the art forms related to daily life. Natural and stylized floral motifs were universally employed in his buildings in a variety of ways, such as carving, inlay, painting, and stucco. In this way, indigenous ornamentation and motifs developed in Mughal art. The naturalistic floral motifs in Jahangir's era largely included influences from Iranian motifs such as the cypress. Similarly, various themes of geometric ornamentation, Arabic calligraphy, and ornamentation are specifically Islamic. Mughal aesthetics leads to the stylization of natural flora and fauna.

4.2The Nawabs of Awadh: After the Mughal period, the Nawabs of Lucknow gave a new definition to the aesthetics of Chikankari. Seeking royal favour, Lucknow drew artists, artisans, musicians, cooks, and literary personalities from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. This migration added to Lucknow's thriving reputation for exquisite Urdu literature and poetry, classical dance and music, fairs, and magnificent Muharram processions. Class, taste, etiquette, and culture came to be defined by the Lucknawi way of life. In this opulent and refined setting, a wide range of arts and crafts, especially embroidery of many types, flourished. Exquisite

pieces of ‘Zardozi, Ari, and Kamdani’ embroidery with gold and silver threads on silks, velvets, and delicate muslins were created in the ‘Karkhanas’, or royal workshops. Despite having evolved towards the end of the Nawabi dynasty, chikan embroidery is frequently considered to represent the finest and ultimate refinement of Nawabi and Lucknawi culture. The Chikankari of Lucknow during the time of the East India Company and the contemporary Wajid Ali Shah show a variety of new elements.

5. Description of motifs and design patterns: Chikankari has variety of motifs, mainly inspired with the natural surroundings filled with flora and fauna. Each and every type of motif and design pattern has unique local name. Embroidery consists of around 32 distinct stitches that can be used independently or in combination. The six primary stitches that distinguish it are the Tepchi (back running stitch), Bakhiya (double backstitch), Hool (eyelet), Zanzeera (chain stitch), Rahket (stem stitch), and Banarasi. Chikankari stitches are divided into two types: those with a smooth surface and a single thread, and those with an embossed look and up to 12 threads each. Here we are merely discussing the motifs with are inspired from the architectural designs. Description of these motifs are given below;

5.1 Jaal-Jaali (Net/Latticework): The Mughal Empire was renowned for its breathtaking monuments and tombs, where ‘Jaal or Jaali’ is used in a variety of ways in various structural elements (*Fig 1,2*). It is also considered a classical style of Indo-Islamic decoration. Jaal, in Mughal architecture, is a term used for a decorative latticed screen built on a foundation of geometry and calligraphy. In Urdu language, this word is considered equivalent to ‘Net’, a very prominent feature of Mughal architecture that it included symmetrical and repetitive geometric ornamentation on stones or floral-inspired ornamentations etc. The foundation of netting lies in a simple geometric progression combined with the beauty of Islamic calligraphy and floral



Red Sandstone Pierced Jali Screen,
ca. 1580,
Uttar Pradesh, Mughal, India.
Source: Arthur M. Sackler,
Harvard Art Museums,
Cambridge, MA, USA

