

Crafting Resilience: Sustainability Initiatives for Chikankari Artisans in Uttar Pradesh

Hershka Verma^{1*}, Dr. Rekha Bhatnagar²

¹ Research Scholar, Shri Krishna University, Chhatarpur, M.P.India

hershika.verma@gmail.com

² Professor, Shri Krishna University, Chhatarpur, M.P.India

Abstract - India is a significant exporter of several handicrafts to the global market. The Indian Chikankari industry holds significant prominence in the global handicraft sector. This is one of India's oldest cultures and traditions, which showcases many traditional arts from different regions of the nation. Chikankari items have a vast global market due to their increasing possibilities. The Indian Chikankari sector is characterized by its great reliance on manual labor and its decentralized nature, with production units located in both rural and urban locations across the country. The sector employs approximately six million craftspeople, many of them are women and individuals from marginalized communities. The Chikankari Sector has a substantial and crucial impact on the economy of the country. The craft industry in rural and semi-urban regions offers job opportunities to a significant number of artisans and contributes significantly to the country's foreign exchange earnings, all while safeguarding its cultural legacy. Chikankari possess immense potential since they are crucial for supporting the current population of craftsmen located throughout the whole country. However, there are several challenges linked to the extensive growth of the Chikankari industry. The study emphasized the difficulty and many challenges linked to the Chikankari sector in India.

Keywords: Sustainability, Chikankari, Rural Artisans, Uttar Pradesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chikankari refers to the intricate art of manual stitching that has historically been practiced in Lucknow and its surrounding regions (Lucknow City Magazine, 1988). The defining characteristic that holds the most influence and is presented in a clear and direct manner is the genesis of the term, which can be traced back to Lucknow. Since the early 1900s, scholars have been endeavoring to provide clear definitions and classifications for chikan. The sort of needlework being produced and the manufacturing circumstances have both experienced significant changes due to their efforts (Agarwal, 2016). Several authors have examined the phrase in order to uncover clues concerning the etymology of the word "chikan." Nevertheless, there is minimal certainty and a clear lack of consensus over the definition of the term "chikan." The phrase "*chikan*" is believed to originate from the Bengali language, where it

translates to "very nice thing". Some have translated it as "fine" (Lucknow City Magazine, 1988), while others have described it as a Persian term meaning "to emphasize" (Lucknow City Magazine, 1988).

1.1 The Historical and Traditional Background of Chikankari

Lucknow serves as the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, a state in India renowned for its significant poverty rates and densely populated areas. The population of the region was documented as 4.58 million in the 2011 Census, with a population growth rate of 25.79% compared to the previous census decade. According to the 1991 Census statistics, 40% of the population of Lucknow lived in slums or conditions similar to slums. Lucknow, similar to India, has a primarily Hindu population, but it also has a significant Muslim presence, comprising around 23% (ibid.) of the city's residents. The distribution of occupations among the underprivileged people in metropolitan areas reflects this phenomena. The economy is primarily characterized by the informal sector, which offers limited opportunities for income generation in the fields of transportation, sales, and daily wage labor. Moreover, a significant segment of the population relies on traditional needlework skills as their source of income (Agrahari and Brar 2016).

The work mostly employs muslin and cotton textiles, which are very suitable for the hot and humid summers prevalent in northern India. The intricate and soft-colored needlework perfectly captures the sentimentality and refinement of Lucknow. Lucknow maintains an unrivaled supremacy in the creation of the finest chikan in India. The artists of Lucknow are very dedicated to preserving the genuineness and complexity of this technique, to the degree that there was a perceived threat to the embroidery at one juncture (Ahmad and Anees 2016).

