

Design Resource

Chikankari Embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow>



1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
5. Products
6. Contact Details

Design Resource

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/introduction>

Introduction

Chikankari is an ancient form of white floral embroidery, intricately worked with needle and raw thread on a variety of fabrics like cotton, muslin, silk, organza etc. There are 36 types of stitches used in chikan work. The word 'chikan' is probably a derivative from the Persian word 'chikin' or 'chikeen' which means a kind of embroidered fabric. It is said to have been originally introduced by NoorJehan, the beautiful wife of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. Since then it has evolved and attained its glory and perfection in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh. Today it is a practiced tradition and an important commercial activity in the city and around.



1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/place>

1. Introduction
2. **Place**
3. People
4. Process
5. Products
6. Contact Details

Place

Lucknow is a lovely old city and has the most spectacular gardens, palaces, fine architectural mosques and temples. It is synonymous with cultural finesse, social warmth and an enduring love for gracious living. Chowk, as the name suggests, is a street in old Lucknow with the distinction of being the oldest in the city. This commercial stretch is an ideal shopping hub for those looking for good quality chikan garments - each one unique, handcrafted with special warmth and care, giving a glimpse of the hours and days of hard work gone into making them beautiful. Though most of the karigars live and work in the narrow lanes of this area itself, there are some who stay in neighboring villages like Malihabad, Kakori, Sandila, Hardoi and Lakheempur.



Badalmambada and Rumi Darwaza, the legendary buildings of old Lucknow



Badalmambada, the legendary building of old Lucknow

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On the streets of old Lucknow



A mosque in Chowk, old Lucknow

1. Introduction

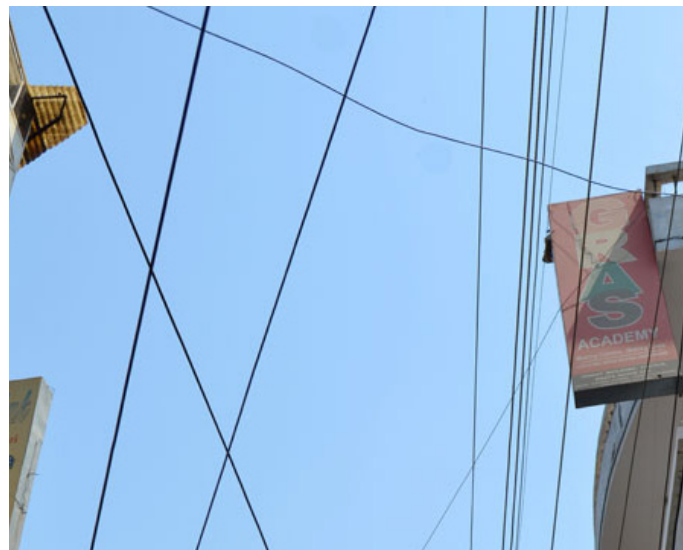
2. **Place**

3. People

4. Process

5. Products

6. Contact Details



On the streets of old Lucknow



A dhobi-ghat (washing area) constructed by the government

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Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

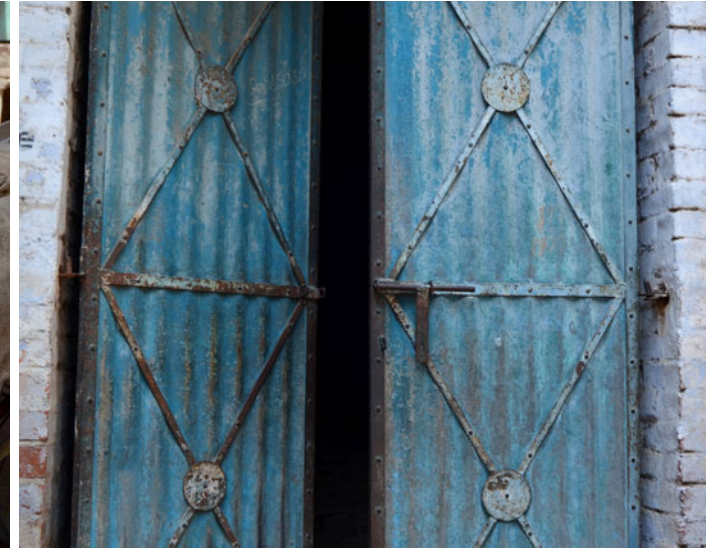
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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/place>



