



Elegant | Exquisite | Eternal

Chikan-Kari

Chikān-Kāri

Special Project

Ravi Purty | 146250014
Visual Communication

Guide: Nina Sabnani

IDC, IIT Bombay

Acknowledgment

Here I express my heartfelt thanks and sincere gratitude to all the people, without whose help, successful completion of this project would not have been possible.

I would sincerely like thank my project guide Prof. Neena Sabnani for his guidance and support throughout the project.

I also like to thank Mr. Ashish Chakravarthy (SEWA Lucknow), Mr. Ram Kumar and Akbar (Lucknow Chikan Factory), Mr. Prabodh Arya (Beau Monde), Ms. Ashima (Seva Chikan) whom I met during the journey and helped me in making this project so eventful. Their effort and co-operation can't be underestimated as their willingness to help in bringing this project come to life.

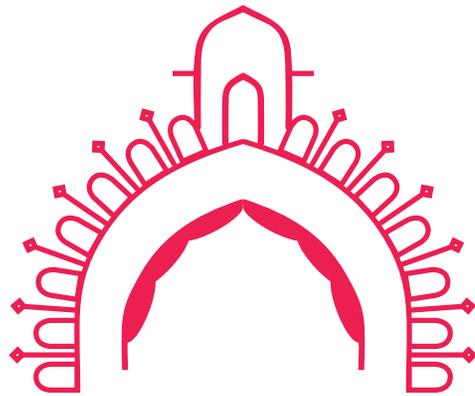
Lastly it can never go without thanking Ms. Suruchi Sati who helped me exploring the city of Lucknow.

Ravi Purty
VC 146250014
IDC, IIT Bombay
Date: 22nd February 2016

Content

1. Lucknow (an overview)	1
1.1 How to reach	3
1.2 The City	5
1.3 Nearby places	6
1.4 Culture	7
2. Reason for coming to Lucknow	13
3. Community	14
4. Chikan Kari	15
4.1 Short history	16
4.2 How it is done	18
4.3 How things changed over the period	23
5. Methodology	24
5.1 SEWA Lucknow	26
6. Interview	38
7. Insights	43





nāwābōn kā ṣāhār

My journey began with lot of excitement in my heart, a chance to meet the people who are famous for their politeness and humbleness. I had lived the state of Uttar Pradesh for more than 18 years, and visited Lucknow on several occasions. This state is divided in 75 district, but there is nothing like Lucknow it has its own culture to appreciate people and it can be seen through generations. Lucknow is the second happiest city of India after Chandigarh according to a survey done LG electronics and IMRB International. Here life runs at its own pace.

We may hear a lot of stories of Nawabs of Lucknow, but this city has remained beautiful because of its people. Pahle aap, pahle aap story may be famous because of Nawabs

but one can still feel the same politeness from Lucknow residents. People will have a lot of time to talk to you, if they are not in real hurry. There is so much to talk about this city whether it art, drama, poetry, music, dance, food, clothing and the people.

Chikan-Kari although introduced by Mughals but Nawabs made it the legacy, and it still continues. Some say it traveled from Persia to India along with Nur Jahan, the begum of Badshah Jahangir. Some references say it had been here since 300 B.C. by Megasthenes, who mentioned the work of white embroidery on white muslin. Whatever it was but it is here today, an embroidery which remained exclusive for this particular city has become the identity of the Lucknow.

