

Chikankari- The Craft of Nawabi Shaan

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Abstract: “Chikankari – Beauty on White “ as its main centre of focus, where its existence over the time is being studied with the different evolution it has shown in its products. Chikankari is a distinctive integral part of Lucknow culture. In India it is believed that Chikan embroidery may have existed from times immemorial. It is said that Noor Jahan brought this craft to India and later it was whole-heartedly adopted by the Nawabs of Lucknow. Thus it became a part of the culture of Lucknow. The embroidery work on clothes was a common feature. In ancient and medieval periods embroidery may have been more popular among the elites but in the present age it is common even among the masses. Because of which nowadays the market is flooded with coarsely executed work and thoughtless design diversifications which has eroded the sensibility of the craft.

Keywords - Elegant, fine, extravagant, global presence, coarsely designs, elite class. “Fashion is architecture. It is a matter of proportions”, said Coco Chanel, (Sieve Wright, 2007)

I. INTRODUCTION

Chikankari is a traditional embroidery style from Lucknow, India. It’s an art, which results in the transformation of the plainest cotton and organdie into flowing yards of magic. Chikankari is subtle embroidery, white on white, in which minute and delicate stitches stand out as textural contrasts, shadows and trceries. 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 remonial 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, uli jaali, bijli, jaali, kharau, keel, kangan, bulbul and hath kadi.

A BRIEF OF CHIKANKARI

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 .

CHIKAN IN GLOBAL WORLD

A consumer’s delight and the artisan’s pride, Chikankari forms an integral part of the Indian Ethnic Wear. Be it Ladies Chikan Work or Ethnic Wear for men, Lucknow Chikan is adorned equally by both men and women. Since time immemorial, Chikan has been accredited as a masterpiece not only in India but in other parts of the world as well. Chikan Embroidery has been famous as Indian Embroidery in different countries. Chikankari has registered and witnessed global acknowledgment and this has proved as a catalyst for the export of not only embroidered traditional apparel but also Embroidered Bed Sheets, Embroidered Table Cloth, and Embroidered Cushion Covers. Chikan craft has a global presence. Ancient Europe has been greatly enamored of Indian fabrics from Greek and Roman times. So fine and delicate Indian fabrics that the Romans romantically called them woven winds ,wherein the beauty of the craft is not sacrificed on the altar of mechanical necessity, but the Chikan workforce made up largely of women who are adequately compensated for their efforts and keep up the aesthetic spirit of the beautiful whispering white woven winds, that are restored to some semblance of their former glory.

There are global celebrity like Madonna wearing Chikan apparel is a clear indication of the popularity the Lucknow Chikankari has outside the country. MLK Exports is the leading export company that is famous for exporting product of this Hand Embroidery. Since 1975, this company has exported Chikan Embroidery products like Dresses to global brands like Amina (Japan), Fashion Fuse (United States), Ghora Tabela (Uruguay), Jackpot (Copenhagen), Betina Gers (Argentina), HHG (Spain), Coline (French), etc. Many more such brands including the aforementioned have ordered stocks worth crores of Rupees and this

indicates about the reach and the global appeal of this unique hand crafted artistry. Internationally acclaimed designers Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla have been using Chikankari Embroidery in their designs for 20 years now. What makes their contribution even more uplifting for the image of this beautiful Embroidery is that the duo got an actress of James Bond series fame, Judi Dench, to wear one of their magnificent Chikan embroidery creations to receive an Oscar in 2004. Calvin-Klein, one of the most respected and famous fashion brands of the world once gave an order of 1000 pieces to a vendor in the Chowk area of Lucknow that defines how it imaged its place in the foreign market.

PROBLEMS

- 1.Undercutting practice among manufacturers
- 2.No regular work to artisans
- 3.Very less wages to artisans
- 4.Abundance of artisans of only 4-5 styles of stitches
- 5.Lengthy production
- 6.No designer input: All the designing work is carried out by the manufacturer himself, either by copying designs from fashion catalogues or by ideas imparted by buyers.

