THE CHIKAN HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY OF LUCKNOW

Yusairah Ahmad¹ and Dr. Mohammad Anees²

¹ Research scholar, Department of Business Administration, University of Lucknow
E-mail: yusairahahmad@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, University of Lucknow
E-mail: drmohdanees@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Chikankari is a wonderful piece of handwork done majorly in Lucknow and near by areas. Chikan products are exported to many countries. The growth of international markets for handmade products and an increased interest for global goods have opened up a new arena of opportunities for the entrepreneurs and artisans. The industry being an unorganized sector is facing a lot of problems. This research study uses secondary data to find out the problems of the chikan handicraft industry and also to devise strategies for the industry and its exporters. The mutual association of the government and the chikan exporters can work upon the problems in order to boost and promote the traditional work and work upon the problems. The number of skilled artisans is declining significantly in the industry, which may be seen as a big threat to the century old heritage and cause of concern for the future.

KEYWORDS: Chikankari, chikan, export, artisans, handwork, embroidery.

INTRODUCTION

The extremely fine, sophisticated, delicate beautiful floral work of white on white known as chikankari is a distinctive integral part of Lucknow culture. Bronze needles dating 1500-2300 and figurine wearing embroidered drapery has been mentioned and seen in the
ancient Buddhist stupa culture. The Babur Nama mentions of very fine muslin with white embroidery. Historian Abul Fazal documents of fine embroidered clothes.

During Akbar’s reign all craftsmen cutting masters, tailors, embroiderers and gold-silver smith sat under one roof. Through this cross-cultural exchange Indian craft was influenced by Middle East, European and Chinese counterparts. Dhaka was an important center for chikan craft. It is said that Jahangir brought this craft to Lucknow and it was adopted by the later nawabs of Awadh. And became a part of the lucknowi culture (SSA Jafri, 2011).

Chikankari derived its name from Persian, which means ‘wrought with needle work’ (Angeera Singh Bhardwaj, 2014). The work is traditionally done on a fine transparent cloth using a needle and a round wooden frame is used to hold the cloth tight.

The most satisfactory contemporary definition of chikan might be “any cotton or other embroidered article that comes from Lucknow” says weber 1997.

The art is found primarily in and around the city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Since the art is confined to a definable area and is world-renowned, GI protection would be highly appropriate (shivani singhal, 2008). Lucknow chikan work was accorded the geographical indication tag in 2008. The GI registration was expected to bring distinct identity for the crafts, however ironically it did not happen so (pranil verma). The reason could have been many ranging from required innovation in design, fabric, outfit of the apparel, skill development, health and education, awareness of the artisans to market development and penetration. GI protection was highly appropriate, especially since there had been instances of products being sold as ‘Chinese made Lucknawi Chikan’ (shivani singhal, 2008).

The sector is an unorganized one that exists because of the traditional skill and knowledge of the artisans passed on through generations. Protects the cultural heritage of the region-providing livelihood to around five lakh people (ASSOCHAM, Jan 2016).

UNESCO defines handicrafts as “Artisanal products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the most substantial component of the finished product remains the direct manual contribution of the artisan”. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity.
and using raw material from substantial resources. The special nature of artisanal products is derived from their special characteristics, which can be stated as: utilitarian, aesthetic, decorative, functional, traditional artistic, creative, culturally attached, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.

The traditional chikan craft falls under the category of handicraft, it is done by hand with the use of mechanical tools as needle and a round wooden frame. Its an activity based on skill in which the product is made in a traditional way with the hands instead of being produced by machines in a factory (Cambridge English dictionary). But the cause for concern is the presence of similar looking machine-made Chinese chikan. It is produced faster as done by machine in comparison to handcrafted work. Enabling timely delivery, which is otherwise an issue (ASSOCHAM, Jan 2016). The chances of a particular piece being rejected are minimized as the product is standardized. Mass production is easily done. The domestic market for the handicraft sector within the country is affected by the import of cheap machine-made versions of products from other countries. (Jena, 2010 as cited in shreya jhadav, 2013). Whereas over the past years with increasing demand for chikan all over the world the demand for handmade chikan work from India has increased in China (Sangram Bhushan And Towseef Mohi Ud Din, 2014).

A study conducted by Ernst & Young (2012) compares Indian and Chinese handicrafts and says

- Indian products are completely handmade while the Chinese products are made of machinery, which facilitates mass production and standardization of products in China.
- Despite being labor intensive, the Indian handicrafts industry faces a shortage of skilled labor
- The artisans in India are unaware of the new technology and modern industry trends
- The lack of proper infrastructure in India affects production & marketing in this area
- A lack of awareness of complex business processes and business incentives / subsidies stops the growth of the industry.
Due to lack of access to credit facilities arise other issues such as procurement of raw material and access to large markets, leaving the artisans to fend for themselves in the local markets.