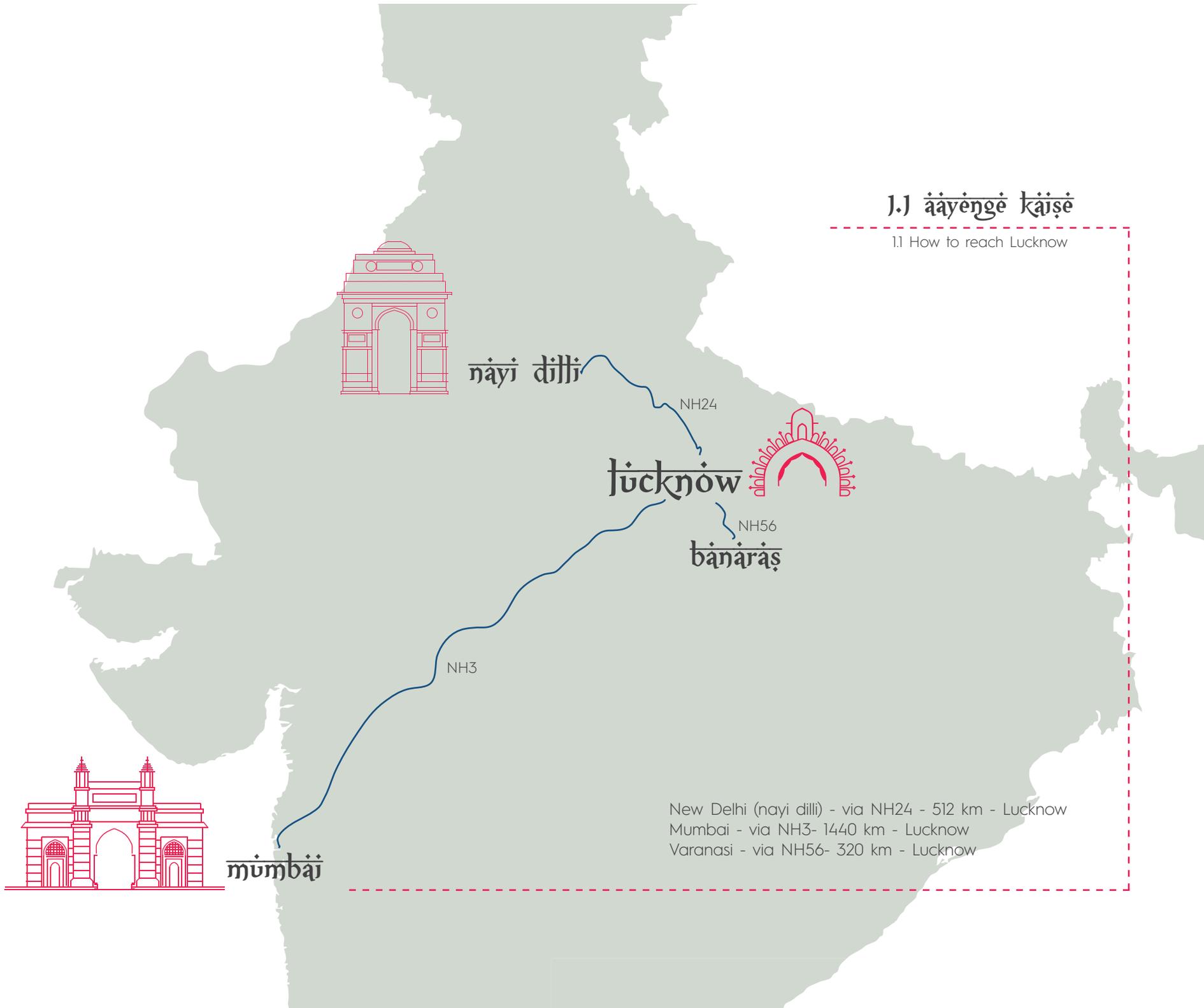
1. Lucknow

ṣārāā ṣī nāṣāākāt



1.1 ऍयेंगे कैसे

1.1 How to reach Lucknow



New Delhi (nāyi dilli) - via NH24 - 512 km - Lucknow
Mumbai - via NH3- 1440 km - Lucknow
Varanasi - via NH56- 320 km - Lucknow

Exclusive Winter Wear
FRESH ARRIVALS
SWEATER, JACKET, CARDIGANS
KNITTED WOOLEN TOP, SHAWLS

बम्पर OFFER - दुल्हे के शेरवानी
सूट-कोट-सवरी-कुर्ता की शान्ता
जुवा की परफेक्ट कपड़े के शेरवानी की शान्ता
शांति प्रो. शांति

केन्द्रीय
वलीनिक
डॉ. विठ्ठल शंकर



1.2 शहज़र

1.2 The City

Lucknow often pronounced as Lughnau, is the capital city of state Uttar Pradesh, India. Lucknow is second largest city in the northern, eastern and central India after Delhi. The city of Lucknow was established by Nawabs in the year 1775 moving their capital from the city Faizabad. It was famous as a multicultural city and flourished under the reign on Nawabs of Lucknow. It has remained an important center for northern in term of government, education, finance, technology, art, design, music, cuisine, pharmaceuticals and culture.

Historically, Lucknow was capital city of Awadh region of north and it was governed the mughal empire of Delhi Sultanate. Lucknow sits on the north-western shore of bank of Gomti river. In the year 1856 British East India company took over the rule from Nawabs. Lucknow was the major center for Indian Rebellion of 1857 and remained actively involved in the Indian Independence movement during the British rule. Lucknow has always remain an area of interest for Indian politics after India's Independence in 1947.



1.4 तहज़ेब

1.4 Culture

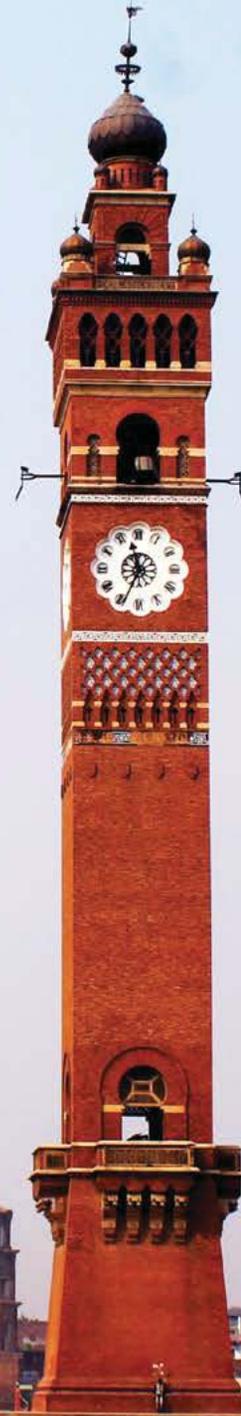
हमारे पक्वान्नें इतने मसालेदार इशिये हैं,
क्योंकि हमारी जुबान बहुत मीठी है

We prefer spicy food because the language we speak is too sweet.

Being the city of political interest in northern region, it is one of the fastest developing cities in India apart from major metropolitan cities. It serves a unique combination of cultural heritage and contemporary lifestyle all across the city. Tehzeeb or what we call mannerism it still exist as it was known decades earlier, and they accept tourists as well as strangers with same grace. It appears in their polite way of addressing people even if they may have difference with other people.

ek jhalak

a view



Clock Tower



Asafi Masjid, Lucknow



Imambara, Lucknow



Residency, Lucknow



Chota Imambara, Lucknow

Yāhān pyāār miltā hāi!

Here affection is everywhere

Lucknow has always been close to my heart because of their culture and lifestyle. Lucknow is famous for its leisurely habits, cuisine, etiquettes, architecture and residue of Nawabi culture. In the era of advancement in terms of technology and economics it has managed to preserve the spirit of the city. Natives of the place are very heart warming and will greet you in same manner, and the city will never make you feel alone if you are new to this place.

My hometown Faizabad, is just 130 kms apart from the city of Lucknow and the language spoken in this area is very much similar to my mother tongue. Lucknow being the capital city and one of fastest growing city of India, gives a lot of opportunity for the people nearby cities and towns. So, idea was I would be able to get a place to stay at someone's home in the city. Although I have been away from my hometown for last 10 years and last visit to Lucknow was almost 7-8 years ago, the lifestyle and culture remained the same. To know the local language is always beneficial, so at least a person does not feel discomfort in talking to other person.

2. wājāh yāhān āānē kī

2. Reason for coming Lucknow

The art of Chikan-Kari has always fascinated me, because of my earlier connections with apparel industry. In the era of Industrialization it has somehow not only able to survive but also flourished over the period. Lucknow is famous for its hand embroidered Chikan-Kari work along with its spicy cuisine, and Nawabi culture. As a designer many a time we look towards a art or a craft form and feel it is losing its importance in the society and we must do something to keep it alive. Chikan-kari is one such example when there was time, it was about to extinct. Craftsmen were losing their interest in working for this industry due to less income and upcoming job opportunities in other fields.

It has survived that phase and now it employs approximately 50,000 people in Lucknow and the nearby towns and villages. Chikan-Kari has revived itself in many ways than just being a craft done on muslin fabric with white. Lucknow is largest exporter of Chikan apparels in the world with matching its pace with contemporary fashion needs.

