



# Sustainable Chikankari Art in Contemporary Indian Fashion Industry: An Observation

**Dr. Shikha Chantia**

*Asst. Prof., Amity School of Fashion Technology, Amity University, Lucknow, U.P. INDIA*

From the early civilization days, human beings believed in culture. Every society practiced one or the other form of art or craft.

The transformation towards a sustainable society requires not only technological progress and innovative solutions, but also a strong cultural sector that inspires change in consumption and production.

Sustainability in the apparel industry is becoming increasingly important. The embroidered textiles of India are a legacy that have a great visual appeal and speak a deeper language of symbolism. The hand skills and processes of dyeing, washing, and printing are rooted in traditions of organic and natural origins and call for sustainable development. Chikankari is embroidery that was always patronized by royalty and is presently incorporated in works of various designers. However, the associated processes in this embroidery suffered slow death of the very essence of this art-form, which was an expression of cultural heritage rather than just being an embellishment.

After becoming the trend of fashion. Chikankari made its pace in the field of export and that is why policy maker tried to popular Chikan by the development of cluster programme. Chikan embroidery in Lucknow is the biggest artisan cluster of India. There are about 2.5 lacs artisans of hand embroidery associated with this cluster. It will proceed to the development of the artisans of the rural areas of Lucknow (India) with the aim of reducing several health and design related concerns currently associated with this handicraft.

Therefore, this paper intends to provide an insight into the design, cultural and environmental aspects of this craft from its past to its revival in contemporary times. present paper will also give a knowledge that Chikankari has not only sustained its originality, uniqueness with time but also innovated according to market need in terms of garments and textiles to not only sustain but to grow and flourish as well.

***Keywords: sustainable cluster artisans, revival etc.***

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Chikankari derived its name from Persian which means “wrought with needle work”. Chikankari has its references in work of MEGASTHENES dated back to 3rd Century B.C. It also has its references in “AAINE-AKBERI”. Till 655 A.D. this art was restricted mainly to the royals and common man seldom got chance to have it with time it started diminishing. It was strongly rekindled by Mugal Queen Noor-Jehan. Chikankari not only enjoyed patronization of the Mughals but also attained more perfection as the exquisite needle work. This art underwent further improvement and beautiful additions were made in it. Awadh an open arm welcome to



chikankari and it flourished a lot in Lucknow. The work is mainly done on muslin and cotton most suited for hot and humid summers of north India. As the embroidery is delicate and pastel it carried truly the nostalgia and Nazakat of Lucknow. Lucknow has still sustained an unrivaled supremacy in producing the finest chikan in India. Karigar of Lucknow are so much keen in preserving the originality and naphasat of this work that at a point of time there was a threat seen to this embroidery. But as management puts forward when you have a quality product you will certainly have a market for it.

## **II. HISTORY AND TRADITION OF CHIKANKARI**

The art of Chikan embroidery in India is about 400 years old and it is believed that this is a Persian Craft, which came to India with Noorjahan, the queen of Jahangeer the Mughal Emperor.. At that time it was designed and practiced by her and other begams (wives) of Mughal Emperors.

Chikankari flourished under the patronage of the rulers of Awadh. Later when the capital of Awadh shifted to Lucknow from Faizabad, in the year 1722, the knowledge of the craft came to Lucknow. It is informed that here the Mughals found the Hand Block Printing skills that made it easier for them to practice this embroidery, as earlier the tracing of design was very difficult. This availability of easy process of drawing of base design encouraged them to teach this fine embroidery-work to their Kaniz (servants), who in turn taught it to their other family members and gradually this embroidery become a part time earning source of many women of rural areas.

The craft of Chikankari is quite distinctive and forms an integral part of life in Lucknow. The fine needlework adorned the garments made from gossamer silk fabrics and muslin for the ruling elite. The love and hard work of the artisans created delicate designs on fabrics that was reminiscent of sheer grace.

## **III. AN OVERVIEW OF EMBROIDERY CLUSTERS IN INDIA**

In India there are many popular embroidery clusters such as Chikankari of Lucknow, Katha of Bengal, Fulkari of Punjab, Kutchi Embroidery of Gujarat & Kashidakari of Kashmir. Each style of embroidery is different from the other and has its own beauty and significant value.

