



SHIMMERS IN A DULL ROOM: EXPERIENCES OF HOME-BASED WOMEN ARTISANS IN THE KAAMDANI CRAFT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. ABSTRACT	05
2. INTRODUCTION	06
3. EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR	07
4. METHODOLOGY	08
5. BACKGROUND	09
6. A CASE STUDY OF THE KAAMDANI CRAFT	11
7. FACTORS FOR WOMEN TO TAKE UP KAAMDANI AND FEMINISATION OF THE CRAFT	13
8. INVISIBILITY AND NON-RECOGNITION OF WORK	16
9. LOCATING CHALLENGES OF HOME-BASED WOMEN WORKERS THROUGH EXPERIENCES OF KAAMDANI WOMEN ARTISANS	17
10. IMPACT OF COVID-19	32
11. OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES	34
12. EXISTING POLICIES	35
13. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	36
14. CONCLUSION	37
15. APPENDIX	39
16. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	41
17. REFERENCES	42

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■ ABSTRACT

The Kaamdani (also known as Muqaish) craft was traditionally done by men, however, over the years the craft has been feminised, employing home-based women workers. The women artisans in Lucknow function from within their homes, juggling between their family and work life. Home-based women artisans face challenges, which are common to most feminised handicrafts in India. Due to the feminisation of the craft, women have to face the double-burden, and take up work available to them- which are characterised by poor working conditions, insecurity, low wages, and irregular work. This paper attempts to understand the challenges that home-based women artisans face, which have been impacted by the society's presumption of the secondary role of women as breadwinners in the family, and the notion of female submissiveness.

Keywords:

Home-based workers, women artisans, kaamdani, Lucknow

■ INTRODUCTION

Kaamdani or *Muqaish* work is a crafting technique done with gold and silver wire. The flattened gold or silver wire, known as ‘*badla taar*,’ is pierced into the fabric or threaded through a needle to create designs. The needlework is around 450 years old. Kaamdani is credited to Empress Nur Jahan, who, influenced by Turkish stitching, brought it to Lucknow (CS et al., 2019). As the Nawabs of Awadh loved ornate and substantial needlework, kaamdani creations flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries (ibid.). The craftspeople received favour in the form of patronage and were led to create new designs. However, kaamdani declined during Aurangzeb’s reign (ibid.). The Nawabs of Awadh revived it, given their penchant for gold and ornate clothing. Initially, the needlework was designed for the city’s royalty and aristocracy (Gwynne, 1910). Earlier, threads of metals like gold and silver were used for craftwork. However, steel threads replaced them later due to rising raw material costs.

Kaamdani has not progressed technologically and is heavily reliant on low-tech manual labour. Men continue to work in *karkhanas* (workshops), performing all the steps of kaamdani manufacture, including embroidery. Women working from home are involved in only the embellishment. The work is time-consuming, with low wages and benefits. Hence, men move to higher-paying jobs, such as delivery hauls or battery-powered rickshaw drivers. Men moving out necessitates an additional income for these households, pushing women into the craft’s production. Some people’s only protection against complete destitution is the money they earn through kaamdani.

Handicrafts represent the culture and craftsmanship of locally produced materials and products. However, due to competition from machine-made goods, the local artisans face socio-economic challenges and the diminishing of the craft in the future. A report by the All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association on the Impact of COVID-19 on artisans and craft enterprises revealed a demand for financial support by individual artisans who were in distress due to the absence of working capital. It was seen that individual artisans required short-term support (All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association, 2020). Thus, it becomes vital to focus on the challenges they face due to the gendered nature of the craft: low bargaining power of craftswomen, poor working conditions, and low wages. Journalist Mehru Jaffer and a few of our respondents remarked that the craft is now dominated by women who work from home. Through the case of India’s handicraft industry, one of the largest employing sectors for women after agriculture, a specific focus on home-based workers in the kaamdani craft will be explored in this study. The study will focus on the kaamdani craft and locate the challenges home-based women face, who are the leading contributors to one of the main processes of production. The study will be based on artisans in Old Lucknow, a hub for various embroidered crafts, majorly employing women.

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

India has a huge informal economy, with approximately 93% of its workforce earning a living as informal workers (National Sample Survey Office, 2014, as cited in State Bank of India, 2021). The number of people employed informally in the organised (formal) and unorganised (informal) sectors has stayed consistently above 80% for recent decades (Table 1). This trend is concerning. The labour force is expected to increase until 2030, and almost all of it will be absorbed in informal employment in the organised and unorganised sectors (Mehrotra, 2019). After that, the induction of the labour force into the economy will begin slowing down due to the demographic dividend¹ for India ending in 2040, leaving the country with a highly precarious young workforce (ibid.). This would mean women workers, an integral part of the unorganised sector workforce in India, would get stuck in the cycle of informality and insecurity. Women’s work can be classified as ‘casual labour,’ including the production of garments or value addition to garments in the form of embroidery and other minor products like cushion covers, tablecloths, batua (pouches), and much more inside the confines of the workers’ household. The absence of decent working conditions and secure and appropriate pay are general characteristics of informal work environments.

**Table 1: Total Informal Employment in Percentage
(Organised + Unorganised Sector)**

Year	Total Informal Employment in percentage (Organised + Unorganised Sector)
1999-2000	91.2
2004-2005	92.4
2011-2012	91.8
2017-2018	90

Source: National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector & Academic Foundation (2007); Srija & Shirke(2014); Raveendran & Vanek (2020)

The informal sector is characterised by inconsistent work, unfair wages, lack of a formal employer-employee relationship, long working hours, poor facilities at work, and lack of social security benefits or provisions (Masood & Jahan, 2015). The workers in the informal sector are primarily home-based, piece-rate², contractual labourers or own-account³ workers who attempt to earn a living through skill-based labour. Therefore, employers are not bound to pay minimum wages, nor is there security of tenure, pension, or paid leave.