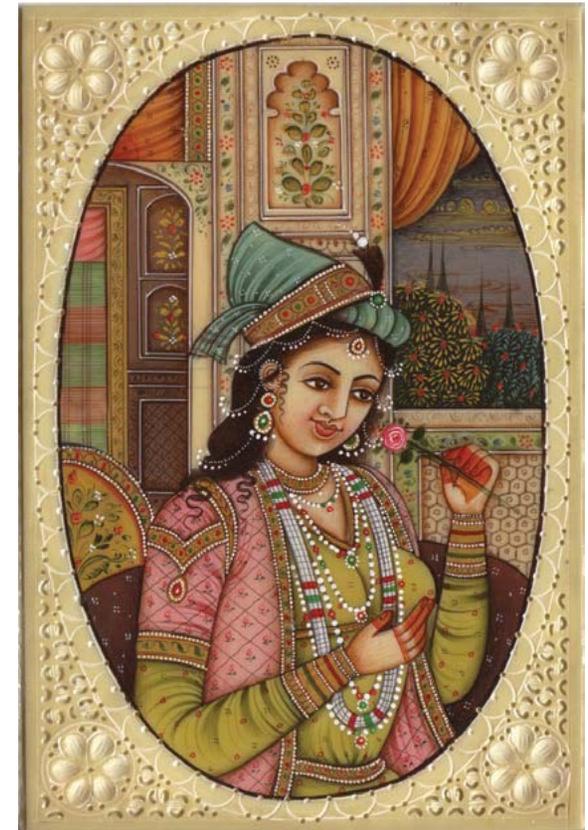
3. Chikan-Kari kartè kàun hāj

3. Community involved in Chikan-Kari

Chikan-Kari is form of craft which was introduced by begum Nur Jahan, wife of mughal emperor Jahangir. It is said that once begum Nur Jahan went to Iran and she brought this embroidery style to India. There are several stories about how this style of embroidery being introduced, but the story of the begum most popular and accepted. Chikan-Kari used to be so intricate, and 32 types of stitches were used in this form of craft which made this craft so unique. Nawab's and the royal family had the luxury, who can afford these garments.

Though it was introduced by Nur Jahan, it were the peasant who used to do this embroidery. In the realm of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah it was opened for masses and flourished. It was usually done by Muslim community and still continues to dominated by these community. Although there are lot of steps involved in making a garment but the embroidery is done by the ladies of Muslim families living in their villages and do it as a part time to earn some extra money as well as contribute to the family income.

Chikan-Kari is a skill based task and it requires great amount of time and practice to master it. When it was done for the emperors by the ladies of palace, it got the respect as form of craft but as soon it reached to masses it became too costly to afford. The time and effort which used to go in making in piece of attire was not cost effective. To cater this larger segment, these fabrics were sent to the nearby villages where women were not literate and family conditions also not good. To support the family, there ladies used to do the embroidery at very low cost.



<http://socialstudies.school/2015/08/23/nur-jahan/>

4. Chikan-Kari hōti kyā hāi

4. About Chikan-Kari

Chikan_Kari is one the finest and oldest form of traditional embroidery practiced in Lucknow and nearby towns and villages. Chikan is a unique craft which involves delicate and artistic hand embroidery which was done on white muslin with white thread. It is said that there were 32 types of stitches involved in Chikan-Kari work since its origin. As it is known that it was introduced by begum Nur Jahan and flourished during her time most of the motifs were inspired from mughal artworks. Though it was a court craft in that period, today it is a practiced tradition and became commercial activity and large number of people are getting benefited by this art form.

It was restricted to royal family unless Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, opened it for masses and common man. It was his reign when Chikan-Kari actually flourished and became famous which we are able to see today. Many of the stories also suggests that he was very lazy and most the time he used to invest in enjoying the luxury which he inherited from his predecessors.