1.2 The meaning of Chikan and Chikankari Work

The term "chikankari" is derived from the Persian word "chakeen," which signifies a sophisticated design on fabric. Chikankari is a form of needlework that involves intricate stitching. Previously, the procedure was performed on muslin clothing with white thread. Conversely, it has been accomplished on a diverse range of materials, such as cotton, linen, nylon, georgette, chiffon, and synthetic fabrics. Embroidery is not limited to clothes, but is also commonly applied to various other objects such as curtains, bed sheets, table cloths, pillow covers, and cushion covers. Chikankari work refers to the intricate embroidery technique originating from Lucknow, India. Chikankari consists of a total of sixty primary stitches and

thirty-six secondary circular stitches, each of which is assigned a number. Tepchi, Bakhiya, Hool, Zanzeera, Rahet, Jali, Pechani, Bijali, Ghaspatti, Makra, Kuri, Hathkadi, Banjkali, Sazi, Karan, Madrazi, Bulbul-Chasm, Tajmahal, Kangan, Razan, Mahakari, and more names are encompassed within it. The task involved the use of white muslin or cotton fabric, along with white threads. Furthermore, cotton and silk threads were utilized for the delicate pastel cloth. The utilization of colored threads was also a possibility, but not on a very large scale (Akhtar et al., 2015).

Chikankari embroidery is a refined kind of intricate needlework that honors the elegance and sophistication of Lucknow and the Mughal culture. The majority of the motifs employed in Chikankari are derived from Mughal art. India is widely admired globally for its outstanding handicrafts, ethnic fabrics, historical sites, and vibrant culture. Chikankari needlework is widely regarded as the predominant expression of this art form in the state of Uttar Pradesh, namely in the city of Lucknow. Currently, a wide range of high-quality materials, including Georgette, chiffon, cotton, and others, are also being used. The Chikankari embroidery method, once used mainly to decorate clothing, has recently been extended to include a range of home design items such as cushion covers, pillow slips, table linen, and related things (Alam, 2015).

1.3 Chikan Embroidery in Lucknow: Key Milestones and Performances

The Chikan Embroidery Cluster in Lucknow has achieved significant milestones and showcased outstanding performances. The women of the royal Mughal families were entrusted with the task of executing intricate embroidery, which remained in use until 1860. Only individuals belonging to the royal family made use of the things. From 1860 until 1947, the sole commercially available product was topi palla. The major buyers were Muslim customers, and the main markets were Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) and specific locations in Pakistan, Hyderabad, and Lucknow. During this period, there was a significant increase in business activity, and only a small number of producers were capable of meeting the demands of the whole market (Alexandri et al., 2019).

Due to the partition, Indians were unable to access the principal markets for topi palla and chikan embroidery since they were deemed foreign markets. Consequently, the makers were obliged to provide novel products, such as kurtas and sarees designed for males. In addition to manufacturing luncheon sets, some producers also started selling ensembles for females, which might be with or without dupattas. The method of chikankari embroidery gained

recognition at both national and international levels when it was featured in the samples and catalogues of renowned fashion designers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bao et al., (2007) found that the popular belief holds that when Chikan embroidery was done previously, there was no printing done on the fabric. This is a common misconception. Master embroiders used their imaginations and a great deal of precision to create designs. In contrast, there are now specialized printers available to assist embroiderers. To transfer the designs onto the fabric using the carved wooden blocks is the responsibility of the printers. Several blocks of varying sizes and shapes, as well as a variety of stitches, are contained within a printer. Both guar gum and neel are used in the preparation of the dye by these printers. For fabrics with lighter colors, blue dyes are used, whereas white dyes are used for materials with darker colors.

Kessani (2012) defines *Chikankari* as a form of white embroidery. The primarily floral motif is embroidered onto the fabric using untwisted white cotton or silk (and now Rayon). The Chikan work of Lucknow is a highly exquisite and sophisticated form of needlework, also crafted in Calcutta, Dacca, Varanasi, Bhopal, Allahabad, and Gaya. When created with white thread on cotton, linen, or silk, this design is visually pleasing and has a sophisticated simplicity and pure elegance, although lacking color. The absence of vibrant flamboyance is replaced with the understated elegance of a refined aesthetic, akin to the serene beauty of moonlight shining through a delicate veil.