The informal sector and informal employment are two distinct concepts. The informal sector comprises all unincorporated private enterprises owned by people or households involved in producing and selling products and services. Contrary to the

1 - Demographic Dividend is the potential for economic benefits when the working-age population outnumbered the non-working age group.

2 - Piece rate work refers to when workers are paid according to the number of units produced.

3 - Own-account workers are those who work on their own or with others.

informal sector, informal employment also includes workers in the formal sectors who are informally employed without agreements or contracts with their employers. Hence, they are outside the purview of labour regulation safety. One of the important sources of livelihood within the informal sector includes the handicraft industry. Rural artisans contribute to 78% of handicraft production (Sharan & Mittal, 2020).

In this context, kaamdani was chosen to highlight its existence among well-known and researched crafts like chikankari and zari zardozi. This visibility will ensure the representation of home-based female workers engaged in the craft. Therefore, the study would analyse the current status of the craft vis-a-vis the past decade, the socio-economic (housing, income, working hours, wage rate), and working conditions of these women advancing the craft. It will also explore the 'informality' of women's informal employment in the unorganised handicrafts sector and their recruitment through middle persons in fashion houses—which are considered to be mainly in the formal sector.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is a primary qualitative study based on home-based handicraft workers focusing on the women workers in kaamdani in Old Lucknow, often overlooked due to its categorisation as a 'supporting craft'⁴. Therefore, the lives of kaamdani workers were chosen to highlight the challenges faced by these women. The study purposely chose women artisans to highlight their working conditions, socioeconomic status, and the double burden of paid subcontracted work and unpaid domestic work.

For the primary source of data collection, a semi-structured interview was used to gain insight into the lives of the women artisans and their day-to-day challenges. Twenty in-person interviews of home-based women artisans were conducted over two weeks from 25 June to 9 July 2022 in old Lucknow. The old Lucknow area is a patchwork of clustered *mohallas* or areas like the Kashmiri Mohalla, Shairgah park, Gadhaiya, Maula Nagri, among others, where the study was conducted. All the interviews were conducted with the prior consent of the artisans. Interviews were also conducted with Mehru Jaffer⁵, Madhavi Kuckreja⁶, and Ada Chikan⁷ to understand the history of the craft, the present condition of the artisans, and the market rates and situation of kaamdani work.

Secondary research tools were deployed to understand the craft's history and the challenges women face in the unorganised sector. Research papers, articles, peer-reviewed journals, official datasets, and government databases were considered to understand the problems workers in the informal sector face and how they intersect with the challenges that women undergo.

However, the study comes with its limitations. First, due to the small sample size, this research does not represent the experience of all the women artisans working in the kaamdani craft. Second, the study is geographically limited to one city in Uttar Pradesh.

4 - Kaamdani is viewed as a supporting craft as it is mostly done alongside chikan work.

5 - Mehru Jaffer is an author, journalist, and the editor of Observer Lucknow. She contributes to the study through her knowledge about Lucknow artisans, on whom she has done stories.

6 - Madhavi Kuckreja is the Founder of Sanatkada through which she engages with artisans from all over the country and gives them a platform to showcase their work. She is also a noted Women's Rights activist who has founded 'Vanagana,' a women's organisation dedicated to protect the human rights for women, particularly Dalit and Muslim women.

7 - Ada Chikan is a designer store in Lucknow that is known for its fine chikankari work and involves kaamdani artisans for pieces.

■ BACKGROUND

Kaamdani has always been a low-technology craft that relies primarily on hand-powered labour, pays piece rates, is done in small *karkhanas*, and has no factories. Earlier, the craft was produced on a broad scale, primarily by male artisans, for royals (Gwynne, 1910; CS et al., 2019). After the fall of the Awadh reign, the demand for this craft was low, forcing artisans to look for other jobs. Despite the low demand, some artisans have continued to be involved in the craft till now. Over time, the embellishment work of the craft was taken up by women from their homes, which became an additional source of income for them (CS et al., 2019). Our interviews with craftswomen found that as embroidery work decreased significantly, many women in the trade competed for limited work, especially during and after the lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of new female entrants in the industry is declining since there needs to be more to provide for existing craftswomen and those who will have to learn new skills only to find employment or jobs that pay very little. Our research revealed that embroidering is becoming a low-status occupation through interviews with workers, shopkeepers, and members of the Lucknawi middle class. Both manufacturers and embroiderers believe that the feminisation of the kaamdani embroidery process signifies its demise. While some women have mastered complex techniques like *chaalu*⁸ and produced beautiful kaamdani art, the figure is meagre. Most women make *fardi*⁹, which is a very low-earning design.

8 - Chaalu is a comprehensive and elaborate design of kaamdani work.

9 - Fardi entails dots-like spaced out designs of kaamdani work.



Chalu and teeki work in progress

A CASE STUDY OF THE KAAMDANI CRAFT

The act of creating gold and silver wire drawings and embroidery, or any other metal wire drawings and embroidery, dates back to ancient times. Its origins are in the east, and it has long thrived in Asia Minor, Arabia, India, and China (Gwynne, 1910). Although there is no direct evidence, there are numerous allusions to gold and silver embroidery in Vedic and Puranic literature (ibid). Pliny informs us much later about an Asian ruler named Attalus, who invented the technique for weaving silk and gold (Gleba, 2008). However, the true origin of the art is unknown. According to some historians, the industry's early and most important centre was the sizable holy centre of Benares (Gwynne, 1910).

However, some historians argue that this industry first became significant with the coming of Muslims in North India (ibid.). The most gifted artisans were frequently called from the major cities of Central Asia and Persia following the Muslim conquest and the establishment of the Mughal empire. They likely taught artisans in India this technique (ibid.). The main centres of this effort were Dehli, Agra, and Lucknow, which benefited from the support of various Muslim courts (ibid.).

The gold/silver/other metal wire work and related trades fall into three classifications:

- (i) Those concerned with producing gold/silver and other metal wires;
- (ii) Those in which the wire is modified for use beyond a wire; and
- (iii) Those involving weaving, embroidery, and brocade from the goods of (i) and (ii) (ibid.).