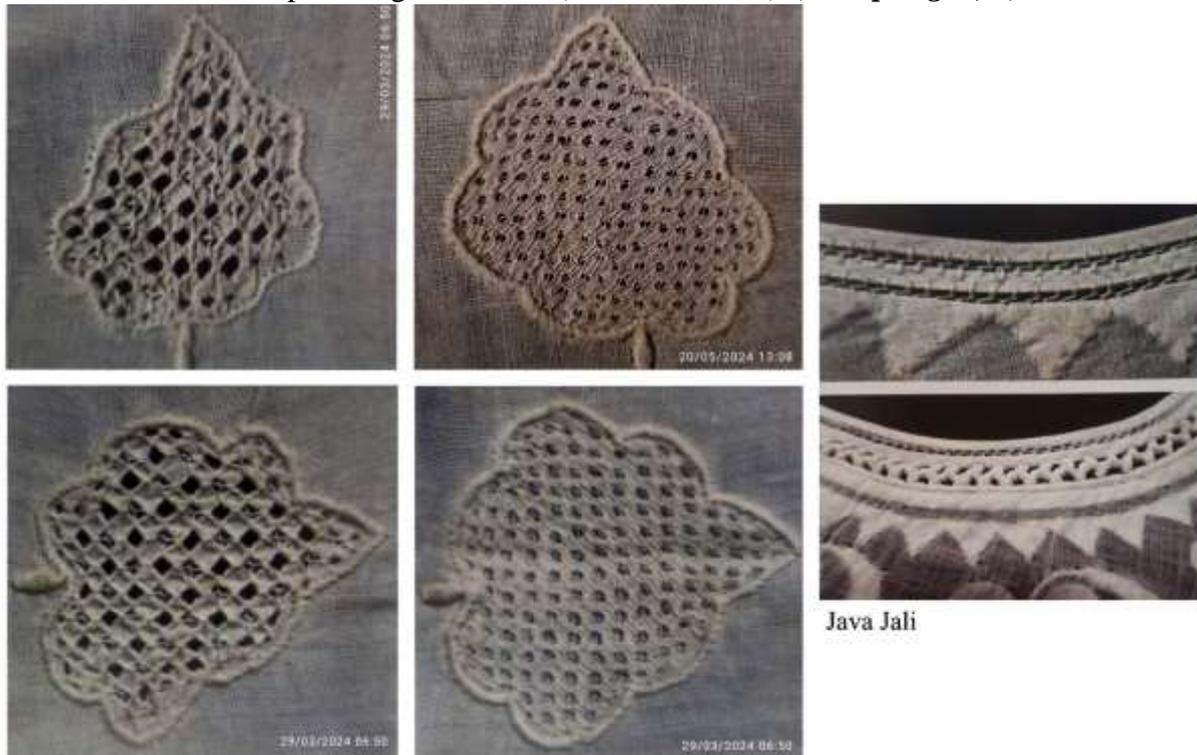


Picture 1: Jali at Sidi Saiyyed Mosque,
Ahmedabad, India. (public domain)
Source: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/jali-in-mughal-architecture-the-most-delicate-stone-curtains/>

ornamentation. In relation to the social norms of the Muslim community, netting was also used as a ‘Parda’ or curtain, which helped separate the personal affairs of royals from public gatherings while allowing common residents to attend the court proceedings. Apart from serving the purpose of visual appeal and aesthetics, the latticework in the architectures provided additional cooling to the room. These promoted natural light and good ventilation, as well as providing shade from the harsh sun. Jaal motif or pattern has been carved in many ways in Chikankari and is done with great skill and precision. Light weight, transparent cotton netting was created in Chikankari clothing to provide comfort and coolness to the body, because these clothes were worn specially in the summer.

Historians have written extensively about how the Mughal empress ‘Nur Jahan’ was a great patron of all art forms and how aesthetics and techniques from different theories and traditions were merged under her artistic

vision. The distinctive Jali work in Chikankari embroidery is one such inspired creation. Weavers used geometric precision to produce a basic grid of a web motif and then incorporated floral and faunal-inspired patterns to create distinctive and diverse types of ornamentation. There are various kinds of Jaali, but the technique is the same, each Jaali is made in different patterns. The most common and popular are Bengali and Madras Jaalis. Description is given below (Manfredi, 2017). (*Group Fig. 3, 4*)



