

## ***Chamba Rumal –the traditional Chamba handkerchief***

**The old saying small is beautiful, aptly expresses the Chamba Rumal.**



This fine and intricate embroidery flourished in the princely hill states of Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, Mandi, Bilaspur and Basholi. Embroidery is in the roots of Himachal but Chamba acquired the considerable fame for its fine embroidery work that their names become the synonym with rumal embroidery. The rumals are usually square or rectangular pieces of cloth, beautifully embroidered with floral and figurative motifs, used to cover gifts and offerings. Traditionally the rumals were exchanged between the families of the bride and groom. These rumals were embroidered by upper-class women.

The artistic style of the Pahari(from the hills)miniature paintings which was influenced by Mughal Miniatures was reflected in the rumals which flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries. The embroidery on the rumal is the image of a miniature painting on fabric.

The creations came to be termed as rumals or scarves, as they were mainly produced in a square format. The rumals reflected the artistic expression and inner soul of the women of the region. There are Pahari miniature paintings in existence, which show gifts covered with Chamba rumals being exchanged between the families of the bride and groom.

**The fabric** used for the embroidery was normally hand-spun or hand-woven unbleached mul-mul or fine khaddar produced in Punjab. Nowadays a more

sophisticated variety of fabric is used is the machine made fine cloth. The cloth is generally unbleached fabric and the design is drawn in outline with fine charcoal. Traces of these drawings are often left on unfinished and unembroidered portion of a rumal. The rumal varied in size from one and a half to four feet in size. The embroidery itself was done in a double satin-stitch called **Do-Rukha** (reversible). Its beauty lies in the fact that the stitch becomes reversible and embroidery viewed from both sides is similar and equally effective. The rumal also owes a debt to Phulkari embroidery of Punjab. In both cases untwisted silk yarn was used.

The most **common themes** of the embroideries have been based mainly on religious themes comprising **Hindu deities, musical instruments, floral motifs, birds, animals and architecture inspired from Kangra paintings. Worship of Ganesh, Dice play with two or three figures at the corners, Marriage scenes, hunting scenes, Raas Mandala, , Krishna Lila, The divine Flute player worshipped by gopis**, form the most favourite subject matter of these rumals.





The colours of thread used in the Chamba rumal varied and no rumal was ever embroidered in a single colour. In the folk style, the **colours used tended to be bright and bold and included pink, lemon yellow, purple and green**. The more sophisticated colour palette included **ochre, dark green, blue and paler shades**. Chamba rumals were being made till the early part of this century but after the decline of the feudal system, this art form began to fade away.

Later, the Himachal Pradesh Government set up a centre for promoting and training in the local crafts of the region. But owing to official disinterest and non imaginative approach, the art of Chamba rumal was being looked upon as mere embroidery. Synthetic and coloured cloth and wrong embroidery threads in gaudy colours were used to make pillow covers, napkins and other such utility items. The art that was once distinguished by grace and naive charm had been reduced to minima. Besides the government, a few NGOs have also come forward to save this traditional art of Chamba.

In November 2008 Himachal Government had taken an initiative to conferred



**Chamba Rumal, with legal protection under the Geographical Indications (GIs) of Goods Act of 1999, boosting its commercial prospects manifold.**

Recently in the press note issued by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations Himachal Pradesh it was mentioned that the Government will take concrete steps to strengthen the **'Guru-Shishya'** (Teacher-Pupil) Scheme to train budding artists in traditional folk arts of the state.