Kaamdani falls in the third classification. Kaamdani and zari zardozi are often mistaken as being the same. Over the years, this confusion, or rather the convenience of this interchangeability, has taken deep root and is also visible in the policies made by the government. For instance, under the One District One Product Scheme to encourage indigenous and specialised products and crafts, Kaamdani is subsumed under zari zardozi, which further invisibilised the former. It is important to understand the distinction, not only for cultural reasons, but also to visibilise and promote it as a distinct craft, and thus visibilise the under-represented practitioners of the craft too. The main distinction is that zardozi is done with *salma* and *sitara*, but kaamdani art is done with wire or thread (*tar*).

There are several types of *salma*, each with a unique look and thickness. *Salma* is a wire twisted into a spiral. It is made by twisting thin circular wire on a needle. Tiny stars and spangles constructed with *salma* wire are known as *sitara*. Each twist in the spiral-shaped wire becomes a single ring as the worker takes a coil of *Salma* wire and cuts straight down the middle with a pair of sharp scissors. These rings are then gathered into a *salai* rod resembling a very long, thick needle. After that, the metal is pounded into a spangled shape.

However, in a few places, this distinction between the two types of work, based on the type of wire, is not strictly adhered to. For instance, *salma* and *sitara* are employed in the kaamdani art created in Bareilly. While the pattern in previous kaamdani works was only geometric patterns like *fardi* (tiny dots), *teeki* (coils), and *rings* (hollowed circles),

zardozi featured floral designs. However, more recent patterns, such as *chaalu* (flower petals) and *patti* (leaves), have emerged in kaamdani.

Old Lucknow is the prominent location for the kaamdani craft. From *chapai* (design blueprint for the next step) to *ghutayi* (removing underlying print stains), the karkhana performs the entire final procedure. Women are only involved in *kadhai* (embroidery) and work on apparel at home. At karkhanas, various goods, including clutches, pillow covers, and clothing, are produced, while women work only on garments at home.



*Materials required for making kaamdani work
(tar, needle, sequins, and thread)*

FACTORS FOR WOMEN TO TAKE UP KAAMDANI AND FEMINISATION OF THE CRAFT

Men in karkhanas mainly did kaamdani during the Awadh reign. As informed by Mehru Jaffer (personal communication, July 10, 2022), “the primary consumers of gold and silver work like kaamdani and zari zardozi were the Nawabs and the royal patronage. However, after the fall of the Awadh reign, the demand for such costly products decreased significantly, which was, over time, replaced by steel or metal wires that the general public could afford. This low demand led to a movement of men looking for alternative means to earn an alternative income. This movement pushed women to take up the embellishment work from their homes, sustaining their families and the craft’s legacy, eventually leading to the feminisation of the kaamdani craft.” Women have continued the kaamdani embellishment work since then.

“Today, men are taking to e-rickshaws. They look for alternative jobs, like paan shops or sweet shops, or they look for alternative employment. Different artisans were employed in different businesses. And then, at some stage, a decade or two decades later, the women were sitting at home, and the income that the male artisan brought in, was probably not enough. So they started embroidering, which is how to make extra money for the family. That is how the women came into the trade. And by the time independence happened, women were sitting at home and embroidering. Most of them were Muslim, most of them were poor, and most of them were parda clad. So they did not step out of the house. So they said sitting at home, even if I work very hard and earn only five rupees for 50 yards of embroidery, plus five rupees to the family income, is also acceptable (Mehru Jaffer, personal communication, July 10, 2022).

Currently, the craft, which had always been male-dominated, primarily engages Muslim women who continue to work from their homes. Initially, women had to take up the craft to add to their families’ income as men were either out of work due to the low demand for the craft. This movement of men started again during COVID-19, primarily because of low wages and decreased demand for embroidery crafts for higher-paying alternative jobs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the karkhanas were shut and hardly any work for kaamdani or any other embroidery was coming through, leaving the artisans helpless. As there was slight relief from the pandemic, male artisans started looking for work and alternative options like driving e-rickshaws. These e-rickshaws are low investments, with a daily income that could be higher than what they received from zari-zardozi or kaamdani work. Women continued to do the scarce embellishment work during the pandemic, earning a small income to sustain themselves. However, women in the craft face numerous socio-economic challenges, as they are paid a nominal wage with a low bargaining power because of the perspective that women are not as skilled as men. Shopkeepers who get work done by women artisans mentioned that the embellishment done by women is not up to the mark and often has stains on them (personal communication, June 26, 2022).

The feminisation of the kaamdani craft has forced women to take up work available to them from the space of their home- often characterised by low wages, poor working

conditions, insecurity, and irregular work. Alessandra Mezzadri's writings on the garment industry mention that feminisation has been used to reduce labour costs (Chambers, 2020). Feminisation was done by reconstructing feminised garment labour as low-skilled and exploiting presumptions concerning women's role as the household's secondary breadwinners. She has also emphasised how the sector's employment practices profited from locally manufactured notions of female submissiveness and the dismissal of women as workers. This combination allowed for both flexibility and gendered forms of labour discipline (Mezzadri, 2016, as cited in Chambers, 2020). Global employment practices incorporate localised gender layouts and women's place in the larger social milieu. This feminisation of work only adds to the marginalisation of women within the labour force. The feminisation of the zari-zardozi craft in Lucknow and Bareilly has coincided with falling wages and employment status (ibid.).

Despite feminisation, these jobs have maintained the gender roles ascribed to women, maintaining the distinction between the public and private spheres. Balakrishnan mentions that subcontracted home-based work is an example of a flexible and decentralised production process that exploits gender norms for profits (Balakrishnan, 2002 as cited in Boeri, 2018). The kaamdani women artisans choose to work from home, maintaining their gendered caregiving roles and looking after household work. Therefore, it becomes critical to locate how the gendered nature of the craft and challenges at work impact women artisans.