Anbumani (2013) stated that there is a clear correlation that Mahajans and critics (traders or subcontractors) observe between the increase in mostly female labor and the prevalence of low-quality work, which is based on incorrect beliefs about the capabilities of women. Gender biases can influence how abilities are seen, as seen in the case of Chikan, which is often associated with women's work and consequently not given the same level of respect as traditionally male occupations (Wilkinson-Weber, 1999). Irrespective of the causes for the decline, the Mahajans, who are dealers or subcontractors, get financial advantages by manufacturing inexpensive and rough Chikan fabric. The competition among Mahajans has escalated, and there has been a more assertive pursuit of extracting profit throughout the embroidery process. An increasing number of women with limited skills are being employed to produce bakhiya work at significantly low remuneration.

Patel and Chavda (2013) that rural entrepreneurs in India face a number of hurdles and concerns. The fundamental concepts of entrepreneurship, which may be used to the development of rural areas, have been outlined by the writers. In addition, they have discussed the consequences that globalization has had on other aspects of society, including but not limited to: economic development, technical advancements, distribution, transformation, vulnerabilities, and policy. Family problems, social issues, technological hurdles, financial challenges, and technology challenges are some of the categories that have been used to list the difficulties that rural business owners encounter. In contrast to this, there appear to be a variety of chances available in the shape of a variety of schemes and programs that are designed to stimulate and support entrepreneurs.

Bajpai (2015) reported that the time itself may be a useful measure to evaluate the work. She contends that the perspective one selects to evaluate the job (whether paid labour, unpaid work, care work, non-market employment, or sexual division of labour) should come from the standpoint of the poorest women in society. Care labour is not considered a part of the economy, despite it is an inherent element of it irrespective of class, caste and cultural barrier. Women, especially from the poorest household, contribute a lot to economic progress yet are overlooked by the economy which are unidentified by the society and state and have removed women from the economy. The unjust vocabulary also obstructs the care work as it undermines the duality of formal and organised-unorganised employment. Informal labour and unorganised labour are formally conducted and governed in distinct organised ways. A number of them are exploitative and regressive to the workers. Unfortunately, women represent the primary labour force in many areas and are the cheapest labours.

Awasthi and Bisht (2017) conducted research on the marketing tactics employed by craftsmen in Uttar Pradesh for their handicrafts and the ramifications of these methods. In order to provide an explanation for the significance of handicraft, the writers have argued that the mythological, religious, social, historical, and artistic expressions that are found in crafts represent the strengths of Indian heritage. Furthermore, these crafts combine both practicality and aesthetic appeal at the same time. More often than not, the same piece of handicraft that is created in different places is different from one another in terms of style, color combination, skill, and inventiveness. This is something that the writers have brought to light as a distinctive characteristic of handicrafts. However, because to factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance, people are forced to rely on intermediaries. Due to this particular cause, people are not even close to being satisfied.

Arisanty et al., (2019) researched that the highest quality needlework produced in Lucknow is known as Chikankari. This type of embroidery features feather, butta, or floral designs in white or off-white, which match the color of the muslin cloth. Occasionally, sequins and scarab wings are included. Additionally, it is worth noting that needlework does not necessarily have to be created in color at all times. The aesthetic appeal of white stitching is demonstrated by Chikan work, a specialty of Lucknow. Chikankari showcases the rich cultural heritage of the region. It provides artistic structure and embodiment to the beliefs and goals that motivate the lives of individuals.

Rai (2012) reported that the art sector can be considered the second largest work field in India. The majority of the primary source of revenue comes from agricultural and postural transportation, both of which are dependent on the talents of the craftspeople. It is important to have fundamental skills such as weaving, basketry, and sticking since these abilities are meaningful to the economic and social freedoms. There are a number of well-known types of embroidery that may be found in India. Some examples include the Chikankari, the Bengal kantha, the Gujrat kutch and Kashmir kashidakari, and the Punjab fulkari. There are various sticks that are widely used. The largest cluster in India is located in Chikankari. Aside from the artists, there were thousands of people who participated in the chikankari process. The artisans of chicaning extended across a region that was around 125 kilometers long, which included the village of Lucknow as well as other districts in the surrounding area.