Both the wholesalers and retailers are selling substitute and duplicate machine made embroidery under the tag of chikankari. The market is flooded with duplicate and similar looking cheap products that are liquefying the brand chikankari. Reducing the importance of the GI tag Lucknow Chikankari holds. They form the biggest challenge for the craft as they are automated, machine made, consume less time and cheaper in cost than chikankari which is inherently a hand embroidery. The mass segment of customers being price sensitive and less sensitive towards the handicraft finds value for money in the modern looking cheap duplicates.

The demand still exceeds the production and this gap is working as an advantage for the duplicate and substitute products. Another gap that is being exploited by the substitute products is the lack of new designs and modern presentation of the product. The international market is a blue ocean market for the product and has a great potential (neha Wason and Sidhartha Wason, nd).

**PROCESS**

The process of making a craft is what gives it the uniqueness it stands for. The process of making the chikankari products is classified into two broad categories that are for stitched cloth and for unstitched cloth pieces. The process is then described as follows:

**For unstitched cloth or suit length**
Selection of cloth: cotton being used most of the time, chikankari is also done on voiles, organzas, mulls, muslins, and polyester. Some more include: chiffon, viscose, georgette, polyester georgette, cotton crepe and net. The specific type of cloth is purchased which is usually transparent and light and has the capacity of not tearing off when stretched in different directions. This makes it easy to be put tight and firm on the frame and the chikan work is done in needle and thread on the already printed design on the cloth. Once the embroidery is done the cloth is stitched fully. Then washed to remove the block printing marks and other marks. It is then starched and pressed to give it stiffness and a good look. Then this fully prepared garment is send to the market for sale.

Semi-stitching- The cloth is semi-stitched so that the cloth pieces do not dismantle. The places where embroidery is to be done is left unstitched, for the frame to be fit in and embroidery be done.

Block making- Done on Sal wood also known as sesame and design come from the mind, first sketched on paper. Then the wooden block is cut in required size, painted with emulsion, design carved in it with a hammer and chisel (Paine, 1989).

Block printing- The block is dipped in indigo and the design printed on the cloth. This marking make it easy for the embroidery to be done.

Thread selection- The thread for making the embroidery is selected. Mostly cotton thread is used. Threads can be pure white or died into various clours. Multi-coloured threads are also used.
Embroidery- is done using the specific stitches that have been printed using the block. Jali work is also done by hand by experts. The work is also done in combination with other types of work like mukaish, kamdani, badla, sequin, globule and mirror work.

Final stitching- Final stitching is done to complete the semi-stitching which was done to complete the product and give it the final look and shape.

Finishing- Finishing is a step in which the button holes are made and cutting of the extra thread from the back of the cloth is done to make it look neat.

Washing- The chikankari clothes are washed in the river. It takes around 4-5 days to complete the process. It becomes difficult in the monsoon as river swells and brings mud along. The alternate source available is government tanks, which charge for the water and also give limited access. Cloth is first soaked in a solution of washing powder, soap cakes, bleaching, caustic soda and acid. Additional washing is done on the riverbank in plastic containers or holes lined with plastic, beaten on washboards (made of large ridged stones). Liquid strained of boiling rice is used for starching. HCL (hydrochloric Acid) is used to remove tough stains and rust marks. Neel (Indigo) is used as per customer requirements. Starching is done by washer men just after washing the cloth as a part if the washing process only. Then it is put for drying. Which is another important step. As During the winter season the cloth takes more time to dry. Care is to be taken that no bird or insect sits on the cloth, which leaves a mark. The clothes are dried on the riverbank and protection from stray animals is a task.

Ironing- Women at home do the final step of ironing. With coal filled or electric irons. Coal filled irons perform the function of ironing better but are costly as the cost of coal is high and are heavy causing wrist issues after prolonged use over a period of time. In comparison to coal irons electric ones are easy to use, their use becoming more common.

Finished product- The final product is now ready to go to the shop owners or the market for sale.
PACKAGING

The Lucknow Chikan Industry does not follow any packaging (Ahmad and Anees). The embroidered cloth is sold either stitched or unstitched. Stitched ones include mostly ladies kurtis and kurta for men. The stitched pieces may slightly differ in size, as there is no standard size mark.

Packaging norms when followed by the industry should include

- Company tag
- Size tag
- Composition tag
- Iron and wash info
- Price tag
- Wrapping

The packaging should be wonderful, eye catchy, attractive, appealing to seek the attention of the buyers.