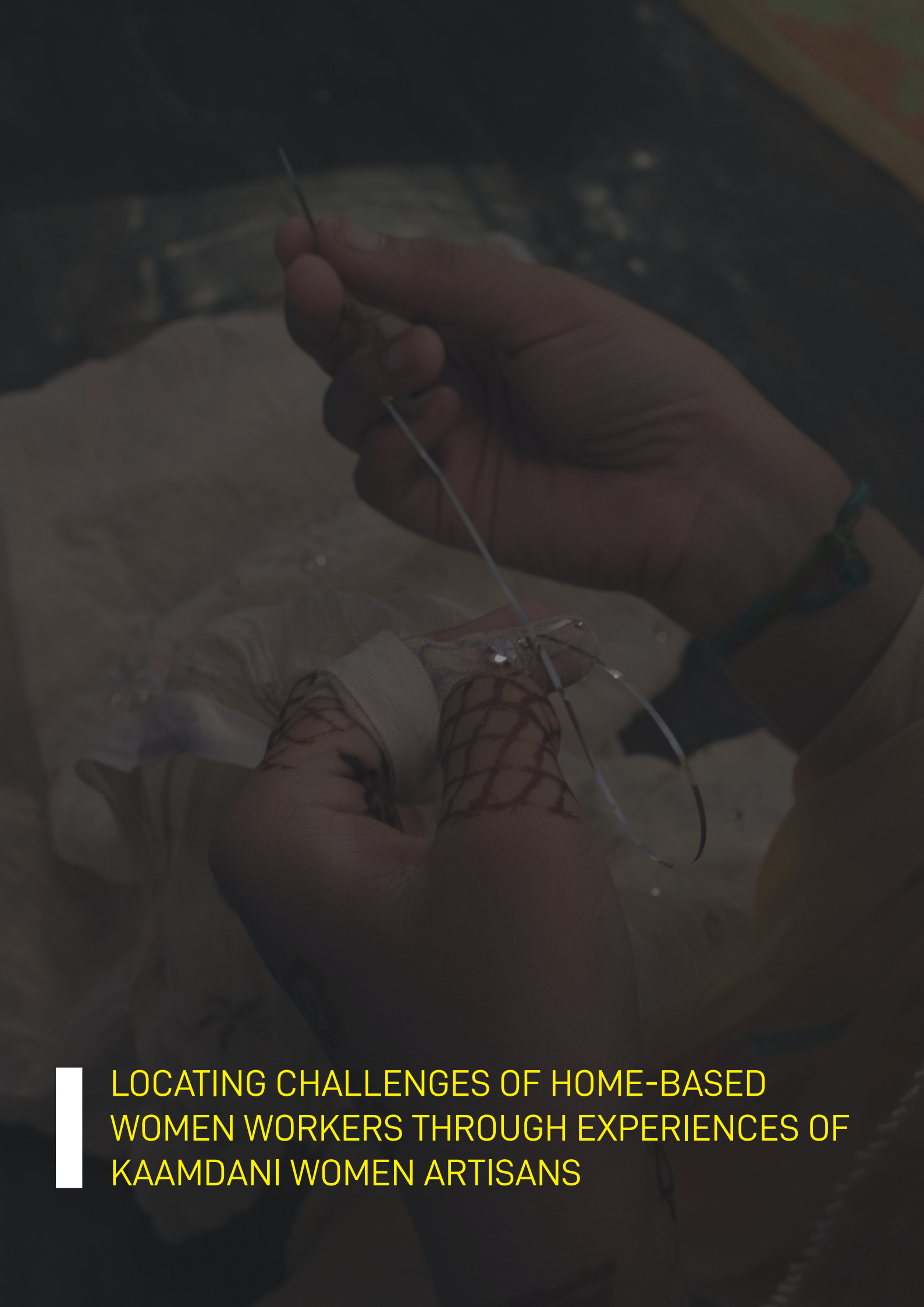
Home-based women workers continue kaamdani work during the day, managing their household and paid work

INVISIBILITY AND NON-RECOGNITION OF WORK

A significant issue with home-based work and the challenges faced by female employees is ‘invisibility.’ As discussed earlier, most women who work from home face hurdles like low pay, longer working hours, a double burden of paid and unpaid work, an unfavourable working environment, and health issues. As Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA, puts it, “confined within their homes for economic, social, or cultural reasons, [home-based workers] are invisible to the nation- in purdah, both literally and statistically” (Bhatt, 2005 as cited in Andersen, et al., 2021). This home-based work can hamper women’s mobility and reduce their socio-economic status, further invisibilising their contribution to the supply chain.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, India ranks 135 out of 146 countries based on the indicators of Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2022). This invisibility of craftswomen, who remain in the confines of their homes due to multiple external factors, raises concerns about official records and statistics regarding these workers, as well as a more significant issue of non-recognition of home-based women’s labour. The idea that men are the primary breadwinners in the family is related to this lack of acknowledgement or exposure. Although this perception is contested, women’s income significantly contributes to the household’s overall revenue.

Waged domestic labour, according to Eileen Boris, “shares the invisibility of housework, as both are a part of the gendered structure of employment, whereby jobs, work procedures, and workplaces are designated as masculine and female” (Nilsson et al., 2022) Employers are also ‘taking advantage’ of a gender-based worldview that designated the home to be a place where mothers and women’s domestic labour enhanced profits by redistributing the production costs to the home worker (ibid.).



LOCATING CHALLENGES OF HOME-BASED
WOMEN WORKERS THROUGH EXPERIENCES OF
KAAMDANI WOMEN ARTISANS

A The Double-Burden and Gendered Nature of Work

Women are prone to a double burden, as they have numerous work responsibilities and daily duties like child care, and household maintenance, among others. Unpaid household work includes cooking, washing, cleaning, and fetching water.



An interviewed respondent mentioned how she juggles between cooking food in their run down kitchen alongside her kaamdani work.

During the interviews, it was observed that older women depend on their young school-going daughters to take up household responsibility, managing both the home and their school. The young daughters picked the skill from their mothers and, to sustain their share in the family, began to do paid kaamdani work.