The city of Lucknow has a prominent place in the history of India particularly for its art, historical monuments and rich cultural heritage. The rulers of Awadh, particularly the Mughals were very fond of art and cultural activities such as music, poetry, architecture and Handicrafts (Chikan). Besides being famous for its hot summers and a glorious past, Lucknow is also known the world over for its many fine Handicrafts (Chikan). Some of the most popular names in this list are Chikankari, Hand Block Textile Printing, Zari Zardozi, Ivory or Bone Carving, Terracotta and many others that are practiced by various artisans of Lucknow. Chikankari is considered to be the most popular amongst these and is recognized worldwide.

## **IV. SALIENT FEATURES OF CHIKANKARI CLUSTUR**

**Biggest Artisan Based Cluster:** Chikan embroidery in Lucknow is the biggest artisan cluster of India. There are about 2.5 lacs artisans of hand embroidery associated with this cluster. Apart from this, the artisans from other fields such as Cuttings, Stitching, Hand Block Textile Printing, Jali work and Washer men are also a part of this cluster. The total number of artisans associated with Chikan Embroidery Cluster, other than chikankari artisans



are about 5000. **Geographical Coverage:** The artisans of Chikan Embroidery are scattered in and around Lucknow within a radius of about 125 K.M. The districts covered are Unnao, Barabanki, Lakhimpur, Hardoi etc. Some other villages where one can find few artisans of chikankari are in Raibareilly, Sultanpur and Faizabad. **Rural Women Based Artisan Cluster:** The embroidery artisans of this cluster are mainly from rural areas. They are mostly housewives doing this work as their part time job. In most cases it is also their only source of their personal income. **Providing Employment To Many Non Artisans:** This Chikan Embroidery is not only providing employment to about 2.5 lakhs artisans of different crafts but people from non-craft base are also earning their livelihood by associating themselves with this craft. Expected number of non-artisan persons earning their bread and butter from this craft is about one million. They may be contractors, manufacturers, retailers, raw material providers or employee with manufacturers.

**V. CHIKANKARI WORK**

Chikankari has basic 6 stiches and round numbered 36 sub stiches in it. Some of the ones in it are Tepchi, Bakhiya, Hool, Zanzeera, Rahet, Jali, Pechani, Bijali, Ghaspatti, Makra, Kuri, Hathkadi, Banjkali, Sazi, Karan, Madrazi, Bulbul-Chasm, Tajmahal, Kangan, Razan, Mahakari etc. Traditionally the work was done on white muslin or cotton fabric with white threads pastel cloth was also used tread were both of cotton and silk. Colored threads were also used but not on a much wide scale. Chikankari is a delicate settle embroidery glorifying the Nazakat and Naphasat of Lucknow and Mughals. Sources of the most motifs in Chikankari are Mughal.

**VI. STRUCTURE OF THE CHIKAN EMBROIDERY CLUSTER**

**Structure of The Enterprises in The Cluster:** The total turnover of the cluster is in order of Rs. 600 crores. There are about 4000 manufacturers in the cluster that can be classified as large, medium and small according to their turnover as given below.

**Table 1 : Structure of The Enterprises in The Cluster**

<b>Turnover (in Rupees per annum)</b>	<b>Number of Enterprises</b>
4-5 Crores	10
50-100 lacs	250
50-100 lacs	500
5-20 lacs	2000
3-5 lacs	1000

Of the above, only two manufacturers have their own registered brand names. Their brand names assure the customers about quality of the product. Besides, there is only one manufacturer who is exporting 100% of his production to different countries. The structure of the Chikan industry and the turnover pattern of different categories of manufacturing units reveal an inverted pattern as presented below.

Table 2: Chikan Industry Turnover

250 Manufacturers - Turnover Rs. 45 Crores
250 Manufacturers -Turnover Rs. 100 Crores
500 Manufacturers - Turnover Rs. 150 Crores
2000 Manufacturers - Turnover Rs. 200 Crores
1000 Small Manufacturers - Turnover Rs. .50 Crores

