

Traditional handicrafts of Punjab developed from plant and agro-waste materials

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■ **ABSTRACT :** Punjab has a rich tradition of arts and crafts. The traditional handicrafts of different types made from plant waste materials available in their vicinity were used in every household during the pre-independence period. *Doaba* and *Majha* were faster to adapt to the modern life style, while Malwa region with low literacy level continued with the traditional ways of life as well as craft making. But over the last two decades practice of handicraft making had sharp decline even in Malwa region. Thus, to document the valuable basketry craft, 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. Older women were found to have made fifty or more traditional handicrafts from plant and agro-waste materials in their lifetime. All women used to carry out different activities of practicing craft in their leisure time such as spinning yarn on *Charkha*, weaving basketry products like *Bohey/Chhikkoo*, *Katnee(s)*, etc. and embroidering the *Phulkaris* or *baghs*. The largest percentage of respondents (28.89%) had made *Bohey/Chhikkoo* followed by 19.45 per cent respondents who had made *Chhabi(an)* from plant and waste materials. None of the respondents was now found to be making these handicrafts for domestic use.

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The Indian handicraft industry forms an integral part of the rich cultural heritage of the country, which in present times, provides opportunities for self employment in rural and sub-urban areas of Punjab while preserving the rich and unique cultural heritage of India at the same time. Many agricultural and pastoral families in India are now depending on their skills in weaving and traditional handicraft making as a secondary source of income.

During pre-independence period, the rural society of Punjab was almost at subsistence level. The simple and illiterate women of the state exhibited their excellence, taste and dexterity of fingers through various handicrafts (Bisla, 1984). Rural women made an intelligent use of plant and agro-waste materials that were easily available to them for making handicrafts to meet varied needs of transportation and storage of goods of daily use. Over the period of time, these traditional utility products had

attained high level of perfection. Some of the handicrafts were practiced by rural women folk only, while others were prepared either jointly or only by male persons of the households. Contemporarily young girls do not even know the process of making these traditional handicrafts (Arsh, 2013) from plant waste materials. Even the use of such traditional products is on decline. Attention of the educationalists, environmentalists, designers and merchandisers needs to be drawn for promoting of handicrafts made from natural plant waste materials using varied basketry techniques. Thus, the present study has been conducted to document different type of traditional handicrafts made from plant waste materials of Punjab.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

A sample of 180 respondents comprising of 60 rural women from each of the three selected districts of Malwa region namely, Ludhiana, Patiala and Bathinda, who had developed traditional handicrafts using plant and agro-waste materials in their lifetime were selected purposively. Data were collected using structured interview schedule and analyzed statistically.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Man has always been interested to develop the woven products from nearby available materials to ease the life since time immemorial (Anonymous, 2011). Various types of basketry products in different sizes were made by the rural folk of Punjab. These were largely used by families for different purposes and thus were designed using suitable types of materials and techniques. Albeit with the changing time, basketry finally became a work of art, and these handicrafts are now used as decorative showpieces in the homes by the proud possessors.

Punjab is famous for its *Phulkari* (Singh and Brar

2002) and *Baghs* (Hitkari, 1984) which have been extensively studied besides *Durries* (Kaur, 1999), *Khes* (Virk and Phadke, 1984), *Jutti*, *Nala* and *Paranda* (Kaur, 2013) still there is an important section of rural crafts developed from plant waste materials, which is little talked about and researched.

General information :

The largest percentage of the respondents (69.45%) belonged to the age group of 55-65 years followed by 14.45 per cent who were in their old age (65-75 years). The minimum percentage of respondents, *i.e.* 5.00 per cent, was 75-85 years old. The largest percentage of the respondents (67.22%) belonged to the jatt community. It was found that a large percentage of respondents (63.89%) were illiterate, while 17.78 per cent respondents reported that they were primary pass.

Types of handicrafts used :

These handicrafts were most popularly made from date palm leaves, *Sarkanda*, *Munj grass*, *Teeli* (kana), *bubber grass*, etc. The largest percentage of the respondents (28.89%) had prepared the *bohey/Chhikkoo* and *Dull* (large *bohiya*) for multiple domestic uses (Plate 1), while 20.00 per cent respondents had made the '*pitari(an)*' (useful containers). *Pitari(an)* or *sarposh(s)* are a simplest form of small basket with a lid, which were used for storing *Chapattis* (Table 1). The *Pitari(an)* were also made for storing useful household articles like cotton, buttons, needles, threads, etc. (Plate 4). Also, 19.45 per cent respondents had made the '*Chhabi(an)*', while 15.56 per cent had prepared '*Chhaj*' for winnowing (Plate 2 and 3). Though *Chhaj* is used for separating grains from unwanted materials but it has great cultural significance as well particularly, during '*Jago*' ceremony in *Punjabi* wedding occasions and festivals like *Vaisakhi*, *Lohri* and *Teej*. Besides, 15.00

Table 1 : Types of products developed from plant waste materials

Types of products	f	(n=180)* %
<i>Bohey/chhikkoo and dull</i> (large <i>bohiya</i>)	52	28.89
<i>Chhabi(an)</i>	35	19.45
<i>Chhaj</i>	28	15.56
<i>Changair</i>	21	11.67
<i>Katnee</i>	27	15.00
<i>Pitari(an)</i> or <i>sarposh(s)</i>	36	20.00

f= Frequency * Multiple response



Plate 1 : *Bohey/chhikko* and *dull* (large *bohiya*)