ROLE OF MIDDLEMEN – The movie Anjuman (1986) of Bollywood shows how the middlemen have taken advantage of the illiterate embroiderers and not given them the wages they had worked hard for. Instead they decreased the number of pieces they counted and paid less. They also paid the embroiderer lesser amount than what the one getting the embroidery done gave and kept it in their pockets. The middlemen were in good books of both the Mahajans (one who gets the embroidery done) and the embroiderers. Yet they were not faithful to any of them. They were only concerned with filling their own pockets.

Since the movie was released in 1986 and now as of today in 2019 there has been less improvement in the conditions of infrastructure, socio-economic status of the artisans, the hardships of the lives of women, the low wages and pressure and exploitation from the middlemen who get the work done in many forms as untimely payment of wages, undercutting, all this is done because of the illiteracy or low educational qualification of
the artisans. This in a way has been destroying the future generations of the skilled people involved in the embroidery, who have kept the art alive and are the main people behind giving the craft an international status. As once said by a prominent cleric in his speech that “Chikan is the cancer of the community”. Having been accorded the GI Tag has made no difference to the working and living conditions of the artisans involved directly or indirectly in the craft.

**STITCHES**

The stitches are classified into three main types- Flat, embossed, and raised stitches. Flat stitches are very delicate in nature and are seen close to the fabric. Embossed stitches provide a grainy appearance to the fabric. Raised stitches give an appearance of work raised from the cloth, highlighting the work. Jali work is not classified in these categories of stitches. As jail work is distinctly visible among these stitches. Jail work is created by string pressure; it gives a fragile net impact.

10 basic- bakhya, tepci, hool, zanjeera, rahet, banarsi, khatau, phanda, jail, darzdari

In chikan craft there are 35/36 types of stitches in all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The stitches of chikankari embroidery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>. Tepchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. Bakhiya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. rahet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. banarsi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. katau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. phanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. murri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. darzdaari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. pechani</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


ROLE OF DESIGNERS

A few renowned designers have worked to help the art of chikankari maintain its place in the changing world of fashion. Designers namely Sabyasachi, Ritu Kumar, Manish Malhotra, Sandeep Khosla and Abu Jani have worked in this field. They have helped this craft maintain its charm with frequent displays in fashion shows and use by Bollywood celebrities on different occasions.

AREAS WHERE THE WORK IS DONE

The handwork of chikankari is done in Lucknow and nearby areas. Different researchers have spotted different areas. I would list most of these areas.

Barabanki- Nindura, Fatehpur, Deva, Massouli, Banki, Harakh, Siddaur, Triveniganj.

Hardoi- Sandila, Behdar, Kachouna, Mailawan, Bharawan, Ahirouri.

Unnao-Ujarion, Bangermau, Nawabganj, Safipur, Bichia, Fatehpur Chaurasi, Auras, Hasanganj, Asoha.

Sitapur- Sidhauli, Mehmoodabad, Misriksh.

Sultanpur- Bazar Shukl, Jagdishpur, Gouriganj, Amethi, Jamo, Musafirkhana

Raibariely- Deeh, Bachrawan, Shivgarh, Maharajganj, Rahi.

Lakhimpur kheri- Lakhimpur Urban, Bankeganj, Kumbhi.

Lucknow- Khadra, Daliganj, Madeganj, City Station, Napier road, Kakori, Malihabad

Block making in Thakurganj, Musaibganj and Khadra (low quality work done).

Washermen homes- Husainabad, City Station, Golaganj

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of the study are:
To find the problems/constraints that surround the chikan handicraft industry
To suggest strategies for the future prospects of Chikan handicraft industry and its exporters.

The research done is exploratory in nature. It endeavors to explore the problems associated with the Chikan handicraft Industry and devise strategies for the industry and its exporters. The research study has been done based on primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected by interview and detailed discussion with the entrepreneurs and artisans associated with the industry doing various tasks.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHIKAN HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY

- Fluctuating demand because of the mindset that the product is seasonal.
- Taxation issues with the introduction of GST and tax being levied now, earlier the government implied no tax.
- No designer input as there is not much change in the design of products available now compared to those available a decade ago.
- Exploitation of artisans as No regular work to artisans, Very less wages to artisans, Bad workplace of the artisans
- Abundances of artisans of only 5-6 styles of stitches as that is what is required for making cheap products for the domestic market as consumers prefer it.
- Undercutting practice among manufacturers
- Artisan no fixed timings of completing the work, no professionalism in the behavior probably because of illiteracy.
- Government intervention in the working of the industry is less, the industry being unorganized, No support or platform for SMES in the cluster to work and support each other.
- Advertisement and branding of the industry
- There exists no proper linkage among the various players of the industry that is among manufacturers, between the artisans and manufacturers, between the sellers and the customers. Industry association that could help provide a linkage
does not exist in a proper working condition.