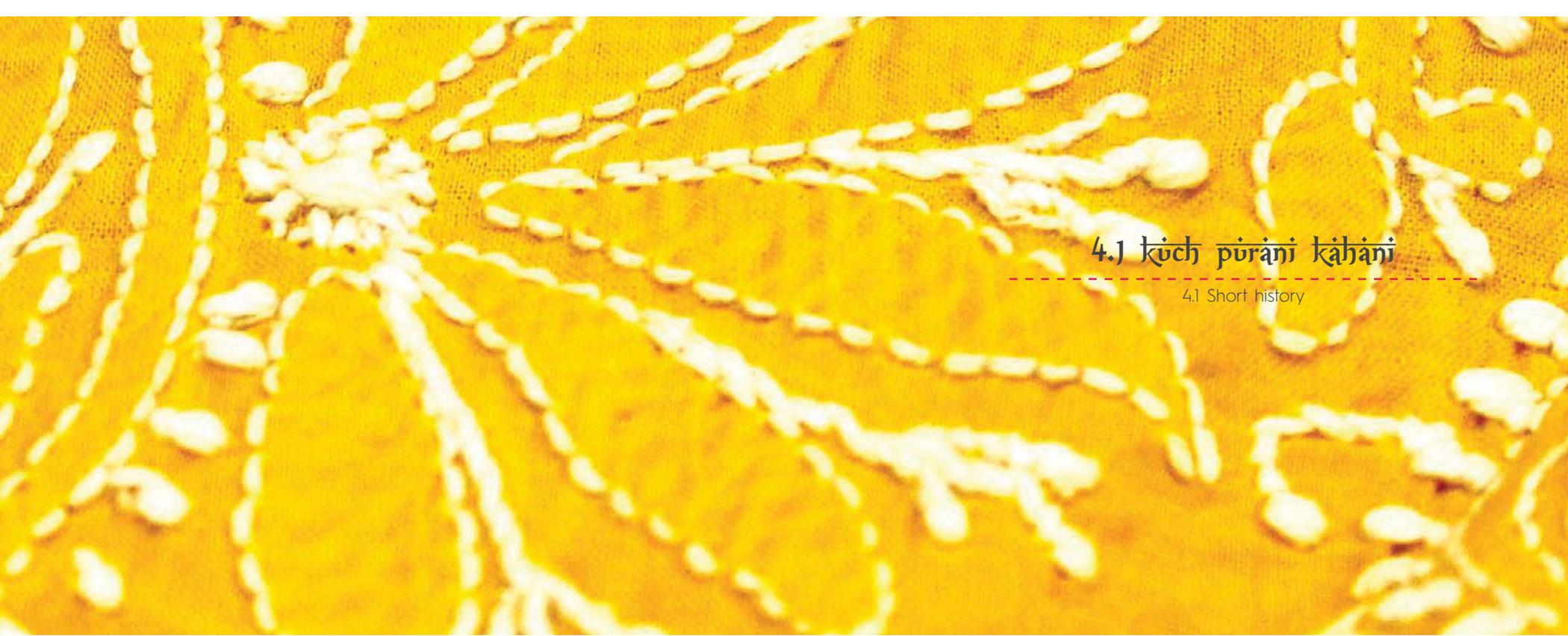


Chikan-Kari may have started in any form, by caste or religion but today it is lifestyle and livelihood of many Lucknowi families. It had seen downfall in the market because there were very few craftsmen left who were willing to do this embroidery and make a source of their earning at one point of time. The families of craftsmen which were involved in doing this embroidery were very poor with health and economic conditions. Literacy rate was very low and the amount with they were getting to make one piece was too less if it is compared to the hard work which goes in doing this embroidery. It was taking more from them than giving any type of employment.

When a art or a craft form becomes a tool to earn livelihood to a society, not only artist or craftsmen gets benefited but there so many other people gets benefited at the same time. In the starting Chikan-Kari was done only on Topi and Angrakha, it was limited and very few people were related to this craft. Only ladies used to do this embroidery and then it was sent to make final product. Slowly it entered the market and many of the other dress material started getting embroidered by this craft. Now when we have multiple dress option and varied number of people to cater many different people had to come together to make this work. Due to this craft,

people like tailors, washer men, wood workers, embroiders, and even a people who can just pack the product got the option to earn their living because of this industry.

Yes it takes a lot of time and effort to master this art, when I was visiting to SEWA Lucknow I saw ladies were getting training to improve their skills and techniques of this craft. Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA Lucknow) is an autonomous organization for Chikan Artisan. It came into existence by a UNICEF sponsored study which was conducted in 1979 on the conditions of Chikan artisans. It stated that more 40,000 artisans at that time



4.1 kũch pũrāñi kāhāñi

4.1 Short history

were working for the Chikan industry were highly exploited. They were not getting paid proper wages for their hard work, and what could be the fair wage it used to depend on contractor or the middleman between artisans and the retailer. Since embroidery is only one aspect of a particular dress other than fabric, raw material, tailors, new design, new patterns, dyeing, washing, packaging, transport etc and to keep the price competitive in the market these artisans used to suffer a lot. Being done by hand and by different artisans on the same design the results were different in terms of quality many of the time wages were cut of these artisans. Artisans were mostly

poor economical background, and mostly not literate they were never able to fight for the right price which they should get. Children of these families were most effected because poor economic conditions as a family usually had more than 5 kids on an average. Their basic requirements of food and education were rarely fulfilled anytime, and they used to get employed at very early age.

In 1984, an organization was registered by 31 women with name of Self Employed Women's Association under 1960 Society's Registration act for 'CHIKAN KARI'. At the beginning SEWA Lucknow the major agenda

for this organization was to remove the middle man and act as platform where artisans can directly respond to the social needs and sell their product directly to the market.

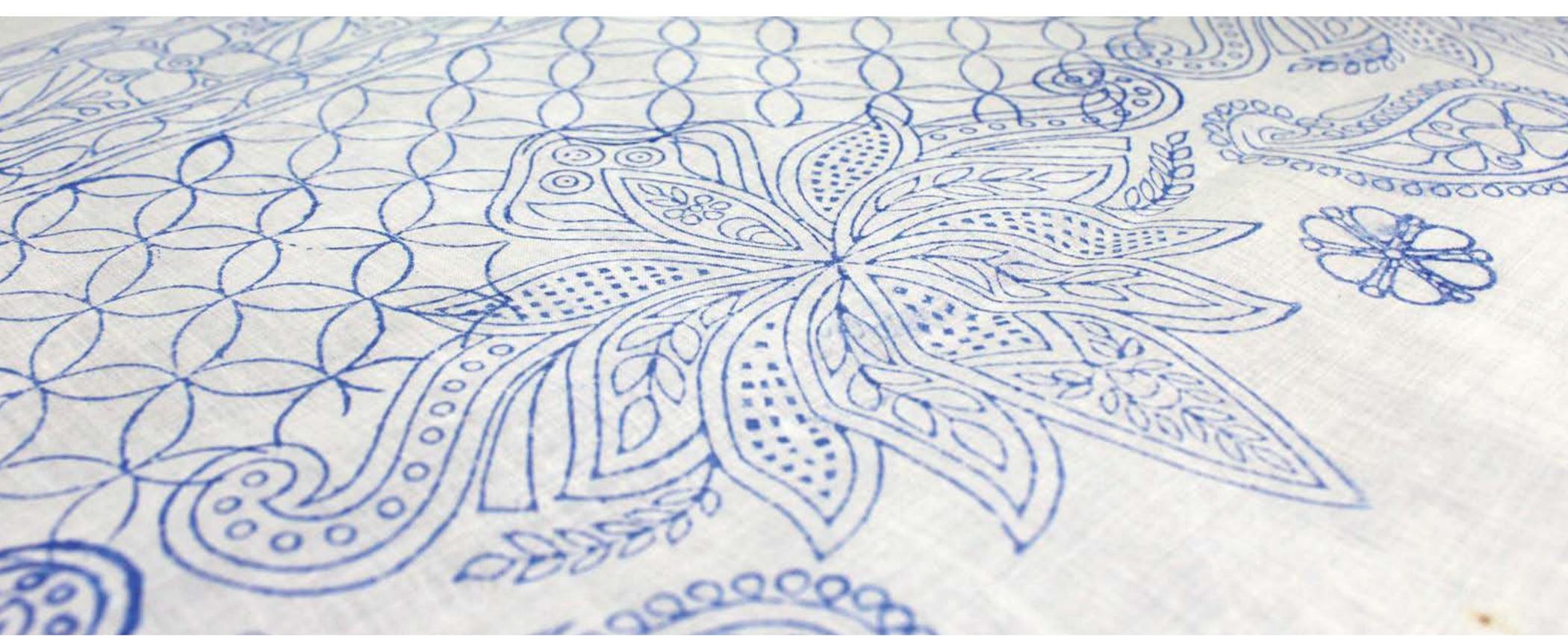
Today around 8,000 women are directly associated with this organization, where they get training for production and marketing. Their wages has gone up and women are feel proud working as owner of the firm not the employees. Their wages has subsequently gone up and it has also helped the artisans who are connected to the organization, but they know the value of their hard work and getting paid well if not same as SEWA Lucknow.