Plate 4 : *Pitari(an)* or *sarposh(s)*



Plate 2 : *Chhabi(an)* or *chhabi*



Plate 5 : *Katnee(s)* and *suhag pitari(an)*

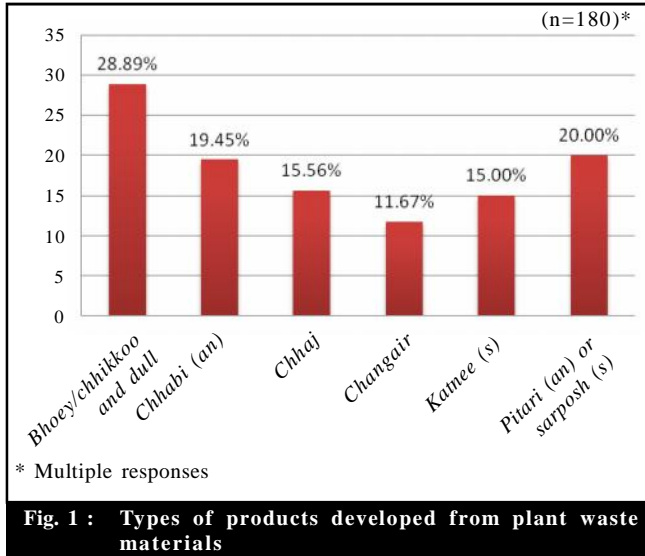


Plate 3 : *Chhaj*



Plate 6 : *Changair*

Plate (1-6) : Type of traditional handicrafts of Punjab made from plant waste materials



per cent respondents had made 'Katnee(s)'. The least percentage of respondents *i.e.*, 11.67 per cent had made the 'changair', a flat plate like with slightly raised edges. *Katnee(s)* (Plate 5) were given to daughters with other items of trousseau while *changair* were made for serving bread, chapattis and fruits.

Number of products developed by the respondents in their lifetime :

The maximum percentage of the respondents (51.67%) had developed 25 to 50 traditional basketry products in their lifetime followed by 50 and above handicraft products by 34.44 per cent respondents (Table 2). Also, 13.89 per cent respondents had developed only 1-25 products using plant materials. It was observed that older respondents had developed significantly more number of such traditional handicrafts.

Size of traditional handicraft products made from plant waste materials :

The largest percentage of respondents had made

Table 2 : Number of products developed from plant waste materials (n=180)

Number of products	f	%
1-25	25	13.89
25-50	93	51.67
50 and above	62	34.44

F=Frequency

Bohey/chhikkoo and *Dull*–large *Bohiya* (100.00%), *Chhabhi (an)* (100.00%), *Chhaj* (57.14%), and *Pitari (an)* (66.67%) in medium size. The *Chhaj* (100.00%) and *Changair* (42.85%) *Chhabhi(an)* (60.00%) were made in large size by maximum percentage of respondents (Table 3). Out of 52 respondents who had made *Bohey/Chhikkoo* in their lifetime, 67.31 per cent had made small sized *Bohey/Chhikkoo*, while large sized *Bohey/Chhikkoo* were made by only 13.47 per cent respondents. *Dull* (large sized *Bohiya*) were available for use in each household in plenty of numbers during pre-partition days. These were popularly used in villages all over Punjab even during 1960s. All of them had also made medium sized *Bohey/Chhikkoo*. *Katnee(s)* were made only in two sizes. The majority of the respondents, *i.e.* 81.48 per cent had made large sized *Katnee(s)* followed by 18.51 per cent respondents who had made these in small size.

Present status of traditional craft of plant waste materials :

The practice of making these products has not only come to a halt, but even the nomenclature of these handicrafts is not known to the majority of younger generations. As these traditional handicrafts lost their cultural sheen, and importance in trousseau declined during the post partition days the tradition of making these crafts started vanishing. None of the respondents were found to be making the traditional handicrafts at the time of the survey. If suitable steps are not taken now, it would be a matter of few decades when no one in rural Punjab will be able to demonstrate the techniques of making

Table 3 : Size of handicraft products made by respondents

Type of products	(n=180)*					
	Bohey/chhikkoo and (dull- large bohiya) n=52*	Chhabhi(an) n=35*	Chhaj n=28*	Changair n=21*	Katnee n=27*	Pitari(an) n=36*
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
Small size	35 (67.31)	23 (65.71)	3 (10.71)	07 (33.34)	5 (18.51)	12 (33.33)
Medium size	52 (100.00)	35 (100.00)	16 (57.14)	05 (23.80)	22 (81.48)	24 (66.67)
Large size	7 (13.47)	21 (60.00)	28 (100.00)	09 (42.85)	-	5 (13.88)

f= Frequency * Multiple response

handicrafts to the younger generations.

Conclusion :

The women possessing the skill of making various traditional handicrafts from plant materials are no longer practicing this craft. It is imperative to make efforts for revival of these beautiful eco-friendly handicrafts from plant and agro-waste materials. The developed products have an advantage of being eco-friendly and biodegradable.

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