“Jabse humari ladkiyan badi hui hai toh wahi karti hai ghar ka kaam. school jati thi, aati thi, phir ghar ka kaam karti thi. Ladkiyon se hum karwate hi nahi the. Uske liye hum alaga le lete hain uske liye alaga le lete hain. jaise ab hamara piece jaldi sil jata hai unka padhai karke der mei sila hai. Ghar ka ab hum sirf sauda lake dete hain.”

“Since my daughters grew up, they have taken on the responsibility of household work. They went to school, returned, and did the household work. I didn’t let my daughters do my job (kaamdani). I take a separate piece for her to embellish. Now, my piece gets embroidered earlier than hers. She takes time as she studies. For the house, now I only get the ration.”

Gauhar*

(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

Most home-based workers convert the one-room domestic spaces they share with 4-5 family members to space for paid work. These workers may suffer from isolation, as they lack time to interact with community members due to confinement within their homes. This shared space between work and family impacts the woman’s spatial and social interactions, as the home becomes an area for family life and work. Therefore, the house no longer remains a space for just family life (Neethi, 2014). The gendered nature of the kaamdani craft has added to the problem of being confined to their homes. However, in some houses, it was observed that women interacted while working together in each other’s homes, especially those engaged in kaamdani work. This interaction displayed a sense of togetherness and support provided by these women who live close to each other. In the case of these home-based kaamdani workers, a clear line of distinction between household duties and work is blurred.

* Names of most respondents have been changed to preserve their privacy. Hereafter an asterisk indicates a name change.



An artisans home, as she does her kaamdani work at her home

Due to poor socio-economic conditions, the housing conditions of most of the respondents impacted their health as well as their productivity to work. The one-room houses were shared as a work and family space, impacting productivity due to low lighting and uncomfortable seating areas.

“Buss itna sa hi thikana hai mera. Yahi room hai mera sasural mei. sasural mein aisa hi toh room milta hai. Gir raha hai mera ghar. sochte hain ki paiso ka intezaam ho kahi se to thoda theek karwaye.”

“This room is the only thing I have. This is what one gets in their in-laws. This is the type of room you get at your in-laws house. It’s falling apart. I keep thinking about arranging money so that I can get it fixed.”

Afreen*
(personal communication, July 4, 2022)



one-room house entrance that includes a kitchen adjoined to a resting space

i) Care work for children and elderly

A study by the Institute of Social Studies Trust found that women in urban areas spend around 15.2 hours a day on care tasks (taking care of children and the elderly) and 8.4 hours on household chores (Sengupta & Sachdeva, 2017). In their study, Sengupta and Sachdeva (2017) found that the age of the children was a factor in forming a woman's choice to enter paid work. The unpaid household responsibilities and caregiving limit the options for women's employment.

“Ab kahin bhi hum bahar kaam karne jayenge toh ghar mein bache hai mere, kaun dekhega? Toh isliye ye ghar baithe kaam mil jaata hai. Kahi jaana nahi hai, kahi aana nahi hai, toh iss liye ye kaam mein jo hai, thodi asani hai.”

“If I go outside to work then who would look after my children? This is the reason I sit at home and do the work. I don't have to go to work and commute back home. So this work becomes a little easier for me.”

Shehla*
(personal communication, June 26, 2022)

The entire day of caring for children and working alongside them hardly leaves the women with time to rest and take care of themselves.



An artisan attending to their children at their home

“Magar jo hai humein (bahar kaam karne) jaane mein pareshani hai kyuki bachcho ka mera chhota, matlab bachho ke saath hai. Ab bachche ayenge, jayenge. Ab hum unko mile, na mile. Ye problem hogi. Vaise toh matlab jaane mein koi baat nahi hai. Bas ye hai ki bachho ki baat hai.”

“It is difficult for me to go out to work because my child is young now, and others are there too. Now, kids come and go. What if they don’t meet me? This is a problem. Otherwise, I don’t have a problem going out (to work). It’s just about my kids.”

Sadaf*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

However, the idea that it is the responsibility of women to take care of their children and families is not new. Yet, it plays a huge role in impacting women’s lives.

“Pura din bhar banate hai matlab apne ghar ka bhi kaam karte hai, bachcho ko laana-pahuchana school se, coaching se. Toh hum toh, pura din hi mera lag jata hai, wo bethke matlab pura din ho jata hai.”

“It embellished the entire day. I do my household work, take the children to school and their coaching, and bring them back home. So, it takes me the entire day, approximately it’s an entire day’s work.”

Rehana*
(personal communication, June 27, 2022)

B Working Conditions, Discrimination, and Marginalisation within the Craft Industry

Women artisans are vulnerable to exploitation, low wages, poor health conditions, long working hours, and erratic work schedules due to taking care of paid and unpaid work. Home-based women artisans face challenges common to most feminised handicrafts in India.

i) Low wages and monthly income from kaamdani embellishment

With little to no work, most respondents mentioned that their monthly income through kaamdani is low and has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of them worked for drastically low wages to survive the pandemic. Each day, these women try to do as much kaamdani work as they can to earn a bare minimum wage.

Jobs in the informal sector do not provide a consistent and stable source of income. According to the interviews, kaamdani embellishment work has been irregular and inconsistent for the last few decades. However, this irregularity increased during the pandemic. Since the karkhanas have been shut, men were out of work. Similarly, women received little work. The respondents earned on a per-piece basis and not

monthly. The inconsistency in the work might be the reason why many women undertook to embroider one heavy piece rather than 3-4 pieces, which pays them well. The minimum wage in the craft industry is not set, as represented in table 2.

Table 2: Monthly Household Income Variation Earned from Kaamdani

Monthly Income	No. of respondents
0-500	1
500-1000	2
1000-1500	7
1500-2000	3
2000-2500	3
2500-3000	4
Total	20

In the case of home-based workers, particularly in the craft-based industry where women juggle earning an income and caring for their homes, several women respondents mentioned that their earning potential is lower than their male counterparts.