4.2 chikān-kāri kārnē kā tāreēkā

4.2 How it is done?

After visiting to different places, I recognized there is separate process for separate places. At some places embroidery is done earlier before making in to the final product, while at some places it is done after preparing the final garment. In some cases fabric are cut in the pattern and sent it to artisans, and at the last product is stitched.

It also depends on the type of the product also, as now Chikan-Kari is not restricted only as garments but it has moved to home decor. Bed sheets, curtains, cushions covers and many more. This is one of the main reason this art has adapted itself with the society demands and every changing fashion trends.

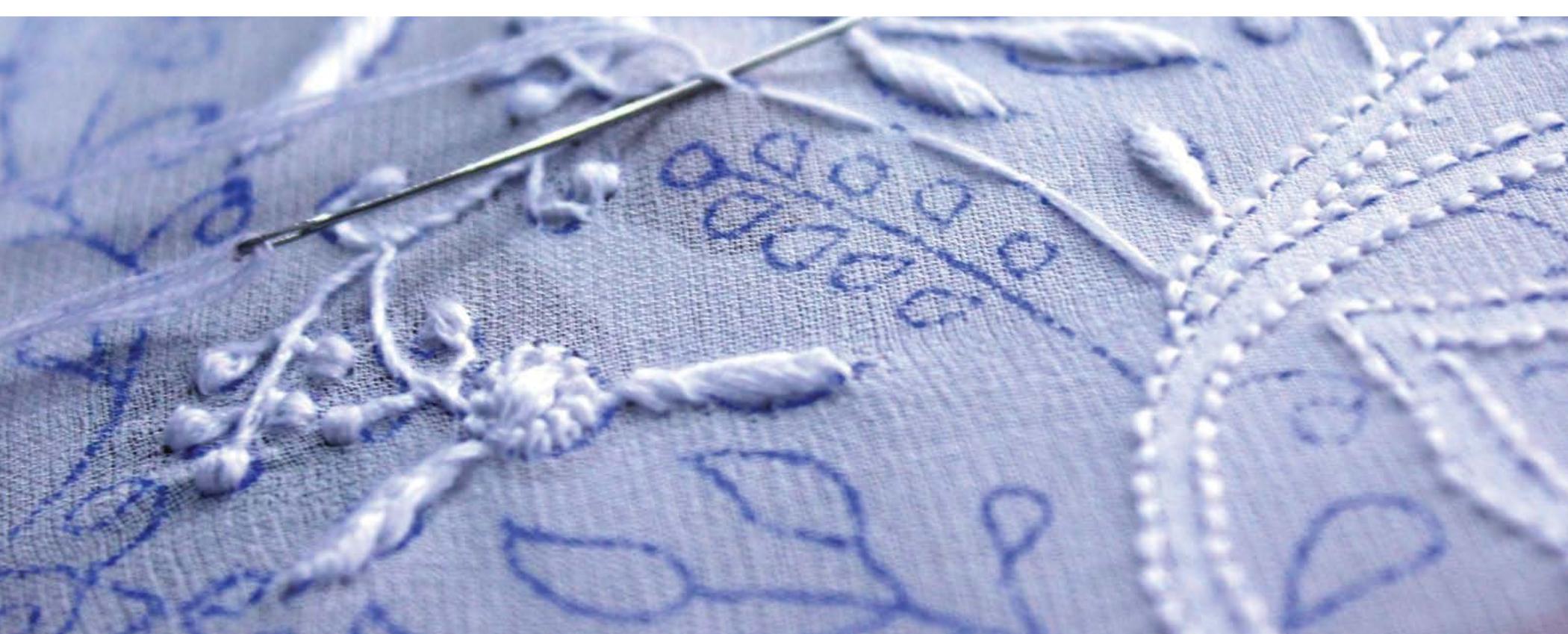


The first stage of this embroidery is source the fabric and chhapa (marking of motifs) is done of the desired design. Ink used for marking is basically neel which is traditionally used to avoid yellowish tint of white fabric after washes. Neel is mixed with gum which gets removed while washing and remains with just the embroidered part.



Chhapaa or the stamp has motifs of the designs which are to be embroidered on the fabric are well prepared in advance. Wood workers are given the motifs a piece of paper which carve out from the piece of wooden block. Afterwards these are mixed and matched with other motifs to create a pattern on the fabric.

Most of the motifs are floral in nature or generally inspired from plants and leaves of a flower. Designs of this blocks are given by the artisans and sometime they are also made on order if someone asks for any specific design.



Then it is sent to the artisans at their native places. Ladies who do these embroidery usually work from their home, so a person from the shopkeeper or the retailer takes these fabric from shopkeeper to artisans and the interval of a week or 15 days he visits again to receive the finished work and make the desired payment.

Annual Celebration of

SI MA R
ENTURES

Our Sponsor

iet
mantra

Partners



Umair Zafar Design Collection

4.3 हार समय एक जैसा नहि था

4.3 How things changed over the period?

I was visiting different places, meeting different people knowing what they knew, understanding market condition and looking on the customers how do they pick a Chikan dress material, it was evident that it has molded itself in such a manner that it may never go out of trend.

As I discussed earlier, it was done on white fabric with white thread but many people just can't wear on white clothes when thousand of color shades are available in the market. When an art is talked about, we always talk about its authenticity and the practices which were prominent in the beginning must refer the original Chikan-Kari. Certain type of motifs and patterns becomes their identity and it must be followed in similar fashion, it focused itself on what customers would like to get from this art. It transformed itself for the people and their demands with its identity, it was able to create a balance between both of these things. In India, people like wearing colors and I must say they look for variety. White wouldn't be able to fulfill most of their needs. Look at our day to day life, colors are everywhere various options are available which fulfill this need. We like to express our self with colors, whether it is

weddings, festivals, cultural events the way we Indian dress up are different from one another.