VII. CHIKAN EMBROIDERY CLUSTER MAP

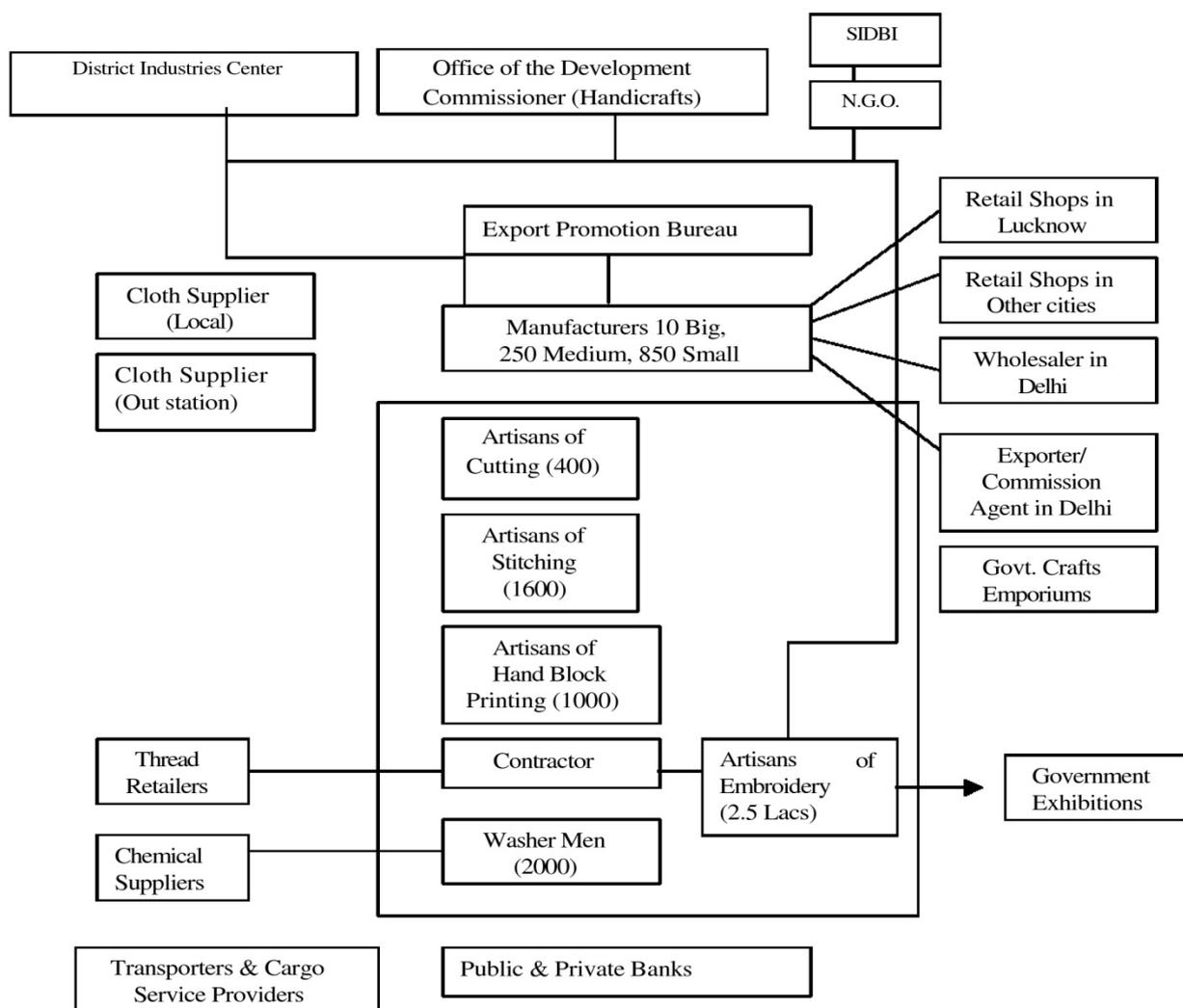


Figure 1: Cluster Flow Chart

VIII. IMPACT OF FASHION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF CHIKANKARI

Innovation is basically defined as adding value or new feature to a already existing product. The feature has to go in for mass production and should increase the product client spectrum. It should give the product an edge over competitors. Effective innovation provides the solution to meeting this growth demand. An innovation



model provides the conceptual framework for identifying and advancing the change ideas most likely to generate the value needed to create sustained growth. A paper by Benoit Godin in 2005 provides a historical discussion of the Linear Innovation Model which has its early references back to 1945. It states the process of innovation as- Basic research Applied research Development Production and diffusion. But innovation research has come forward with some more models to overcome the deficiencies seen in the linear model. These are namely-

- Technology Push.
- Market Pull.
- The Phase Gate Model.