“Aise kahi jana nahi hua toh lacchi ke hisaab se hota hai Rs 60 roz ka, kabhi Rs 60 kabhi Rs 30”.

“The income depends on the skein, sometimes it’s Rs 60/- and sometimes Rs 30/-.”

Hunza*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

After the pandemic, the work picked up slightly. However, it has been relatively slow because the work comes to the women artisans only when there is a demand, leaving them without a consistent source of income. Currently, the rates per *tola* (50 wires) range between Rs 120 and 130, depending on the complexity of the designs. As a respondent puts it:

“Zyaada bhari vaise banate nahi hai. 2-3 tole hi toh banate hai, toh 1 tole ke jaise .130 hue. Toh agar 3 tole humne banaye, toh 660 rupay ho gaya ”.

“If the work consists of heavy embellishments, which isn’t the case most times. If there are 2-3 tolas, 1 tola is priced at Rs 130/- and if I make 3 tolas, then it’s set at Rs 660/-”.

Samreen*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

Each respondent is paid based on the work they can complete in a month. *Fardi* (wire-made dots) has the lowest payment, and other designs such as *teeki* (round design resembling a coil), ring, and *chaalu* (dense, intricate and heavy design) have higher prices. Most respondents stated that they could complete up to 2-3 *tolas* in a month while also managing their household chores. It was observed that the younger artisans, aged 15-18 years could produce more pieces and earn more than their older counterparts. There could be various reasons for the same, like health, time, and family responsibilities.

The payments for kaamdani work are not upfront, and artisans get it after completing the piece. It is challenging to procure the amount if someone requires advance payment.

“Advance ke liye kehna padta hai 3-4 din pehle se. Phir mil jata hai. Milta bhi hai abhi bhi milta hai. Agar 500 rupay mangoge toh 500 nahi 100 rupay milenge”.

For an advance payment one has to ask 4-5 days before. We get it. If you ask for Rs 500 then we receive Rs 100”.

Sara*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

The pieces are subject to approval. In case of delays, either they are not paid for or are paid less, and artisans have to pay the intermediaries for the cloth and sell it to someone else. However, when asked if their pieces have ever been rejected, most respondents refused and maintained that their pieces have never been rejected. After the completion of the pieces, the artisans give them to intermediaries, who then take them to the shop's owners for selling, and it later goes for the next step of *ghutayi* (the process of removing underlying stains of print) and ironing.

The middlemen dominate the industry, who directly contact the artisans and send the pieces to be embroidered to the artisans' homes. The women work from their homes and complete the given pieces in a set duration to provide for their families and make ends meet in light of growing prices.

“paise toh badha ke milne hi chahiye, itni mehengayi ho gayi hai ki agar ghar mein Rs100 bhi rakhe honge toh vo ek dum churan hi lagta hai, aur Rs 500 bhi ho toh vo bhi 2-3 din hi chal pata hai”.

“The wages for kaamdani craft should be increased, there's so much inflation. If there's Rs 100 in the house, it vanishes, and if there's Rs 500 it also lasts just for 2-3 days.”

Afreen*
(personal communication, July 4, 2022)

Most respondents mentioned that they learnt the craft through their family. Most married respondents took up the craft after marriage to support their families and add to the family income. In an informal economy, peer networks play a huge role in bringing vital information regarding job opportunities. In this case, it was observed through the interviews that the women artisans got the opportunity through their networks. Many respondents did not get formal training for the craft and learned it through observation or watching a family member do kaamdani.

ii) Long working hours

Table 3: Number of Working Hours in a Day

No. of working hours	No. of respondents
3-4 hours	4
4-5 hours	6
5-6 hours	3
7-8 hours	4
8-9 hours	1
9-10 hours	1
11 and above hours	1
Total	20

Table 3 highlights the number of working hours that women artisans dedicate in a day to make kaamdani pieces.

Through the interviews, 6 respondents reported working for 4-5 hours a day, 4 worked for 7-8 hours a day, and 4 worked for 3-4 hours a day. One respondent mentioned they worked for nearly 11 hours or more in a day.

“arey 10 ghante din ke toh dena hi padte hain. main lagatar karti hu. subah 6 baje uth jate hain. 8 baje tak ghar ke kaam kiye fir apna ye kaam karte hain 5 baje tak. fir khana pakate hain fir shaam ko 7-8 baje fir baith jate hain fir 11-12 baje tak hi bnate rehte hain raat mein.”

“I have to give 10 hours a day. I work continuously. I wake up at 6 in the morning and complete household work till 8 and then I complete kaamdani till 5 in the evening. Then I get up to cook dinner, and then again around 7-8 I sit again to do kaamdani till 11-12 in the night.”

Susheela*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

It should be noted that while most respondents were required to count the number of paid working hours, they did not mention the daily domestic duties they were required to perform. During the day, respondents stated that being home allowed them to work on their schedule. Many said they rushed through their morning chores and sat to finish the kaamdani pieces, taking breaks for lunch. After lunch, many people worked until sundown. However, many continued to work in dim lights in the evenings.

“agar hum log subah se khana bana ke 10 baje se baithte hai toh 1 baje tak uthte hain, phir khana khate hain, aur khana khake phir baith jaate hain 2-2:30 baje, phir shaam tak karte hain, aur khane ke time uth jaate hain, khana pakane ke time pe. Taqreeban 7-8 ghante roz.”

"If we cook lunch by 10 in the morning, we sit to do our work till 1 o'clock, then we eat lunch, and then again sit to do kaamdani around 2-2:30. Then we continue to do it till evening, and get up to cook dinner. So we work around 7-8 hours in a day."

Gauhar*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

"Ghante ka toh nahi andaaza lekin ye hai, jab time milta hai, bana lete hai. Jaise raat mein bhi time mil gaya, jaldi khana bana liya. 8 baje se beth gaye 10, 11, baje tak laga ke bana liya. Phir khaana waana kha ke beth gaye thodi der ek, adha ghanta phir bana liya. Aise banate hai."

