



LAKHANAVI CHIKANKAARI – THE GLORY OF INDIAN TEXTILES

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INTRODUCTION

India is a land of craftsmen. Indian textiles have been well known in Europe since Greek and Roman times. From 1600 to 1800 AD, India was the biggest exporter amongst the textile exporting countries (Arya and Sadhana, 2002). Textiles in India are beautified by various techniques such as embroidery, brocading, printing, painting and dyeing; but among all of these, the embroidery craft is ranked at the top. Chikankari of Uttar Pradesh also famous as “Shadow work “. It is a very delicate work. This delicate pattern making of hand is facing tough competition from the commercialised market version of cheap quality products. Because of which it is rare to see the beauty of its fine work of motifs and stiches. The aim of the research will be study the problem and a try a way to help in the revival of the craft.

Rationale of the Study

Chikankari is the intricate art of doing fine and delicate embroidery on cloth by hand. But today it is facing commercialization because of its great demand from domestic as well as from the foreign market which is indirectly affecting the quality of embroidery present in the market. Eventually the sophistication from the embroidery has been lost.

Objectives

- To make an effort towards preservation of the art of chikankari from losing its identity by contemporizing the craft.
- To identify the market and to study the available products in various categories in terms of quality finishes, designs, colors, etc.
- To design and develop a collection of garment using traditional motifs.

LIMITATION

While conducting this research, it could not be generalised as a whole segment of market where the customers who wants it as a traditional wear.

REVIEW

In India there are many popular embroidery clusters such as Chikankari of Lucknow, Katha of Bengal, Phulkari 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, specially the Mughals, were very fond of art and cultural activities such as music, poetry, architecture and handicrafts. Besides being famous for its hot summers and a glorious past, Lucknow is also known the world over for its many fine handicrafts. Some of the most popular names in this list are chikankari, hand block textile printing, ivory or bone carving, terracotta and many others that are practiced by various artisans of Lucknow.

Glory Of Chikankari

Chikankari is the most popular amongst these and is recognized in the world. Chikankari is subtle embroidery, white on white, in which minute and delicate stitches stand out as textural contrasts, shadows and tracteries. Some stitches are worked from the back and some from the front. In a unique, anokhi chikan, the stitches do not appear at the back. The fabric used is fine, and traditionally muslin. Chikan appears to have been derived from the Persian word chikin or chakin, meaning cloth wrought with needlework. It was originally a court craft having been introduced by the Mughal empress Norjahan. There were chikankaars in the courts of Kolkata, Delhi, Dhaka (Bangladesh), Gaya, Varanasi, Allahabad, Rampur and Bhopal. In Lucknow, the Nawabs of Avadh made the finely embroidered muslins a prescribed requirement of the ceremonial court. A single piece of chikan relies on many skilled craftsmen, designer, printer, embroiderer, washer man. Traditionally, different artisan families practiced and perfected one type of stitch and it would, therefore, often take between three to four craftsmen to embroider a single garment. Bakhiya, herringbone stitch, done on the reverse of the fabric, gives a shadow effect that became a dominant feature of the craft in the 1980s.

Chikankari has six basic stitches and over thirty-five other traditional stitches used in various combinations based on what the pattern to be embroidered requires. The six basic stitches are: Tepchi, (back Running stitch), Bakhiya (double back stitch), Hool (Eyelet), Zanzeera (chain stitch), Rahet (stem stitch) and Banarsi. Other stitches are phanda, chana patti, ghaas patti, ulti

jaali, bijli, jaali, kharau, keel, kangan, bulbul and hath kadi. Depending on the type of garment and the pattern to be embroidered the entire process happens in a series of stages over a period of months or even years. 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. The Mughals found that hand block printing skills made it easy 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 family members and gradually this embroidery become a part-time earning source for many women of rural areas .

CHANGES IN CHIKANKAARI

- As embroidery has gained one more aspect added to it with the changing time.
- More options are available to consumers; hence increase in demand which will be good for both craft and craftsmen.
- Fusions with the western garment will help in increase in foreign export sector which will help the craftsmen to be with craft and carry it forward.

Problems of Chikankari Workers

- *Undercutting practice among manufacturers
- * No regular work to artisans
- *Very less wages to artisans
- *Abundance of artisans of only 4-5 styles of stitches
- * Lengthy production
- *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.