Dhar (2018) investigated that the influence that direct selling of textile handicrafts from Uttar Pradesh has on artisans. This research will be conducted after an intensive literature review in relevant areas. The Chikankari skill of Lucknow and the Silk Sarees and Brocade of Varanasi are the primary subjects of the research that is being conducted. For the sake of this study, direct marketing has encompassed not just online and e-commerce platforms, but also exhibits, fairs, and any other type of direct engagement between weavers and craftsmen and clients that takes place in the real world. It is important to highlight that, in contrast to traditional research studies, the research field was not predetermined only on the basis of the gap that was discovered via the evaluation of the relevant literature. However, it was the other way round, wherein after observing certain phenomenon on field, research idea was conceived and thereafter literature was visited to verify the phenomenon & understand the depth of literature available in concerned field.

Kumari (2021) reported that in the city of Lucknow, the history of chikan needlework may be traced back to the time of Megasthenes, who lived in the third century BC. Megasthenes recalls that Indians used muslins with floral designs. Chikankari hand work is a well-known art form in Lucknow, which is the capital of the state of Uttar Pradesh. That the technique, which dates back hundreds of years and originated in Persia, is being practiced now contributes to the elegance and delicacy of the person who wears it. Chikankari is a Persian term that literally translates to "wrought with needle work". This is where the pattern got its name. Before, the chikan handwork was done with white thread on white muslin cloth. The work received a considerable deal of sponsorship and flourished throughout the time of the Mughal Empire, particularly during the reign of Jahangir, because Jahangir's wife Nur Jahan was a significant patron of the artistic form. This was the period of time when the work achieved its pinnacle and became widespread.

Chambers (2015) reported that the Craftspeople or craftsmen are categorized under the extensive informal sector of the Indian economy, primarily operating from their homes. Marx argues that under some "exceptional circumstances," the strong rivalry between laborers seeking remote employment and capitalists aiming to minimize expenses, such as workplace and upkeep costs, leads to the profitability of "concentration of workers" or large-scale production. As demonstrated by the Indian case, particularly during the era of neoliberalism, outsourcing to smaller workshops and houses might be more advantageous for capitalists in some situations compared to consolidating output in a factory. Capitalists employ a well-recognized dual mode of production, wherein big factories are connected to smaller workshops that rely on the factory. "The employees' ability to resist decreases as they become more scattered"; as a result, higher levels of exploitation can be accomplished by reducing the price of labor or raising the intensity of work in the home-based sector.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the challenges faced by Chikankari artisans in Lucknow.
- To examine the role of governmental policies, NGOs, and private sector collaborations in promoting the sustainability and empowerment of Chikankari artisans.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Selection and Introduction of the Research Study Area

The research was conducted in the Lucknow district of Uttar Pradesh. This research focuses on rural artisans who are involved in the Chikankari business. The researcher has deliberately chosen the Lucknow district as the research region for the following reasons:

- 1) Numerous artisans are suffering from neglect and lack of recognition. Therefore, the researcher aims to present significant information on these artists, which may assist policy makers in revitalizing, conserving, and advancing rural art and chikankari.
- 2) Being familiar with the culture, local dialect, and accessible infrastructure facilities will enable the researcher to establish a strong connection with the respondents, resulting in obtaining genuine replies.

4.2 Profile of the Research Study Area

The Lucknow State has many regions, with the Basti District being a crucial constituent. Lucknow, located in Uttar Pradesh, covers 5.31 percent of the whole land area of the state. The district has the authority to manage a total land area of 10,423 square kilometers. The population density of the Lucknow district in 2011 was 168 individuals per square kilometer, which ranked it as the fourth least densely populated area in the state. According to the results of the census that was conducted in 2011, the population of Lucknow was 4.58 million. This represents a growth rate of 25.79% in population over the previous census decade. It is believed that there are over 250,000 artists connected to the Chikan embroidery cluster region. It also provides a means of subsistence for around one million people who are not craftsmen.

4.3 Sampling Technique

The Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow district mostly includes techniques such as Bakhiya, Hool, Zanzeera, Rahet, Banarsi, Khatau, Phanda, Murri, and Jali. In the villages of the Lucknow district, a diverse range of chikankari activities occur, leading to the early recognition of eight distinct types of handicrafts. Subsequently, craftsmen were chosen from the villages in a random manner. In an ideal scenario, it would have been impractical to select a precise number of artisans from every community. This is due to the unique characteristics and specialized expertise found in each region, encompassing its people, culture, and handicrafts. Therefore, researchers considered the availability of craftspeople and their

requirements while selecting and interviewing respondents. During the field visit, it became evident that the actual situation surrounding the practice of Chikankari differed significantly from the secondary data available. There were several reasons for the absence of numerous artisans: unavailability, changes in their profession, or relocation to other places.