On the streets of old Lucknow



On the streets of old Lucknow

1. Introduction

2. **Place**

3. People

4. Process

5. Products

6. Contact Details



On the streets of old Lucknow



Ghotul near gadhbengal

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The craft of floral embroidery

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IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/place>

1. Introduction
2. **Place**
3. People
4. Process
5. Products
6. Contact Details



On the streets of old Lucknow

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/people>

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. **People**
4. Process
5. Products
6. Contact Details

People

The people of Lucknow are among the warmest and the most courteous people in India. They are known to be very soft spoken and treat guests like Gods. The place has a rich cultural heritage and is popularly known as the city of Nawabs. There are several chikankariaddas in the city and around. These provide employment to thousands of people, most of whom are Muslim karigars. While the men take care of cutting, stitching, printing and washing the fabric, embroidery is an expertise of the women. They are paid by each piece they create and not on daily basis.



Chikankarigarigars at what they do best



A lady sorting the threads for embroidery

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The craft of floral embroidery

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Source:

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An embroidery karigar



An embroidery karigar



An embroidery karigar



An embroidery karigar

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. **People**
4. Process
5. Products
6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/people>

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. **People**

4. Process

5. Products

6. Contact Details



An embroidery karigar



A chapayikarigar printing the design on the fabric



A chapayikarigar printing the design on the fabric



A dhulayi expert

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Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process>

Process

Each karigar specializes in the task he/ she performs: cutting, 'chapayi' (printing on the fabric), 'taanka' (embroidery), thread cutting, 'dhulayi' (washing), starching and ironing.



Chapayi(printing)



Taanka(embroidery)



Dhulayi (washing)

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. **Process**

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/chapayiprinting>

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
 - 4.1. **Chapayi(printing)**
 - 4.2. Taanka(embroidery)
 - 4.3. Dhulayi(washing)
5. Products
6. Contact Details

Chapayi(printing)

First, the fabric is cut by a tailor into the required garment shape, after which the basic pre-embroidery stitching is done so that the correct shape is available to the block-printer to plan the placement of the design. The design (pattern to be embroidered) is printed on the semi-stitched garment with a mix of 'neel' powder and gond (gum). Color containing trays are covered with a bamboo frame. On top of this a felt piece is kept to avoid excessive sticking of color. Through this the color is picked up in appropriate amount by the portion of the block that is to be printed. The color dries off very quickly, making the garment ready for its next stage - embroidery! Some of the block patterns are called chadi, patti, golbooti, gutka, kairi (paisley) in their local language.



Colorful fabric, yet to be cut and stitched by a tailor



A tailor measuring and cutting the fabric

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The craft of floral embroidery

by

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/chapayiprinting>



'Gond' - gum particles that hold the print on the fabric



'Neel' powder

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



The bottle with the gum and water mix



Neel powder being put in the liquid gum

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

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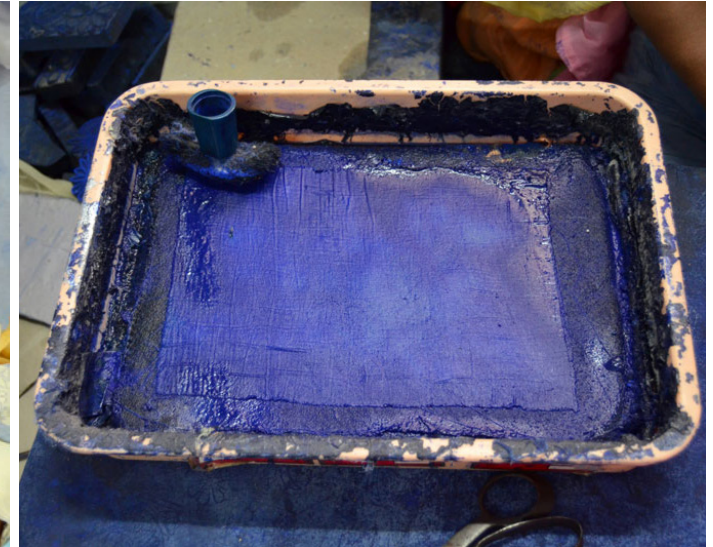
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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/chapayiprinting>