Group figure 3: Different types of Mandraji and Bangali Jali-works

Source: Paola Manfredi

- 5.1.1 Bangala Jaali:** It is popularly believed that the Bengali and Madras (also known as Mandrazi) Jaali were clearly bought from Bengal and Madras and probably modified to suit Chikankari. In Bangla Jaali the square holes are smaller than Madras Jaali and the holes are alternately opened and unopened in parallel bands.
- 5.1.2 Chattaiya Jaali:** In Chattiya, the Jaali is opened in the same style by holding the weft and the waft apart, but mat like patterns is formed in the net.
- 5.1.3 Makra Jaali:** Makra Jaali or the spider web, the Jaali is opened about $1/16$ th 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 Jaali.
- 5.1.4 Mandrazi Jaali:** This Jaali is the most intricate among the others. Here one hole is opened about $1/16$ th of an inch another is left unopened, another is opened in four parts and the next is again left unopened. The pattern is thus repeated. In the next line on top of the fully opened hole a Jaali with four parts is worked out. The next hole is left unopened which comes on top of the four that has been opened below and this is again repeated thus creating an interesting texture.
- 5.1.5 Siddaur Jaali:** Siddaur Jaali is the most common Jaali in Lucknow, except Siddhaur Jaali in which the stitches are worked diagonally the warp and the weft threads, in rest of the Jaalis the stitches are worked on the weft and the warp. Other kinds of Jaalis which are sparingly used are, Tajmahal, Phool Jaali, Satkani, Tabar, Chitegul and Kanthmahal.
- 5.1.6 Bulbul Chashma:** This Jaali seems to be compound of the Siddhur and the Makra Jaali. In the alternative rows there are the Siddhur like opening ascending vertically. In the other rows are square holes with diagonally intersecting threads. This Jaali also appears very delicate. (All the Jaalis are worked from the reverse side of the fabric).
- 5.1.7 Hathkati:** Another form of Jaali stitches to form a row of square holes is known as Hathkati. This can be seen around the borders of handkerchiefs, centers of flowers and petals, in gents' kurtas on the neck and the shoulders. Hathkati is of two types, the single, when the Jaali is made from one side only and the second type

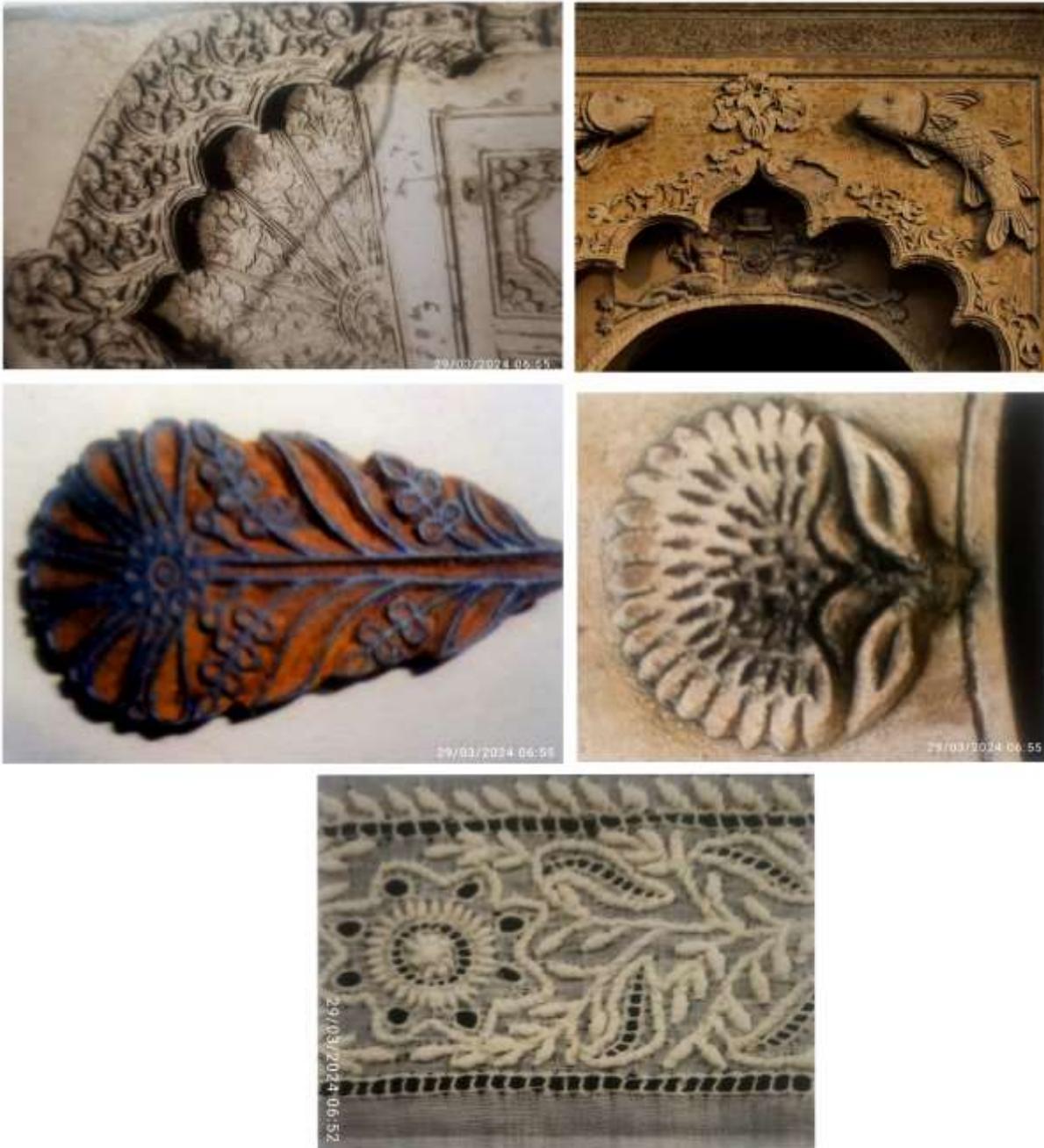
is when the Jaali is worked from both the sides. Also known as Bank Jaali There is a slight difference in their look but double Jaali takes more time and gives a finished look.