Specialisation in product manufacturing: In this cluster usually manufacturer has specialization in manufacturing one or two products.

Research Methodology:

As it is a **qualitative research**, so **data collection** will be done in both the under given categories:

Primary data collection: It includes the on **field survey** undertaken for **objective study** over the problem as well as interaction with buyers to understand their approach towards the problem: Selection of proper **sample** market and stores will have to be picked up which could give a deep and vast understanding of market. Various **Questionnaires** to be formed to collect the experience and responses from wide range of sample selected so as to specify this research at a very vast platform. **Direct personnel interaction** will be done and **Interviews** taken which could give a deep insights into problem of commercialisation.

Then **secondary** data should be collected from various data available **online** as well as the **survey** conducted by various research agencies in the form of **reports, articles, journals, books, press releases, blogs, magazines**, as well as stores **sales policies reports**.

Study And Data Analysis:

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. Besides being famous for its hot summers and a glorious past, Lucknow is also known the world over for its many fine Handicrafts. 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.

The prominent belief is that it was introduced by Noor Jahan in the Mughal courts in 1600 A.D. from where it went to Bengal and then it came to Nawab of Avadh in 17th century and became a royal embroidery in courts and Now it is one of Lucknow's most famous textile decorations. Chikankari used the finest of white cotton fabric called muslin or mulmul. This gossamer light muslin fabric has found mention in the writings of many visitors to India; a great deal of muslin was produced in and exported from Bengal. Dacca was the main region where cotton was cultivated due to the high humidity of the region, which prevented the delicate thread from breaking on contact with the air. The cotton spun was very white since the Brahmaputra and the Ganges Rivers have bleaching properties. The chikankari workers in Bengal used this fine muslin for embroidery. Some very fine muslin was also produced in and around Lucknow. During the seventeenth century the East India Company decided to send two factors or employees to live in Lucknow and buy bales of a kind of muslin which was made in the Hasanganj area of Lucknow on the northern bank of the Gomti. The two/three categories of fine, white fabric that are used for chikancraft, namely Addhi, Tanzeb and

Girant. These were the traditional chikan fabrics. Their sheer texture was just right for the fine white needlework. Currently also done on cambray, mulmul, chiffon, georgettes, nets and other similar sheer fabrics.

FROM 1860 TO 1947 (TILL THE TIME OF INDIA-PAKISTAN PARTITION)

After 1860 till 1947, the only commercial product was TOPI PALLA. The main buyers were of Muslim Community and main markets were Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) and some areas that are now in Pakistan, Hyderabad and Lucknow. In this decade the business was in good condition. Few manufacturers were catering to the entire market.

AFTER 1947 TILL 1970

After partition the main markets of Topi Palla of Chikan Embroidery were not easily accessible because they became foreign markets for Indians. It forced the manufacturers to develop new products and they started producing Gents Kurta and after that Saris.

FROM 1970 TO 1990

Some manufacturers started manufacturing Ladies Suits (with or without dupattas) and even Luncheon sets. But this period is also seen as the worst period of Chikan embroidery. Because of producing only lower value products, consumers started using the products as night wear.

FROM 1990 TO 1999

This period can be referred to as the Golden Period of this cluster. New products, such as Suit lengths were developed and manufacturers started producing high value products. In this era new entrepreneurs with high ambitions entered the field and started manufacturing good quality products. Some reputed fashion designers also included Chikan Embroidery in their samples and catalogues which highlighted the Chikankari at national and international levels.

FROM 1999 TO 2001

Introduction of work on Georgette has kept the manufacturers in business. An overall general business slump in the economy has been affecting these embroidery stakeholders also and a decline in turnover has been observed. Sudden changes in fashion also adversely affect the performance of this industry, as the manufacturers are not able to cope with the changes. But nevertheless this era gave Chikankari products a good advertisement through media especially T.V serials and films.

FROM 2001 TILL DATE

Now chikankari has written its name on the worlds map as it is now being recognized by different designers and it is being loved and demanded by importer's also in high quantity. As

along with it there are cheap copies from China, machine work or duplicated work is available in the market at low prices. This is ruining its identity of being sophisticated and hand made.