"I haven't observed the hours, but whenever I get time I make the kaamdani pieces. In the night, when I get time, I cook dinner early. I sit from 8 o'clock to 10 or 11 o'clock and complete the work. Then I eat dinner, and sit again to do kaamdani, make it for another half an hour. That's how I do it."

Saba*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

Most women sat in their homes with their pieces spread across the floor with little space for movement. Many respondents sat near the doors of their rooms or houses for natural light, completing their orders. The respondents mentioned that they continued to work the entire day, both unpaid and paid work. Homemakers had a full-time work schedule and respite during lunch or when guests arrived.

"Pura din bhar banate (kaamdani work) hai, matlab apne ghar ka bhi kaam karte hai, bachcho ko laane-pahuchana school se, coaching se. Toh hum toh, pura din hi mera lag jata hai, wo bethke matlab pura din ho jaata hai."

"I work the entire day, including my household chores, bringing the kids to and back from school and their coaching. So my entire day passes by with work, and then sitting with kaamdani takes the entire day."

Ishrat*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

Out of the twenty respondents, three respondents who went to school also managed their kaamdani work accordingly and pursued it when they returned. In a day, the girls gave 4-5 hours to the kaamdani craft and managed their studies.

"subah 5 baje uth jate hai so ke phir kaamdani ka kaam 7 baje tak leke beth te hain. 11 baje se 5 baje aate hai school se phir 5 baje se 6 baje tak yu padhai ke saath rehte hai iss coaching phir 6 baje se phir kaamdani karte hain."

"I wake up at 5 in the morning and then sit with my kaamdani work till 7. From 11-5 pm I spend at school and from 5-6 at my coaching, to study. From 6 again I pick up my kaamdani work."

Mehr (name changed),
personal communication, 25 June 2022

iii) Impact on Health

This section outlines the impact of continuous kaamdani work from their homes on the health of home-based women kaamdani workers. As the craft is done over long hours and in dim light and space shared for both home and work, many workers suffer back pain and weak eyesight. Due to the absence of proper healthcare facilities for informal workers, it is difficult for many to afford healthcare.

Specific ailments are commonly experienced by home-based workers, which were replicated for kaamdani women artisans due to long working hours and constant sitting for embellishment work. Four respondents reported back problems such as cervical pain, backaches, and constant body pain from sitting cross-legged for long periods.

“Pareshani ye hi hai ki jaise ab light nahi hui, tab kaise banaye? Aur light bhi pehle mere yahan nahi thi. Toh bahut pareshani thi, jab tak ye aasmaan roshni rehti thi, usmein hum banate the. Jab andhera ho jayega toh kahe mein banayenge? Kyuki ab kiraaye bhi bahut mushkil se light mili hai. Hum usmei banate hai. Ab light chali gayi, toh nahi bana paate hai. Ye hai.”

“The problem is if there’s no light then how will I work? Earlier, I did not have electricity so I had to endure a lot of problems. Till the time there was natural light I used to work. Now, I have rented electricity so I work in that. But when the electricity goes, I cannot work. This happens.”

Sarwat*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

“Sehat pe toh bahut asar hain. Kamar bekaar ho gayi hai meri. Kamar pe beth nahi paate. Tek laga ke baithte hai. Kaam banate hai. Kamar ko aksar mere jaise jaise thandi ho jaati hai, ya aag jalne lagti hai, kamar mein pareshani ho gayi phir haddi ye badh jaati hai phir karhane lagta hai. Aur phir bhi thoda bahut jaise hi control hota hai, phir banane lagte hai kaam. Let ke banate hai kabhi beth ke bante hai.”

“My health has been severely impacted. My back has gotten worse and it’s difficult to sit. I have to sit with support when I’m working (kaamdani pieces). My back often goes cold and it feels like it’s burning. I have a back problem, and my bone size has increased, and then groan in pain. As soon as the pain gets controlled, I start working again. I lie down and do my kaamdani work sometimes.”

Tuba*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)



A young girl doing her kaamdani work near a door for light, sitting cross legged and without support for long hours

Eight respondents mentioned having weak eyesight due to long hours of focus and improper lighting. The respondents, who complained of weak eyesight, wore glasses to work. Respondents mentioned that they tend to complete as much work as possible when there is natural light, as working in the bulb's light strains their eyes further.

“buss ankhon par asar pada. aankhon se kam dikhta hai. yeh hai ki jab hum raat mein seete the, ab din hi din, jab roshni hoti thi tab silte the. jahan roshni khatam hui suraj doob gaya, wahan se kaam rakh diya. ab bulb ki roshni mei kaam nahi hota.”

“My eyes have been affected. Now, things are less visible through the eyes. Earlier, I used to do kaamdani work during the night, but now I cannot. I just work during the day. As soon as the natural light goes, I keep the work away. Now I cannot work on the light bulb.”

Zehra*
(personal communication, June 26, 2022)

The respondents who suffer from health issues have to bear the expenses of check-ups and purchasing medicines. The middlemen or employers do not provide them with any healthcare benefits or support. Over time if these ailments go unchecked, they can cause chronic internal issues that may cause irreversible damage.

“Baith ke kaam kiya toh cervical ho gaya, gardan mei takleef shuru ho gayi aur nazar kamzor ho gayi. Ilaaj apne se hi karaya, sarkari hospital mei dikhaya. Unhone exercise bataya, 15 dine dawa kari. Takleef hoti hai agar toh exercise kar lete hain, araam mil jaata hai.”

“Due to the continuous sitting and working I got cervical, my neck and eyes were affected. I got my treatment done at the government hospital. They told me to do exercises and gave me medicine for 15 days. If pain occurs, I exercise and get relief.”

Mehjabeen*
(personal communication, July 1, 2022)

One respondent mentioned their eyesight was weak. However, prescription glasses were expensive, so they avoided wearing them. Respondents used quick fixes for their health, like lying down after a few hours of working if they felt any pain.

“ankhon mein asar aa raha hai. Dikhta nai. chashma Rs 500-600 se kam me thodi banega. aur paise hote toh hum banaye.”