The block library



Tray with the blue printing color

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. **Chapayi**(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



Blocks for printing



Chapayi begins

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Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/chapayiprinting>



Chapayi begins



A karigar at the printing adda

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



An anaarkalikurta being printed



An anaarkalikurta being printed

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Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/chapayiprinting>



An anaarkal kurta being printed



A printed kurtas

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



A printed kurta



A printed kurta

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Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

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IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/chapayiprinting>



A printed kurta



A printed kurta



A printed kurta

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>

Taanka(embroidery)

Silk, cotton and polyester threads are employed for embroidery work on sarees, dupattas, table linen and kurtas. Cotton being the most preferred choice, chikankari is also done on mulls, muslins, voiles, organzas and polyester. Some more include chiffon, viscose, georgette, polyester georgette, cotton crepe and net. The designs change every other month, as per the market trends, with colors that perfectly match with the season.

The patterns and effects created depend on the types of stitches and the thicknesses of the threads used in the embroidery. Some of the legendary stitches include tepchi, bakhiya (shadow stitch done from the back side of the fabric), keel (the embossed centre of the flower), hool, zanzeera, rahet (stem stitch), banarsi, khatau, fanda and murri (types of french knots), jali (warp and weft threads carefully drawn apart),ulti-jali,pechani, bijli, hath-kadi, kapkapi, madrazi, bulbul, tajmahal, kangan, raza, meharki, ghaspatti, chanapatti, dhaniapatti, jora, sidhaul, turpai and darzdari. Different specialists work with different types of stitches. For example, jali is not done by embroiderers who do the filling work. Each worker completes his/her bit and the fabric is then sent to the next embroiderer. Thus, each hand-crafted piece talks volumes about the number of people involved in making it and the long hours put in.

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
 - 4.1. Chapayi(printing)
 - 4.2. **Taanka(embroidery)**
 - 4.3. Dhulayi(washing)
5. Products
6. Contact Details



Multicolored threads for embroidery



Polyester and resham (silk) threads for embroidery

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by

Sakshi Gambhir

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



A lady sorting the embroidery threads



A lady sorting the embroidery threads

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. **Taanka(embroidery)**

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



A lady sorting the embroidery threads



Embroidery begins with threading the needle

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The craft of floral embroidery

by

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Printed fabric being fitted into the frame



Ulti-bakhiya stitch (zig-zag on the front side)



Ulti-bakhiya stitch (zig-zag on the front side)



Bakhiya stitch

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Bakhiya stitch as seen from the back side



Bakhiya stitch as seen from the back side

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



Bakhiya stitch



Ulti-bakhiya stitch

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

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IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Bakhiya stitch



An embroidery karigar completing the bakhiya stitches

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

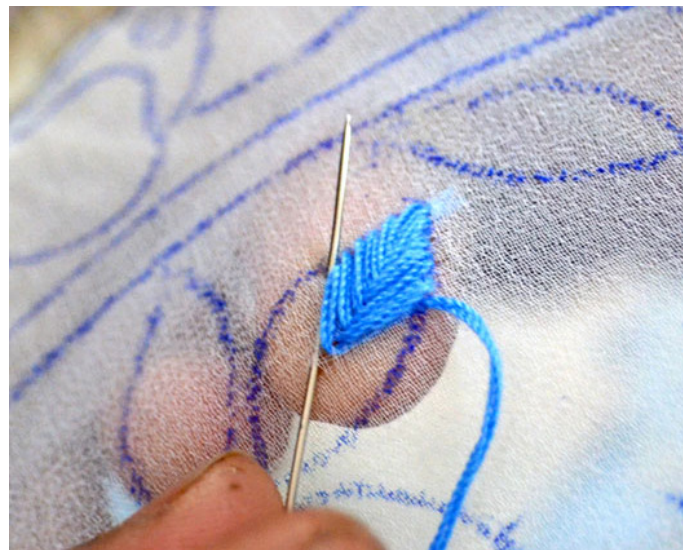
4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. **Taanka(embroidery)**