- No quality marking exists in the industry for the embroidery
- There is no testing lab for checking the color fastness of the cloth and thread due to the effect of sunlight, temperature, water and brushing.
- Washing related issues as space for washing and access to clean water.

**STRATEGIES**

1. There should be sector based and demand based schemes from the government. Exploring of small and midsized new domestic markets should be continuous process. Focus should also be on ways to increase exports.
2. Tax should not be implied, as earlier also there was no sales tax/ VAT implied. With the introduction of GST tax implied was 18%, which was later reduced to 12%. Government should not introduce such high tax rates suddenly even if necessary, could have started in the minimum tax slab i.e. 5%
3. Help of the services of professionals should be taken in designing of product. Global Style Products should be introduced; it will help in increasing the exports as well as sale in the domestic market.
4. With increase in demand (done via various means as exploring new markets, increasing product line, increasing exports) regular work can be guaranteed to the artisans. There should be some government norms for the wages of the artisans. Minimum wages is not applicable in the industry as payment is not on per day basis but per piece basis.
5. Revival of the fading arts and diminishing skills of artisans for the growth of the industry is required. Up skill and dev. Corporation has been giving training in collaboration with TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) but the effort is not substantial to bring about a visible change. More help of the government, NGO’s, manufacturers is required. CSR activities from manufacturers can be beneficial. They should arrange Training Centers and Programs for Artisans to enhance their skills. Establishment of permanent embroidery and training centres should be done to make it easy for the people to learn and teach the art and skill to the willing. Having specific embroidery in the course curriculum can help.
Introduction of some diploma or certificate courses can be highly beneficial.

6. Increasing the rate of literacy and then level of education and socio-economic status of the artisans could help increase professionalism and ways of working in the industry.

7. Government intervention will be required to great extent in transforming the major part of the industry from being unorganized to organized. So that it is easy to implement and track those norms. Take the benefit of CSR activities, establish a platform for SMES in the cluster to work and support each other, Ensuring Adequate Financing, Formation of Special Economic Zones, Support during the economic slowdown/recession.

8. Marketing Campaigns, promotions and positioning in Target Markets, Branding of handicraft products should be done.

9. Buyer seller meets should be organized in various cities across India. Proper use of the newly constructed Lucknow expo mart should be made, Lucknow haat can be used in organizing exhibitions. Active participation in International fairs and events can help increasing product awareness. Promotion of lucknow exclusive products in combination with the tourism in the Uttar Pradesh will help both. An active and functioning industry association can aid in growth of the industry

10. Quality marking and Quality certifications could be introduced to make assessment of quality and related price easy for those who are known to the embroidery and the first time buyers. It will add transparency for the customers.

11. Application of updated technology and collaborations for technological, marketing and financial strength should be made. Having a lab for checking colour fastness will help in branding of the industry. In collaboration with students of IIT Kanpur technology was developed for block printing which is in used.

12. Without adequate infrastructure it is very tough for an industry to sustain in the long run. Methods need to be devised for eco- friendly washing, so that the chemicals used do not affect the quality of water of river Gomti. Water should be available along with space for the drying of clothes. Each washerman cannot own the required space. Development of riverfront in Lucknow has taken the pre-
occupied riverbanks from the washers with no alternate space allotment made. This could lead to perishing of small players, which will have its impacts in the long run.

13. Introduction of attractive packaging can help in branding, increasing confidence at the time of purchase and increasing sale.

CONCLUSION

The chikan handicraft industry of Lucknow is unique in its product and has its own charm yet there are many challenges that surround the industry. Challenges range from problems related to livelihood of the artisans, revival of the art, infrastructural issues, use of technology, advertising and promotion, highly unorganized nature of the industry with the difficulty to find official number of people earning their livelihood from it. Though it is comparatively easy to suggest the remedies on paper but it needs effective implementation so that the effect percolates all and inclusive growth takes place. The improvements are not possible by a single effort. The government, NGO’s and manufacturers have to work their part in order to bring about the changes they want to see. Successfully dealing with these challenges can take the industry to new heights. It would make living easy for the many involved in the age-old craft and revive an industry.

REFERENCES

4. https://chikankariproducts.wordpress.com

ISSN NO: 0886-9967


13. SSA Jafri (2011). Chikan craft as a subsistence occupation among the Muslims of Lucknow. Islam and Muslim societies a social science journal, Vol. 4 No. 2

14. UNESCO/ITC Symposium "Crafts and the international market: trade and customs codification" - Manila, 6-8 October 199