4.4 Data collection

Primary data is collected directly by the researcher for a specific purpose. Secondary data refers to information that has been previously obtained by another individual or entity for a distinct objective. Data essential for this research inquiry was collected from many sources. Both primary and secondary data sources were found to be advantageous. The research employed secondary sources, including books, articles published in books and journals, various websites, the 2011 census data, reports and publications from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other pertinent sources. The primary data were gathered with the use of the methodologies and instruments that are listed below:

a) Interview/Questionnaire

An interview schedule or questionnaire is a meticulously arranged series of questions that are designed to address the specific topic of investigation. This list is utilized for the purpose of gathering data from the participants in the field. The interview schedule was carefully designed with the study's objectives in mind throughout the whole procedure. The survey had a diverse range of questions, including both open-ended and closed-ended questions, along with a Likert scale consisting of five points. The interview schedule was designed and finalized by consultation with the mentor and experts in this domain. Before its final deployment, it underwent a number of preliminary testing. A decision was made to streamline and optimize the timetable for craftsmen, with the aim of enhancing its comprehensibility for artisans working in remote locations.

b) Bibliographic Studies

These included other magazine and journal articles, government agency reports and data from the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) Office, and study reports from non-governmental organizations and individual researchers on Lucknow and Chikan workers' conditions, training, and empowerment.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table below shows respondents' gender, marital status, and number of children. It covers respondents' backgrounds broadly.

Table 1: Gender, Marital Status and No. of Children

Gender	No.	Percentage
Male	255	55%
Female	245	45%
Participation in handicrafts		
Male	238	58%
Female	315	78%
Children	48	10%
Marital Status		
Married	350	78%
Unmarried	150	21%
Total	500	

In actuality, there are 313 families with female artisans, or 78.25% of the total, and 238 households with male artists, or 59.5%). It is evident that there is a 1:1.32 ratio between male and female involvement. It is also noteworthy that, of the 400 houses, 87 (21.8%) of the families had only male artisans, while 162 (40.5%) of the families contained only female artists. However, it was discovered that both male and female artists were employed in craft production in 151 families (37.8%). But depending on the kind and category of handicraft activity, men and women play different roles. In addition, children participate in handicraft activities in 44 homes, or 11% of all families. Children are typically observed assisting with the primary task or performing some kind of supporting or supplemental job.

Table 2: Age and Education Level of Respondents

Age	No.	Percentage
20 and less	45	11%
21-30	100	22%
31-40	112	28%
41-50	76	19%
51-60	47	11%
Above 60	20	5%
Education Level		
Illiterate	50	10%
Pre-primary level	100	25%
Secondary level	50	10%
Higher secondary level	200	30%
Graduation level	100	25%
Total	500	100%

Table 3: Types of Artisans involved in the work

Sr. No.	Particulars	No.
1.	New business owners	100
2.	Artisan Working in a Family Business	150
3.	Handicraft Unit Artisan	100
4.	Artisan Working from Home and Performing Job-Related Duties	150

➤ **Challenges**

Most artisans note that demand appears to vary, thus work is neither regular nor continuous. Disruptions in work lead to fluctuations in revenue, which must be considered when assessing the long-term viability of rural handicraft artists and their crafts. Bureaucracy, banks, and government officials are viewed with distrust. Unfavorable attitudes prevail. People distrust such programs because they think the authority executing them are just concerned with paperwork and not with doing business honestly.