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



Ghaas-patti stitch



Ghaas-patti stitch

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Ghaas-patti stitch



Bakhiya and fanda stitch



Keel stitch forming the embossed centre and bakhiya forming the leaves of the flower



Pechani stitch

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Murri stitch (the stem) and fanda stitch (the embossed French knots)



Murri stitch (the stem) and fanda stitch (the embossed French knots)



Bijli stitch



Bijli stitch

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Bijli stitch



Bijli stitch



Bijli stitch



Bijli stitch

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

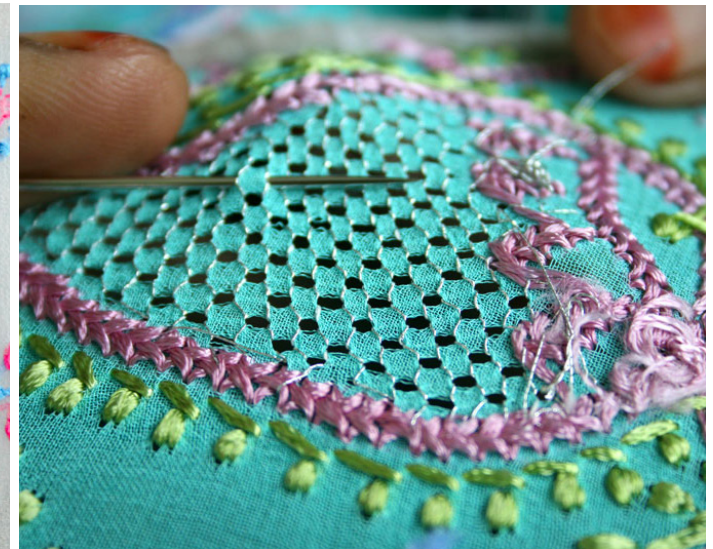
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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Bijli stitch



Bijli stitch



Bijli stitch



Sequins being stitched on the embroidered fabric

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/taankaembroidery>



Sequins being stitched on the embroidered fabric



Sequins being stitched on the embroidered fabric



Threads as seen from the back side of the embroidered fabric



Thread-cutting to finish the piece

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. **Taanka(embroidery)**

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/dhulayi-washing>

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
 - 4.1. Chapayi(printing)
 - 4.2. Taanka(embroidery)
 - 4.3. **Dhulayi(washing)**
5. Products
6. Contact Details

Dhulayi (washing)

After completion, the article is checked carefully since most defects can be detected at first glance. However, the finer flaws surface only after washing. A little bit of 'tezaab' is added to water (50 grams in 20 litres of water) and the embroidered garment is soaked in water for five minutes. This removes the 'neel' or the blue color of the print. The next step is to bleach the fabric. Rubber gloves are worn during this process. Garments are soaked overnight in a mix of caustic soda, bleach, 'ghadi' powder and 'ghadi' soap overnight and washed with water the following day. About sixty thousand garments are washed daily at this dhobi ghat. After this, the garment is starched and let to dry in the sun. Once dry, these are ironed and packed!



The difference between an unwashed and washed kurta



A dhobi (washer-man) rubbing the clothes in 'tezaab' and water

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/dhulayi-washing>

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



Clothes after being rinsed in clean water



A dhobi preparing a mix of bleach, castic soda, 'ghadi' powder and soap to soak the garments



A dhobi preparing a mix of bleach, castic soda, 'ghadi' powder and soap to soak the garments



A dhobi preparing a mix of bleach, castic soda, 'ghadi' powder and soap to soak the garments

Design Resource

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The craft of floral embroidery

by

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IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/dhulayi-washing>