Figure 4: Mosque design with Jali work on cap
Source: Paola Manfredi

5.2 Floral motifs and design patterns: Floral motifs generally consist of different types of tiny flowers, buds and leaves motifs. A few numbers of popular floral motifs are *Buta-Buti* and *Bel-Buta* or *Buti* and *Kinari*, *Kairi*, *Paan*, etc. Distinct sorts of stitches have been used to create desirable natural effects in these motifs and patterns. These motifs and design patterns are mostly used to carve on Mughal architecture also. Examples are given below;

5.2.1 Buta-Buti and Bel-Buta or Buti and Kinari: Buta and Buti are motifs in themselves that indicate the sizes of motifs; the bigger one is Buta, and the smaller one is Buti. It might consist of merely one flower or bud or a bunch of different floral elements. The word Bel-Buta or Buti indicates a thin or thick stripe of floral elements in a repetitive manner, and the Kinari is the border of the garments (*Group Fig 5*)



Group figure 5: Design & Motifs from Architectures used in Chikankari
Source: Paola Manfredi



5.2.2 Kairi (Paisley): Paisley motif is a sort of 'Buta or Buti design', filled with blooming flowers, buds, vines and creepers. It has been used in all types of decorative arts throughout the world over than thousand years. In India, it is frequently known as *Ambi*, which is Punjabi for mango, or *Kairi*, which means mango seed. Around AD 221, the paisley design first appeared in Persia and the Sassanian Empire. The design depicts the cypress tree, a Zoroastrian symbol of life and immortality. paisley is also found in Scythian, and Achaemenian arts. In Iran and in Turkey it is called *Gul*, bunch of flowers and leaves are made in an organized order. In Western Asia, it is considered a symbol of the 'Tree of Life' and fertility. According to Kashmiri historians and academics, Sultan Zein-Al-Aabedin (1468 AD) introduced ornate designs from Iran to India. The paisley design gained popularity in Asia and India, especially during the Mughal Empire (1526–1764). Kairi motif is created by combining a variety of small Kairi patterns. It has been used mostly in the form of *Koniya* (Corner) in Chikankari mostly filled with network, and sometimes 'Tepchi' (a type of Chikankari stitch). Various types of flowers, leaves, leaf-vines, etc. were used to fill the Kairi.

5.2.3 Paan (Betel leaf): Betel leaf is another significant Buta motif in Chikankari. In old pieces of garments like Choga, Angarkha, Waistcoat, Kurta-Kurti, etc., the design of embellished beetle leaf is clearly visible, mainly

in the middle part of the back, which is called 'Pushta' as well as in the corners of the garments, called 'Konia'. It mostly consists of budded twigs, small leaves, vessels and other types of small decorations. Various sorts of stitches with latticework are commonly used in Chikankari garments. This type of decoration; flowers, leaves, creepers and vines are mostly seen carved in the old architecture of Lucknow as well as other places. For example, the 'Imam baras' of Lucknow built between the 18th and 20th centuries and the 'Taj mahal' of Agra. Paula Manfredi gives a detail description of men's and women's clothing of that time.