THE INNOVATIONS AND EXPERIMENTATIONS IN CHIKANKARI

The colour selection for chikankari has undergone a change tremendously. Out went the voiles and mulmuls and the pastel shades and came georgettes, Tussars and silk that exhibit the styles. It's not just chikankari work on fabrics like cotton, but experimentation, the order of the day, has enhanced basic chikan with more detailing- with zardozi, crystals and so on. Changes in patterns, design, motifs and use less stiches have lead chikankari and its elegant beauty to a detreating stage. And even high rise of demand is leading to producing low quality products along with thoughtless designs

LUCKNOW: CITY OF NAWABS

The city of Lucknow has a prominent place in the history of India particularly for its art, historical monuments and rich cultural heritage.



BADA IMAM BARA, LUCKNOW

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. Today, this delicate form of embroidery is traditionally practiced in and around the city of Lucknow.it is a Lovely old city, a city of old gardens and palaces, fine architectural conceit mosques, temples and ageing monuments, a city so favoured by European travellers once upon a time, that it was popularly called the Constantinople of the East. Like Marseille, it has a great deal of historicity. It is synonymous with architectural elegance, cultural finesse, social warmth and an enduring love for gracious living. Lucknow also has the distinction of being today, the cusp of a very beautiful, very aesthetic form of white floral embroidery, unique to this geographical location. Chikankari has been practiced in Lucknow for almost more than two hundred years.

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

The artisans of Chikan Embroidery are scattered in and around Lucknow within a radius of about 125K.M. The districts covered are Unnao, Barabanki, Lakhimpur, Hardoi etc. Some other villages where one can find few artisans of Chikankari are Raibareilly, Sultanpur and Faizabad. There are 2.5 lac (approx.) people who are attached with Chikankari including artisans, washer men, block printers, etc. working in chikankari industries.

CHIKANKARI GI: A Step towards International Branding

GI is accorded to products that have a specific geographical origin. Lucknow got the GI for chikankari in December, 2008. The government of Uttar Pradesh can now initiate legal action against manufacturers producing Chikan anywhere outside Lucknow (and its periphery) .The GI certification will promote genuine chikankari as the community which is producing chikankari in Lucknow has got the exclusive rights to manufacture and market it.

The word "Chikan" steps from a Persian word derived from Chic, which referred to the 'Jali'" work done on marble or wood. It is also famous as "shadow work" or "white embroidery work", traditionally practiced in the city of Lucknow and its environments Chikankari of Uttar Pradesh also famous as "Shadow work ". It is a very delicate work. Word „Chikan" is derived from Persian word „Chakin" means making delicate pattern over fabrics. Chikankari is an art worked with needle and untwisted thread of cotton on sheer fabric Chikankari of Uttar Pradesh also famous as "Shadow work ". It is a very delicate work. Word „Chikan" is

derived from Persian word „Chakin“ means making delicate pattern over fabrics. As per its geographical origin it also is helpful in coping up with the heat and dirt of summers.

CHIKANKARI IN LITERATURE

Chikankari dates back from the III century B.C. Ajanta's rock painting show early samples of chikankari embroidery, as few designs and motifs are similar even their pattern of placement is even at someplace.



AJANTA ROCK PAINTING

In the third century B.C. Megasthenes wrote about „White flowered muslin worn by courtiers in reign of Chandragupta Maurya. Ancient Europe has been greatly enamoured of Indian fabrics from Greek and Roman times. So fine and delicate were the Indian fabrics that the Romans romantically called them woven winds. It is also believed chikankari was used in courts of Harshvardhan, (Dongerker, 1954) where White signified Royalty and Sophistication. 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 Nawabs 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.



CHIKANKARI: A BRIEF TRAVEL THROUGH TIME

TILL 1860

Till 1860 this artistic embroidery was the craftsmanship of the ladies of royal mogul families. The products were in use by royal family members only.

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 stiches that are used in chikankari which are mainly permutations and combinations of six to seven basic stiches given below:

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

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

2. Embossed Stitches (they give a grainy appearance)

1. Murri
2. Phanda

II. CONCLUSION

Developing innovative products will help artisans to catch up to the competition and developed more contemporized 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 commercialization and machine work.

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