In specific reference to Chikankari we see that Market Pull Model is more effectively put forward. Which states Market Need Development Production Sales Market Need is for garments which are not only comfortable but also stylish in addition to it the garments needed are more of today's trends. Chikankari done on Suites, Saries and Kurta Pajamas have less consumer demand than Kurtis, shot shirts, Formal shirts, Palazzos, Anarkalies etc. Similarly more than cotton and muslin, georgette, crape, silk, tussars and chiffon are in demand more as they are easy to wear and maintain. Seeing the need manufactures developed the garments accordingly as well as on textiles in demand in public. We can easily find chikankari on georgette, chiffons, tussars etc. which was not so common around 20 years back. More detailing been done on basic chikanwork in the form of ZARDOZI and CRYSTAL WORK. Items as tablecloth napkins bedspreads are also being made which were traditionally were not made. Chikan primarily being a summer collection has also become winter couture. Famous designers like Sabyasachi, Ritu Kumar, Manish Malhotra etc have given chikankari important place in their assembles and shows so it is much more highlighted now a days.

## **IX. ANALYSIS OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS**

### **Availability of Raw Material**

The basic raw material for manufacturing of Chikan Embroidery products is cloth, which is easily available in India. Availability of various variety of cloth in the market provides manufacturers with opportunities to produce many varieties of products.

### **Subcontracting of Production Process**

In manufacturing of Chikan Embroidery goods, the usual procedure followed is of subcontracting the work. Job workers are hired on per piece basis who then usually work from their own place and complete all the process of production such as cutting, stitching, printing, embroidery and washing.

Some manufacturers have also started in-house process of manufacturing.

### **No Design Input**

Chikan Embroidery dresses are now treated as fashion garments but manufacturers do not use designers for product designing or for development of new products. Very few i.e. just two or three manufacturers are making use of designers expertise. All the designing work is carried out by the manufacturer himself, either by copying designs from fashion catalogues or by ideas imparted by buyers.

### **Lengthy Production Time**



Normally about 3-5 months time is required for production of Chikan Embroidery products. Sometimes it even extends up to 7-8 months depending on the intricacy of the design

**No Regular Work to Artisans**

The Embroidery artisans are not directly related to the Manufacturers for work. One contractor of the area procures the work from the manufacturers and distributes it to the artisans. Artisans are dependent on the contractor who usually exploits them. Artisans do not get regular work and payment from the contractor.

**Very Less Wages to Artisans**

Due to the job distribution by the contractor, the artisans who are the actual masters of the art do not get their due wages. The normal earning of an artisan is just Rs. 15/- to 40/- per day. Very few artisans of high skills get Rs. 60/- to Rs. 80/- per day.

**Poor Work place condition of Artisans**

The workplace conditions of the artisans are quite poor. Usually they do work at their home along with their regular household work. The Kachaa homesteads tend to soil the cloth to be embroidered and also the poor light and hygienic conditions of the workplace adversely affects the health of the artisan.

**Abundance of Artisans of Only 4-5 Styles of Stitches**

Most of the artisans in the cluster specialize only in 4-5 stitching styles of Chikankari. It is easy to find products with embroidery forms of Bhakiya, Murri, Funda, Tepchi and SidouliZali but very difficult to get the other styles.

**Specialization in Product Manufacturing**

In this cluster usually manufacturer has specialization in manufacturing one or two products. Some are only manufacturing Ladies suits while some only produce saris. Even specialized manufacturing of value wise products is also present. The manufacturers can also be differentiated as producers of Low range, Medium range or High range products.

**X. SWOT ANALYSIS**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Large domestic market</li><li>• Traditional Handicraft (Chikan)</li><li>• Huge artisan base</li><li>• Can be done on variety of clothes</li><li>• Availability of skilled artisans</li><li>• High competition among manufacturers</li><li>• Low-price hand made garments</li><li>• Available in all price ranges</li><li>• Customised products can be made</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No technological upgradation</li><li>• Lengthy production time</li><li>• No designer input</li><li>• Over production of low quality goods</li><li>• Manufacturers are not having technical qualifications</li><li>• Very less export</li><li>• No association among manufacturers</li></ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exemption of Excise Duty, Trade Tax</li> <li>• A Brand Name in itself</li> <li>• Easy availability of Raw Material</li> <li>• Availability of Transport Facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No fixed time for return of goods from embroidery</li> <li>• Unorganised Artisans Cluster</li> <li>• Very less fund flow from financial institutions</li> <li>• Very less advertisement in Foreign markets</li> <li>• Very less use of modernised facilities such as Computer, CAD, Internet and Email etc.</li> <li>• Products mainly treated as seasonal summer garments</li> <li>• Undercutting practiced among manufacturers</li> </ul>
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<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big scope in domestic market</li> <li>• Big scope in foreign market</li> <li>• Scope for development of new products</li> <li>• Scope for selling low price goods in Latin America (e.g Beach wear in Brazil, Chile)</li> <li>• Various Central and State Government Schemes for benefit of Artisans</li> <li>• Implementation of Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojna under O/o The</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition with Printed &amp; Machine embroidered items</li> <li>• Globalisation might bring Pakistani embroidery or other similar products in India</li> <li>• Change in Government Policies such as imposition of Excise Duty and Trade Tax</li> </ul>