6. CONCLUSION

The progression towards the advancement and sustainability of Chikankari artisans in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, encompasses a harmonious fusion of community engagement, inventive approaches, and traditional values. Considerable progress has been achieved in safeguarding the future of these artisans and their trade by means of diverse endeavors supporting skill enhancement, equitable market access, and environmental awareness. The cooperation and joint ventures of governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, and socially responsible enterprises have been instrumental in promoting cultural preservation and economic stability in the Chikankari community. Nonetheless, the effort remains extensive. Sustained allocation of resources towards education, infrastructure, and market entry, in conjunction with a steadfast dedication to environmental stewardship, will be imperative for guaranteeing the enduring viability and affluence of Chikankari artisans, not solely in Lucknow, but extending their efforts beyond Uttar Pradesh and beyond. This expedition stands as evidence of the efficacy of collaborative efforts in preserving conventional artistry and establishing a path towards a future characterized by fairness and ecological awareness.

References

1. Agarwal, S. (2020). Finding the Market Feasibility for Women's Ethnic Wear Range in Multi Brand Outlets. NIFT.
2. Agrahari, R., & Brar, K. K. (2016). Role of Chikankari NGOs to ameliorate the artisans: an exploratory study in Lucknow. *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 10(1-3), 14-20.
3. Ahmad, Y., & Anees, M. (2016). Issues of the Lucknow Chikan Handicraft Industry. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Social Science*, 2(1), 1-9.
4. Akhtar, F., & Khan, A. A. Art Womens (Association of Rural Trained Womens): Organising the Unorganised.
5. Alam, A. (2015). Emergence of Muslim middle class in post-independence India and its political orientations. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 35(1), 123-140.
6. Alexandri, M. B., Zultaqawa, Z., & Aulia, M. D. (2019). Creative industries: Strategy and challenges in the Craft Sub-sector. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 8, 255-263.

7. Anbumani, K. (2013). Role of SHGs towards Women Empowerment in Lucknow. *Department Of Social Work Assam University, Silchar-788011 Assam, India Phone: + 91 3842 270821 www. aus. Ac. in, 4(2), 43-50.*
8. Anh Thu, L., Fang, S., & Kessani, S. S. (2019). Factors influencing Vietnam's handicraft export with the gravity model. *Journal of Economics and Development, 21(2), 156-171.*
9. Arisanty, D., Putro, H. P. N., Normelani, E., & Anis, M. Z. A. (2019). The role of local government for local product processing: the implication for tourism sustainability in Lok Baintan Floating Market. *Journal of Indonesian Tourism and Development Studies, 7(1), 7-12.*
10. Awasthi, S., & Bisht, P. S. (2017). Socio-economic condition of Chikan workers of Kakori block in Lucknow. *International Journal of Recent Science Research, 8(9), 19841-19844.*
11. Bajpai, S. (2015). *Brocade and Chowkpurana: Craft and Art of Uttar Pradesh-Prospects for Their Sustainability* (Doctoral dissertation, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (India)).
12. Bao, S., Howard, N., Spielholz, P., & Silverstein, B. (2007). Two posture analysis approaches and their application in a modified rapid upper limb assessment evaluation. *Ergonomics, 50(12), 2118-2136.*
13. Chambers, T. (2015). *'Carving out Niches': Informality, Work and Migration in a Muslim Craft Community of North India* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex).
14. Dhar, B. (2018). Artisans and Technical Education in Lucknow, United Provinces: c. 1880-1940. *Review of Development and Change, 23(2), 93-117.*
15. Ghose, S. M. (2017). Export challenges to MSMEs: A case study of Indian handicraft industry. *International Journal of applied business and economic research, 15(6), 339-349.*
16. Harris, J. (2014). Meeting the challenges of the handicraft industry in Africa: Evidence from Nairobi. *Development in practice, 24(1), 105-117.*
17. Kruja, A. D., & Berberi, E. (2020). Tourism and handicraft industry: Opportunities and challenges of operating in the Albanian market. *Cases on global leadership in the contemporary economy, 119-136.*

18. Kumari, P. (2021). *Innovation in design of traditional Mashru textile for product diversification* (Doctoral dissertation, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (India)).
19. Majeed, I. (2018). Indian Handicraft Industry and Globalization: An Analyses of Issues and Challenges. *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 25(1), 129-135.
20. Rai, S. K. (2012). Weaving hierarchies: Production networks of the handloom industry in colonial eastern Uttar Pradesh. *Studies in History*, 28(2), 203-230.