Garments being soaked in the mix



Garments being soaked in the mix

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



The final wash



The final wash

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

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IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/dhulayi-washing>



The dhobi ghat (washing area)



Starch being prepared

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



Garments being starched



Garments being starched

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/dhulayi-washing>



Garments being hung on the clothesline to dry



The colorful clotheslines



The colorful clotheslines



Clothes being removed from the ropes

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/dhulayi-washing>



Clothes being removed from the ropes



Garments being ironed by sprinkling a bit of water

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

4.1. Chapayi(printing)

4.2. Taanka(embroidery)

4.3. Dhulayi(washing)

5. Products

6. Contact Details



Garments being ironed by sprinkling a bit of water



Garments let to dry after being ironed

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

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IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/process/dhulayi-washing>



The ironed lot



The store room at one of the addas

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
 - 4.1. Chapayi(printing)
 - 4.2. Taanka(embroidery)
 - 4.3. **Dhulayi(washing)**
5. Products
6. Contact Details



Packed to be parceled!

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/products>

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
5. **Products**
6. Contact Details

Products

Chikan work is no more confined to traditional salwaarkameez, kurtapajama and sarees, but is a delight to wear and watch in almost all kinds of western wear like funky tops, designer kurtas, enticing skirts, etc. Drifting apart from the original pristine white-thread setting, the tone-on-tone embroidery is in vogue these days. The significant use of beads, sequin, mokaish (white flat silver strip embroidery) and crochet have also gained wide acceptance.



Embroidery on a cotton kurti



Embroidery on a cotton kurti.

Design Resource

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The craft of floral embroidery

by

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IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/products>



Embroidery on a cotton kurti.



Embroidery on a cotton kurti.

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

5. **Products**

6. Contact Details



Embroidery on a net saree



A crepe kurti

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/products>



Cotton kurtis



Cotton kurtis

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

5. **Products**

6. Contact Details



A crepe kurti.



A crepe kurti

Design Resource

Chikankari embroidery of Lucknow

The craft of floral embroidery

by

Sakshi Gambhir

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/products>



Cotton kurtis



cotton kurti.



A cotton kurti with crochet border



A cotton kurti with crochet border and sleeves

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
5. **Products**
6. Contact Details

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An unstitched cotton suit with mokaish



An unstitched cotton suit with mokaish

1. Introduction

2. Place

3. People

4. Process

5. **Products**

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An unstitched cotton suit with mokaish



Georgette saree

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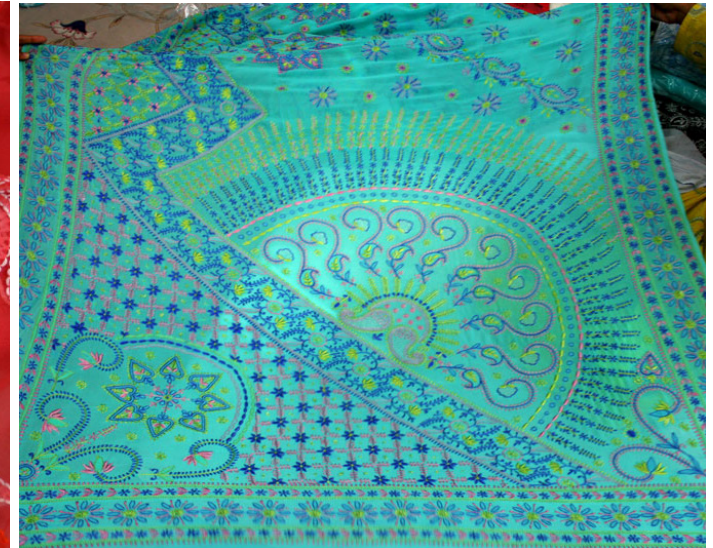
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/products>



The stitches as seen on the back and front of a georgette saree



A georgette saree with multicolor thread embroidery



A georgette saree with sequin highlights

1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
5. **Products**
6. Contact Details

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/chikankari-embroidery-lucknow/contact-details>

Contact Details

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1. Introduction
2. Place
3. People
4. Process
5. Products
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