Chikan-kari took a very different route to sustain itself in the market. It moved from just cotton or muslin to Organdi, Kota, Georgette, Chiffon, Silk, Dalmia, Chanderi, Teri Rubia, Teri Voel, Voel, Linen etc. It tapped every possibility not only to keep up with the variety in terms of trend but it was also able to reach larger consumer group with various price range. Multiple fabric options gave the options to choose from what they would want, at the same time it gave the liberty to make it a fashion statement. It provided multiple texture, silhouette, fall of fabric and flexibility to call an item exclusive and for the mass.

Colored fabric played an important role to take this art to another dimension. Even if only cotton fabric came in 5 colors it gave a customer 5 different options of the same product with same motifs and patterns to choose from. One can just get an idea by this only that 1 fabric in 5 colors with 32 different stitches and 'n' number of different motifs. But fabric was not the only thing which offered multiple colors but the thread

for embroidery has a major role to play. A manufacturer may have limitations to keep only few colors in fabric due to the cost, but threads are very less costly as compared to fabric and it can be kept in various color options. When it started it was done only Topi and Men's Kurta, but now it caters women's wear, children wear, home furnishing and personal accessories. While this art was struggling to survive at one point of time, there was a boom in fashion and garment industry. In late 90's many Indian designer labels came up, and they saw Indian art form a great opportunity to explore. One may imagine how much it can cost to buy a white fabric with some white embroidery, but many of us just can't afford to wear or just to buy it.

After that there was no looking back, Chikan-Kari is done only in limited regions of Lucknow and its nearby villages. More than 50,000 artisans are involved in the form of embroidery and 90% of these products are exported to various cities of India and International market. Having a dress made up of Chikan-Kari in itself is a fashion statement.

5. kāryā prānālī

5. Methodology

I started my journey for this visual ethnography project with a small secondary study on Internet to gather information about the place and the people. I belong to a city which is 120 km apart from Lucknow, but in India every place is different with their people and lifestyle. Idea was to collect information of the places where I can find people to whom I can talk about it. Lucknow has its own long history and without talking about Lucknow, Chikan-Kari looks irrelevant. I also talked to the people who can give me the contacts of the people who work in this industry, but couldn't succeed because first it done only in Lucknow and nearby villages, second being something close to your eyes often gets neglected.

Anyway, I did my part on collecting information about important places of Lucknow and the areas where Chikan-Kari industry exists. I was so excited to visits this place and get the hands on experience. I stayed there at one my common friends place who lives in Lucknow for over an year so he may suggests the places where to go and how to commute in the city. I must say, it was a great help at least in a manner if I face a problem I may contact for help. One more

thing in winters of December and January it freezes like anything, so if you want to visit Lucknow either you have warm clothes or visit in the month of February and March or October and November.

With my secondary study about the city, it was very clear where I could find the people who deal in Chikan-Kari and what are the important places to visit. On the first I went to Aminabad, one of the busiest market of Lucknow where you can find almost everything. This is a market for the middle income group families, where they go routine for shopping. Most of the products in this market are locally produced and sold, whether it is garment, footwear, food, or home furnishing material. I went to number of shops and asked about the Chikan-Kari industry in Lucknow, almost everyone said I must visit Chowk the oldest market of Lucknow where Chikan is made and produced. As I said earlier study on Chikan-Kari can not be completed without knowing about Lucknow.

Next morning I started by visiting Bara-Imambara as it is the place Nawab used to live which in the way of Lucknow. On these

places you can often get a guide, who can take you to the places where common man usual never know even after living in the city. He took me Sri. SS Chikan Industry who is a Manufacturer and a whole dealer of Chikan-Kari. I looked into the shop and one of the employee showed me the Kurta for daily wear. I only wanted to understand how things work here. I bought a Kurta from the store when owner of the shop came up to me and gifted me a pack of handkerchief, and asked me to keep the Kurta which I bought it from his store. Well I was confused but I followed his instruction. He was very polite and gentle so I tried to discuss about my project and if he can help as he is manufacturer.

Guddu baiya, what everyone is calling him in the store and he gave me card and contact number. I came out I asked the guide to take me to the chhota Imamabara, and certainly what I bought it from the store and the price. Since I wasn't carrying in my hand, he asked with my friend who was accompanying at that time. There was the conclusion, every guide gets a percentage amount what a customer buys from a shop.

Then visited Chhota Imambara for that day and at the time of return I looked around the shops in Chowk. Chowk is the oldest market in Lucknow and it is said, you can find most of the authentic things here of the city. Then next it was time to Guddu bhaiya, we I tried to contact him but he wasn't available on that day so I thought I must look for other shops where I can talk to people. Well as it said, Lucknow "Nawabon ka shahar" people take their time. Most of the shops were opening till 12 noon, and owners were yet to arrive. After struggling a bit I reached Lucknow Chikan Factory. It is local buyer and retailers, I discussed with him and very kindly he was to discuss. I met Mr. Ram Kumar there who took me around his workshop, and explained the procedure of the making the garment. Rest of the time I invested in looking around the way they work and type of customer who visit this shop. Next day again I visited this place to meet owner of the shop. He discussed how they started the business and how the Chikan-Kari had become reliable source of income of his family.

Many of the people complain that people don't entertain, which is somehow true but it is

also true that they can't spend much time on discussing. Next destination was Hazratganj market of Lucknow, it is considered market for elite people who come here to spend their evening. It is also where you can get the best Chikan-Kari products in terms of quality and the variety. This day I explored the market and looked around to understand the taste of people. Hazratganj market is very much different from Chowk or Aminabad. Hazratganj is near Lucknow's Vidhan Sabha, Chief ministers residence, GPO, Lucknow's zoo. There I came to that there is state museum inside the zoo. This day I spent in the museum to understand the history. History can be told in museums and also with living examples.

Residency, a British monument built in the period of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan. In 1857 the place witnessed a prolonged battle which is also known as Siege of Lucknow; this began on 1 July and continued until 17 November. In Lucknow if we talk about Chikan-Kari, there is one name which gets ignored that is SEWA. Well one might get confused if on go on looking for SEVA Chikan, I visited their store at park and explained about my project. They agreed to help but asked to their factory

at Siatpur road. Seva Chikan is a pvt. ltd. company which deals in Chikan Kari products. There I met Ms. Ashima who took me around their workshop how things go in process. It seemed very nice that people are entertaining from their busy schedule, but after sometime I got to know this is not that SEWA which I was looking for. It is SEWA Lucknow, Self- Employed Women's Association, which started in 1984 to revive this art and what we see is the effort of this organization.

