

LUCKNOW CHIKAN- TRADITIONAL HAND EMBROIDERY FROM LUCKNOW

Written by

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FADE IN:

Shot of embroidery work being done.

MAIN TITLE: LUCKNOW CHIKAN

Traditional hand embroidery from Lucknow

Shots of embroiders showing finished products of chikankari work and several kurtas hung on ropes left for drying in the open.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Lucknow Chikan- the traditional hand embroidery work originated in India's northern city of Lucknow hundreds of years ago. Originally done with gold and silver threads, the embroidery known as chikankari is now done with colourful threads on different types of clothes. The chikankari work that started in Lucknow has spread to other places but the work is diminishing in its native place.

EXT. STREETS OF LUCKNOW - DAY

Shot from a moving vehicle showing the main roads of Lucknow and the city centre.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I tried to find out why the embroidery work that is synonymous with its place of origin is gaining more popularity in other areas as compared to its place of origin. The thing is, the work has started declining in Lucknow but the art will survive in other places where the cost of living is less compared to cities.

Shot of a person making patterns on plain white cloth using a wooden block and people moving around in the streets of Lucknow.

TITLE: Let's find out how the embroidery work is done and what do the embroiders have to say about their work.

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Omar Ali, an embroider, is telling about his work while another embroider is busy at work and making designs using needles.

OMAR ALI

Chikan embroidery is complete
handwork. There is no machine work.
We do only embroidery work with
needles.

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Azhar Ali, an embroider is telling about how the materials required are collected and what are the steps involved in making a chikankari product.

AZHAR ALI

We go to the shops and get the
clothes. The shopkeepers send us
photos of the designs they prefer
on WhatsApp.

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Azhar Ali is showing the designs of chikankari products sent by shopkeepers on his phone.

Shot of chikankari pattern on butter paper.

AZHAR ALI

Accordingly we make patterns using
butter paper and then send them for
approval. If shopkeepers like the
designs, then they place order with
us.

Shots of final products of chikankari work being dried and patterns being printed on plain white cloth.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The shopkeepers play a huge part in
this business. They give the
materials, get the embroideries
done and sell in their shops for
the prices they deem fit.

TITLE: Can the embroiders sell their work on their own?

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Omar Ali is sitting in his workshop and is talking about the prices of the products they make and why it is not possible for the embroider community to sell their work directly to customers.

OMAR ALI

The real profit is made by the shopkeepers. We are daily wage labourers. We complete the work and handover the finished products.

Shot of a finished chikankari product.

OMAR ALI (CONT'D)

This entire piece of cloth will sell for Rs 3500 in the market. But we make it for Rs 500.

Shot of embroidery work being done.

OMAR ALI (CONT'D)

No one will buy from us. Shopkeepers have their own guarantee and security, so customers prefer to buy from them.

TITLE: What happens if the embroiders raise concern?

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Omar Ali is talking about the limitations the embroiders face in chikankari work.

OMAR ALI

If the shopkeeper gives Rs 350 for work that is worth Rs 400 and we object to it, then the printed clothes with our designs will be given to a different embroider. Our hard work in making the patterns will go to waste.

Shots of an embroider doing needle work and Omar Ali showing a yellow coloured finished chikankari product.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Hand embroidery is a tedious work. The embroiders sit for hours at a stretch to finish the designs.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I asked if they want to teach the next generation this line of work and this is what they had to say.

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Azhar Ali and Omar Ali explaining their reasons for not teaching the work of chikankari to the people of the next generation.

AZHAR ALI

If there was more money, then would have taught. We don't earn enough.

OMAR ALI

We don't teach anyone now. They don't want to learn because there is no profit in this work. We don't want to teach because they will remain worried unnecessarily in this line of work.

TITLE: But one has to run a household

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Omar Ali is talking about the wages and profits earned by the embroiders in the chikankari work.

OMAR ALI

The profit is bare minimum. 75% of the embroiders have left this work. Some are driving rickshaws. A good embroider gets Rs 150 for 8 hours of work. It's difficult to run households. Those who are still working are helpless.

EXT. GOMTI RIVER BANK - DAY

Shots of washermen taking out and folding the dried chikankari products.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

After the chikankari work is finished, the final products are sent to the washermen. These people here wash the clothes in the nearby Gomti river.

EXT. GOMTI RIVER BANK - DAY

Mohammad Shafiq, a washerman, is seen taking out the chikankari kurtas hung on ropes and folding them.

MOHAMMAD SHAFIQ

We wash the clothes and after they have dried, we iron them and return to the shopkeepers. Each piece of cloth fetches us Rs 10.

Shots of chikankari dress material, kurtas hanging on rope, embroidery work being done and streets of Lucknow.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

After talking to the embroiders, it's easy to say that all that glitters is not gold. But like many things, the art of Lucknow Chikan has also found its way of surviving.

INT. EMBROIDERY WORKSHOP - DAY

Omar Ali talking about the hurdles faced by the embroiders in chikankari work and what is the future of Lucknow Chikan in the place where it first originated.

OMAR ALI

70% of the workshops are now closed in Lucknow. Daily wages are least in Lucknow even though the work is originally from here.

Shots of Azhar Ali showing the patterns on finished chikankari work.

OMAR ALI (CONT'D)

The work is not just limited to nearby villages but has also spread to faraway villages but not so much in Lucknow. The work will happen in rural areas because the rates of work are same but the cost of living is much less in villages.

Shots of chikankari work done on dress materials.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

At first I wondered whether Lucknow Chikan will become a dying art? But Chikankari is going to survive.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The traditional hand embroidery
remains in high demand. The
association of Lucknow will remain
stitched.

FADE OUT.

END CREDIT

Special thanks to Bobby uncle and Reena mashi

A film by Amrita Kundu