Development (Handicrafts (Chikan)) for welfare of artisans	Commissioner	
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## **XI. VISION OF THE CLUSTER**

### **Vision Statement**

To increase the turnover of the cluster by 30% within 5 years by development of high quality fashion products and entering in export market

### **Strategic Goals**

- To develop High Fashion Garment Products.
- To convert the seasonal summer industry to all weather industry by development of products for winter season.
- To explore new markets within the country.
- To increase export from the cluster.

## **XII. ROLES AND INITIATIVE TAKEN BY VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF CHIKANKARI CLUSTUR**

### **(A) Support Institutions**

#### **Non-Government Organizations**

There are many NGOs working for welfare of artisans in the cluster. They are implementing various schemes of Central or State Government Departments. These NGOs have established Craft Development Centers in the area, which directly helps the artisans. One very prominent NGO who has done significant work in field of Chikan Embroidery is SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association). Other NGOs are also working in the cluster with help of O/o the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts).

#### **State Govt. Institutions**

##### **District Industries Center (Dic), Lucknow**

This center functions under the Director & Commissioner Industries, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Kanpur. It is the main coordinator between other Government offices and artisans. It recommends names of enterprises for various exhibitions, bank-financing, State/National Awards for master craftsmen. It also implements the Prime Minister RozgarYojana for benefit of unemployed persons. The center also provides Small Scale Handicraft (Chikan) Industry registration to Manufacturers of the area. Besides, a Central Design Center (CDC) & Craft Museum was also setup under the DIC of Lucknow. CDC is closed and in Craft Museum articles are getting dust because of no proper attention taken by state govt.



### **Export Promotion Bureau Lucknow**

In 1999 the Export Promotion Bureau was formed under the Ministry of Small Scale Industries in U.P. The main functions of the bureau are monitoring and policymaking. It also provides Marketing Development Assistance to small exporters in form of grants under different schemes. There are very few manufacturers/Traders of Chikan Embroidery products in the total list of members of Export Promotion Bureau. Out of these only four are actual exporters. Others are not even having any proper manufacturing or trading units.

### **U.P. Tourism**

The basic aim of this office of the Government of Uttar Pradesh is to promote tourism of state but it also gives an exposure to the craft and culture of state through organizing festivals, publicity catalogues and website.

### **Financial Institutions**

There are many banks in the area but very negligible amount has been given as finance to the manufacturers of Chikan Embroidery goods. A total Rs.5 Crores has been financed till now to about 300 manufacturers and that too mainly as a working capital loan.

### **(B) Other Institutions**

#### **Sate Govt. Institutions**

##### **U P Trade Promotions Authorities Kanpur**

Established under Commissioner Director of Industries, Government of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the organization is making efforts for promotion of trade from UP. It organizes fairs and exhibitions of different product groups. It is also responsible for setting up the U.P. Pavilion of PragatiMaidan, New Delhi for advertisement and marketing of products manufactured in the state. It also participates in international fairs.

Despite that ,there are various central government institutions ,who are working well for constant development of Chikankari. to make it more fashionable and contemporize for flourishing this beautiful art more and more and sustainable.

Handicrafts (Chikan) Marketing and Service Center, Barabanki, EPCH, New Delhi, ITPO, New Delhi, AEPC, Handloom & Handicraft Export Promotion Corporation, New Delhi are there to name a few.

### **XIII. CONCLUSION**

Therefore, it is evident clearly that Chikankari has not only sustained its originality, Nazakat and Nafaasat with time but also innovated according to market need in terms of garments and textile to not only sustain but to grow and flourish as well.

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