Betel leaves have immense importance in both Hindu and Muslim religions. In the Mughal court, it was considered a matter of honour to present betel leaves with various spices. Apart from this, the betel leaf was also considered a symbol of credibility and loyalty to the emperor. The number of leaves also reflected the level of respect shown. Even beyond court life, offering paan is seen as a social ritual in Lucknow culture. Betel leaves were kept with great care in Betel boxes or 'Paan-dan'. Very beautiful and carved betel boxes of that time are available in even today. These are called pandan. (*Group Fig 6*)

5.3 Fish motifs: Most traditional cultures and folklore have the fish as a universal emblem of fertility and purity. Fish, famed for their beauty and free-flowing bodies, are regarded as a representation of life energy, a power of regeneration and rebirth, and a charm against the evil eye. The city of Lucknow picked the twin fish as its emblem. This fish symbol is seen all throughout, including on the walls of gateways, halls, and exquisitely crafted objects. In the architecture of Lucknow, this motif (two fishes in pair) is shown, facing each other in circular symmetry. Even today, these patterns can be seen engraved in the buildings of the last Nawabi period



Group figure 6: Paisley and Paan leaf design
Source: Paola Manfredi

in Kaiserbagh, Lucknow. These decorations on the arched doors of palaces and other places were made of stucco. During the Nawabi period, their general prevalence can be seen in various types of handicrafts.

The ornamentation of fish has great importance in various religions, like Buddhism, where fish means constant awakening. In Hinduism, Matsya is related to incarnation, and in Muslim religion, the importance of fish is related to wealth, fertility, and immortality. According to Iranian mythology, the fish is a symbol of the balance of the world. Fish markings are visible in some miniature paintings from the period of Jahangir. During the reign of Khusro II (591-628 AD), this pattern was also seen in the decoration of the Iranian army. It was called 'Mahi-e-Maratib', or Fish of Dignity. It was later adopted by rulers in South Asia, and the Mughals also included it in their military adornments, especially to honour the soldiers. In 1720 AD, Shahadat Khan was awarded this honour by Mohammad Shah.

Apart from this, many legends are prevalent in Lucknow that give knowledge about the adoption of this model by the



Group figure 7: Fish motifs in Chikankari

Source: Paola Manfredi

Nawabs. The Nawabs' attraction towards fish ornamentation is also proved by ancient miniature paintings. In a water color painting, the shape of the boats is shown to be like that of a fish. Photographer 'Felice Bietou' documented it in 1858, and it was titled 'Boat is Lying on the Banks of the Gomti River'. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1847) designed his royal coat of arms in the form of two mermaids with facing wings holding the royal scepter. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's attraction towards fish ornamentation was also reflected in Chikankari and presented in Jamdani. These relief figures made of stucco are still present on the buildings in Kaiserbagh, Lucknow. The markings of these mermaids in different shapes, types, and forms can be clearly seen in Lucknow. Fish motif is also used to fill Kairi and heart-shaped paan. (*Group Fig 7*)

6.Conclusion: Based on this research, it is feasible to conclude that emperors' artisans worked on the imperial building. Because beauty, elegance, and greatness are the primary criteria for a thing. These unbroken traditions were passed down to the craftspeople and have now become their primary guiding principles. Each theme has

a historical context. Weavers and artisans have inherited a precious art, but with the passage of time and technological innovation, it is now possible to manufacture it on a larger scale. They have kept the art form alive and preserved it as an ancestral asset in today's contemporary environment. The adventure may have resulted in their overall evolution, but it is up to us to ensure their survival when the world changes. They introduced the idea in an expressive way through the monument architecture. Fashion designers now draw influence from historical structures. Motifs, silhouettes, and, on rare occasions, colours and decorations serve as inspiration. Overall, they add to the essence of architectural culture and ethnicity.

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