I tried to contact this organization and after 2 days I got an appointment with Mr. Ashish Chakravarthy. He explained me about how SEWA came in to existence and how it empowered the artisans. I must say it wouldn't be possible without them to see Chikan-Kari today in market and in the hands of common man. Then I met Mr. Prabodh Arya who owns a shop in Hazratganj market who told me the up's and down's of the market and how Chikan was able to survive from it worst times. Though I wasn't able much of artisans because they work near by village and retailer don't share their contact, but SEWA helped me to get hands on experience of art and artisans in their training center.



 **SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, LUCKNOW**
सेल्फ इम्प्लाइड विमेन्स एसोसिएशन (सेवा), लखनऊ



5.1 स़ेवा लूकनू

5.1 Self Employed Women Association

Self-Employed Women's Association, Lucknow is an autonomous organization for Chikan artisans. Setting of SEWA-Lucknow came from a UNICEF sponsored study conducted in 1979 on the living and working conditions of Chikan artisans.

Objectives of the organization are as follows:

- To ensure that Chikan craftsmen get sufficient work at fair wages with letting away exploitation.
- Network and partner with Fair Trade social minded organizations for marketing.
- To identify and develop promising new market for Chikan products.
- To train members in purchase, production, management and accounting.
- To upgrade the skills of artisans through training programs which will improve the quality and range of their work.
- To revive and revitalize the traditional craft and take it to highest level of refinement.
- To provide strong platform for artisans which women can bargain for higher wages from traders and middle man.
- To ensure social benefits like education and health facilities for members of the

organizations and their children.

SEWA Lucknow that campaigns and practices Fair Trade is a member of the World Fair Trade Organization and Fair Trade Forum, India. At every exhibition, the artisan women who have over the years developed their capacities as very good sales women directly sell their products to the customers. SEWA Lucknow participated in bridal organized by 'Femina India' in Mumbai, which was grand success as well as high motivating factor for the women artisans who themselves were present at the show.

When Chikan handicraft was on the verge of becoming extinct due to prototype designs, that were monotonous and all above low payments by the business houses to the artisans. Urge for the buying by customers as well as production by the producers together was taking downward curve. After making endless efforts over the years was able to revive the craft by bringing in product variations and continuous changes in designs and created new interests in the buyer's mind and finally, gave a new life to the product.

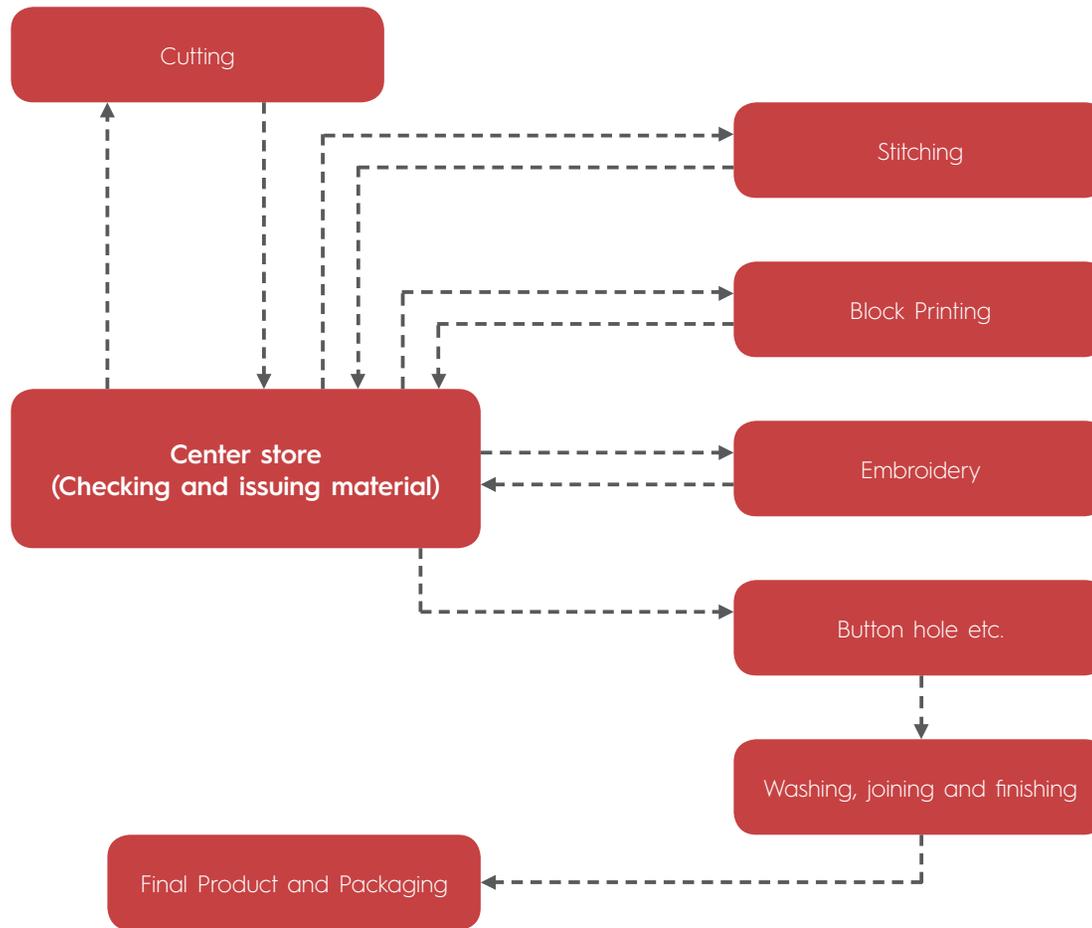
For educating the children in the community, SEWA Lucknow has been running a school since 1982 known as SEWA Montessori school which has classes from Nursery to standard eighth. Children are linked with formal schools afterwards. The organization has also been running three residential schools, one in Lucknow, Barabanki and Raebareli districts for school dropout girls of the age group 11-14 years.