THE TECHNIQUE AND TYPES OF CHIKANKARI STITCHES

There are 32 types of stitches that are used in chikankari which are mainly permutations and combinations of six to seven basic stitches given below:

A.Flat Stitches (Subtle stitches that remain close to the fabric)

1. Tepchi
2. Bakhia
3. Khatao
4. Gitti
5. Jamjira

B. Embossed Stitches (they give a grainy appearance)

1. Murri
2. Phanda
3. Pulled work (Jali) (Created by thread tension, it gives a delicate net effect)

FLAT STYLE

Bakhia

1. It is done with satin or herringbone stitch
2. It has opaque effect
3. It gives shadow appearance due to herringbone stitch
4. It is done in two forms ultra bakhia and sidha bakhia
 - a) From back side (ultra bakhia), the floats lie on the reverse of the fabric underneath the motif. The transparent muslin becomes opaque and provides a beautiful effect of light and shade.
 - b) From front side (sidha bakhia), it is the satin stitch with crisscrossing of individual threads. The floats of thread lie on the surface of the fabric. This is used to fill the forms and there is no light or shade effect.

Tepchi (running stitch)

1. Tepchi is occasionally done within parallel rows to fill petals and leaves in a motif.
2. Sometimes tepchi is used to make the bel buti all over the fabric.

3. A variation of tepchi is pechni and pashni.

4. Pechni It is the variation build on Tepchi where the tepchi base is covered by entwining the thread over it in a regular manner thus forming a lever spring

.Janjira

1. In Jamjira only chain stich is used to create the outlines of motif

2. It is also used as filling stich

3. It is the chain stitch usually used as outlines in combination with a line of pechni or thick teipchi.

Khatao

1. It is white on white applique work using paisley and floral patterns

2. It gives different opacity on different places of a fabric

Rahet

It is a stem stitch worked with six threads on the wrong side of the fabric. It forms a solid line of back stitch on the right side of the fabric and is rarely used in its simple form but is common in the double form of dohra bakhiya as an outlining stitch.

Gitti

Mainly blanket stich with buttonhole stitch is done to create circular patterns in the form of wheel like motif.

Turpai and Darzdari are also significant stitches in chikan work. Turpai should have an effect of a thin thread. Darzdari have several varieties, the popular ones are Kohidarz, Kamal darz, Shankarpara darz, Muchiiand Singbhada darz.

Banarsi

1. This stitch has no European equivalent and is a twisted stitch worked with six threads on the right side of the fabric.

2. Working from the right across about five threads a small stitch is taken over about two threads vertically.

3. The needle is reinserted halfway along and below the horizontal stitch formed and is taken out about two threads vertically on the right above the previous stitch.

KNOTTED EMBOSSSED EFFECT

Murri

Murri is typically an oval shaped French knot that creates an embossed effect on the fabric.

Phanda

1. Phanda is another style of chikankari. It resembles millet and gives a raised effect as it falls under the knotted style

Ghas patti

It is the grass leaves formed by V-shaped line of stitches worked in a graduated series on the right side of the fabric.

PULLED WORK (JALI)

1. Jali work gives an effect of open mesh or net like appearance.
2. Sometimes it looks like drawn thread work or lace like .This effect is produced by pushing apart the warp and the weft yarns with the help of needle.
3. Forming into tiny holes and are later tightened to give the cloth firmness and appearance of a net.

Hool

1. It is a fine detached eyelet stitch. Here in, a hole is punched in the fabric and the threads are teased apart.
2. It is then held by small straight stitches all round and worked with one thread on the right side of the fabric.
3. It can be worked with six threads and often forms the centre of a flower

MOTIFS

Motifs generally tell about the association of people with the environment as motifs used depict the flora and fauna. In earlier times colour does not play any roles in chikankari embroidery as it

was done with the royalty of White. But now in modern time due to rise in Demand and variety colour are brought in as design interventions.

CONCLUSION

The research analysis explains several new facts about chikankari:

As it is losing its fine charm because of blind commercialisation of chikankari by middlemen in the hope to increase the profit.

Even artisans are paid less for their immense dedication and effort done as this middlemen system emerged in the market in the large numbers.

So developing such products will help artisans to catch up to the competition and developed more contemporised products which can attract more customers. So it will help chikankari to rediscover its beautiful form in a modern as well as traditional way.

This research also concludes such a royal craft should be preserve as royalty and the fine beauty of chikankari should be stopped from distortion done to it from the hands of commercialisation and machine work.

SOME SAMPLES OF CHIKANKARI





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