Although many of the artisans don't work for SEWA-Lucknow, but SEWA was able to do is to create awareness among all the artisans about their right wages and fight for it. The skill development programs run by SEWA not only keep up the artisans with market trends but also provide stipend while they are getting trained. So, they can earn while they are just getting trained to work in the industry.

Making women of this Chikan-Kari self reliant could be considered as greatest success which made a mark in history of this art, artisans and whole industry which is mostly run by private buyers who run their business in the city of Lucknow.

kaam ka pravah

Work flow at SEWA





Center Store



Cutting of the fabric as per desired patterns



Stitching of the garment



Printing blocks



Block printing



Embroidery



Pic.1 and Pic.2: Chikan-Kari, Pic.3: Appliqué, Pic.4: Daraz



Final checking and Packaging



6. kuch kahi suni

6. While talking to people

Haaath ka kaam toh, bas haaath ka kaam hai
machiney ise aaj bhi nahai chhu payi hain

Mr. Ram Kumar (Lucknow Chikan Factory)

Learning an art is a long process, so how long you have been involved in this.

I have started working at the age when I was suppose to study, due to early death of my father. I had to support my family, so I started learning this at learning centers. I must have been around 20 years since I have been working. Today everyone has their expenses, a person who is adult can't afford to first learn this and then start earning. People involved in this industry often start very early age.

When you see ready made industry, what you think why Chikan-Kari has survived.

Today it is done on many different types of fabrics and different colors. Customers always gets something new from the market because we continuously work on various designs. Everyone in the supply chain plays their part like tailors masters explores with patterns, block printers shows their excellence, Chikan artists expresses their elegance which makes a garment exquisite and unique.

Now embroidery is done machines also, then it is done by hands.

Machines have come and gone, but it were not able reach the perfection of imperfection of hand crafted garments. One can fix multiple colors in same designs while in machines you have to multiple pieces of same design. Machines also loses the sense of uniqueness, you can manipulate the designs at your will but the with machines you need to stick what you decide in the beginning.

kūch kāhī ṣūnī

While talking to people

Nūr jāhān nē iṣṣē pāidā kiya,
pār pālā pōṣā iṣṣē nāwābōn nē

Akbar (Lucknow Chikan Factory)

I heard somewhere it was started by Nur Jahan, so what was the contribution of Nawabs?

Yes, it said that it was started by Nur Jahan and I do believe she is the who gave the birth to this art form. Giving a birth to child, and raising him/her are two different things. Nur Jahan would have been the mother, but it was raised by the Nawabs. Almost every Nawab contributed something or the other but it was Wajid Ali Shah made it a style statement, which created interest to common man.

How many people may be involved in this industry?

If I say 50% of the people of the community is involved in this business. Some have put money, while some have their efforts whether it is artisans, tailors, washer men, transport, packaging and many others. It has been lifeline of the city and taken care thousands of people.

I heard Chikan-Kari has 32 stitches, so how can I find the samples of these stitches.

Today we generally make use of maximum of 8 to 10 stitches which easy to do or it is cost effective. Many of the artisans had never knew or done all type of stitches. Very people may be knowing about this, and only if he/she is above 70 years of age. Finding a sample of every stitch may not be possible today, and even I can not name all of them. See market may have a demand for the product of Rs. 500 bracket and if I create a product of Rs. 2000 it will create an imbalance. At the end we are business man, and we have to cater everyone's need.

कुच काहि सुनि

While talking to people

Yeh unka permanent kaam toh hai nah,
 agar din mein 25 rupaye ka kaam bhi kar liya,
 toh yeh unki upari kamayi hai

Ashima ji (SEVA Chikan)

I have heard most of the artisans work in nearby villages.

See if have sell a product of Rs. 500 and if go for the artisans in the city the cost will very high. It is send to nearby villages where ladies work from their home. When they are done by their routine work at home like cooking etc, they do embroidery on these pieces. If some guest comes to their house, they are able to leave the work as it as and when again they are free they can start working on it. They live in mud houses and surroundings are not very clean, and they are able to take care of the fabric. So they never completely rely on this, as they work it as part time job to earn some extra money. If they are able to work for Rs. 25 a day, they are making extra money.

You have your own factory in the city so how does it work here.

In the city, we have patterns masters tailors, washer men and other but the Chikan-Kari is done mostly in villages only.

kūch kāhī ṣūnī

While talking to people

Only 10% of chikan is consumed in Lucknow,
but most of the things are exported.

Prabodh Arya (Beau Monde)

As we know it was started on white cotton with white.....

Earlier it was done on loam fabric, when the quality of loam gone down it was shifted to cotton and muslin. Then it moved to Silk, Chiffon and Georgette. Chikan looks best on translucent fabric and silk was opaque so it moved to Chiffon and Georgette, but the problem with Chiffon was it was too light and easily gets torn away. Today the favorite fabric is Georgette, it is able to sustain the weight.

As it was in white on white, so does it affected the market?

In the scenario, it was taken up fusion. Chikan was combined with Jardozi and many famous designers came into picture who took this craft and tried, tested, manipulated the designs as per the market. It was showcased in bollywood and it became popular. Right now only 10% of Chikan is consumed in Lucknow and rest is exported. One of the curious part in this embroidery is, most of the motifs are floral, leaves, geometric figures, paisley even fruits also but you will never find and an animal figure. Animals like elephants which looks like very ethnic, but one may never find these in Chikan-Kari.



7. माँन अँर चिकान-क़ारी

7. Insights

Chikan-Kari is not merely an art but a culture which has evolved over the period. A person can look and appreciate the art today, but it has been the soul of Lucknow. Traditional yet contemporary at the same time, this is what Chikan-Kari all about. Today we talk about many art forms which are on the verge of dying and people are making various efforts to retain. It has overcome the phase of its extinction in the era of industrialization by making itself available for everyone.

We say handicraft is not affordable and it doesn't look trendy enough in current scenario. Chikan-Kari in itself is a statement of being

elegant and exquisite which reflects the charm of Lucknow. Chikan-Kari holds the perfection of being imperfect, and yet being perfect is incomparable. Industrialization has brought so many things to make things easier and faster, yet it was unable to match anything near to hand done Chikan-Kari.

Beauty of this art is all because of the people of who do this embroidery. We say our work reflects our mind, and for an artist it most important of all. I saw many of the pieces in colored fabric with beautiful color threads yet nothing can beat white on white embroidery.