“My eyes are getting weak. I cannot see. The glasses will cost me around Rs 500-600. If I had the money then only will I get them made.”

Santoshi Devi*
(personal communication, July 5, 2022)

The respondents who did not report any ailment or health concern were the younger artisans. However, women artisans who have been in the craft for longer have to suffer without proper amenities to pursue the craft.

C Organisational Challenges

i) Lack of market linkages and the nexus of middlemen

During the interviews, it was observed that the nexus of middlemen with contractors and a lack of market linkages were a substantial part of the craft market. The middlemen/women are the main point of contact between the employer and the women artisans. These intermediaries act as agents who deliver cloth pieces with designs and the *taars* (flat steel wires) for kaamdani embellishments. The artisans are given a set duration for the work, and the wages are paid after they have completed a set number of pieces.

The respondents refused when asked if the women had any information regarding the market prices of the finished kaamdani pieces. The response showcases the lack of knowledge about market conditions and prices of the craft. The artisans were unaware of the market prices and that their wages were much less than the market cost of these pieces. However, when given an idea of costs, they said they were grateful for whatever little they received in income.

“kabhi socha hi nahi. humne buss socha ki hume jo mil rha hai vo hamare naseeb mein hai aur baaki kuch nahi.”

Never, I have never thought about it. I just thought that whatever I'm getting is my destiny and rest is nothing.”

Ishrat*

(personal communication, July 4, 2022)

Most artisans mentioned that they did not have permission from their husbands or fathers to go out and check markets. These limitations placed on women artisans hamper their ability to engage with the craft further and beyond their role as the *karigar*, which displays the detachment of the artisan from the craft and the artisans from the employer. The motivation for most respondents to keep themselves engaged in the craft was the minimum wages they received to support their families. The gendered nature of engagement with the craft and the craftswomen's socio-economic condition must be considered.

A few city businesses provided an overview of this nexus and how they tend to keep artisans' wages stable by maintaining clarity on the monetary share of the intermediaries. According to the interviews, artisans are compensated based on the number of pieces and the density of their work. The artisans get a few days to finish the designs and deliver them to the intermediaries. Many people buy pieces that are done alongside *chikankari*, which helps to keep the craft in demand.

We have a group of artisans working with us, wherein few artisans are allocated work directly via us and some get allocated work through middlemen appointed by us.

The first are billed directly through our account, whereas the latter are billed through the middlemen though there are detailed bifurcations of the artisan's payment and that of the middlemen for transparency and to avoid any form of exploitation at lower levels of the hierarchy.

Ada Chikan,

personal communication, 17 September 2022

■ IMPACT OF COVID-19

An absence of an employer-employee relationship often characterises home-based work that engages women. Women artisans often connect with an agent, a middleman, or a woman who brings them a piece that must be embellished. The piece might be a small or a large one which decides the amount of time it would take. A week is enough for some pieces that require fardi to be embellished. However, some pieces require chaalu work; a saree requires around a month to be completed. In the kaamdani craft, agents give work to these women and, over time, share a relationship where the artisans might ask for an advance payment or more work during a month. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the inflow of work was less, and many depended on the prior pieces they might have had. The prices of pieces drastically hit a low, and some artisans were not getting work. This chapter will elaborate on the conditions of women workers during COVID-19 and some organisational challenges they face in the craft.

Due to low wages, some artisans engage in alternative sources of income, like small general/paan shops, to support themselves. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one respondent mentioned that they depended on their small shop as there was no source of income, and it was difficult for them to sustain.

“Kaam hi nahi tha, bahar humari dukaan dekhi hai? yeh dukaan pehle se thi, 2 saal hue the humein dukan khole hue, jab corona aa gaya hai tab humari dukaan se kahrcha chal raha tha, na humare shohar ka kaam tha na hum logon ka. isi mein chala.”

“There was no work, have you seen my shop outside? It had been two years since I opened my shop and covid hit. During covid, it was through the shop that my expenditure was being managed. Neither did my husband have a job nor did we. It was through the shop.”

Shakeela*
(personal communication, July 2, 2022)

These shops are often within houses or just outside the houses of these artisans. The craftswomen continue to do their kaamdani work during the day while looking after their homes and shops. Opening shops is easier as they stay within or near their home premises. Respondents who are educated (mostly younger generation) also mentioned that they took tuition classes for children of their locality to help generate additional income for themselves, along with their kaamdani work.

The work was completely shut, and those who got work were paid significantly less. After some relief from the pandemic, the prices have increased slightly but are inadequate. The low prices are also an added reason male artisans move on to different jobs. This movement out of the craft industry could severely impact the diminishing of the craft, with no new members joining it and the older ones moving out. A respondent pointed out that she would not want her daughter to continue in the craft and would want her to study. The artisans would not want future generations to engage in the craft for the choice of a better future.

“Koi aur agar kaam isse acha mil raha hai, naslo ke liye toh wo achi baat hai kyuki aaj kal padhai likhai bahut dekhi hai, aage jaa chuki hai. Bas aur jo hai, jo padi likhi nahi hai, jo jinka koi aur matlab nahi hai, nahi padh paye hai, toh unke liye sahi hai. Ab meri koshish toh yahi hai ki apni bachi ko hum padha de, toh ye kaam pe na baithe wo.”

“If we get some better work to do, then it’s good for the upcoming generations, these days education matters a lot, I’ve seen, and it’s going forward. The ones who are not educated and those who don’t have any other significant interest, couldn’t study, then it’s fine for them (if they continue in the kaamdani craft). My effort is towards getting my daughter an education so that she doesn’t have to continue in the craft.”

Gauhar*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

■ OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

In the kaamdani craft, the male members work out of karkhanas, a space dedicated to the work, including zari zardozi and other embellishments. However, women do not have any such place for their work. NGOs like SEWA India have made an effort to establish centres for women who are in the handicrafts industry pursuing chikankari and zari-zardozi. Home-based workers face multiple challenges of improper lighting, cramped space, and irregular work hours. Small cluster centres in areas with multiple artisans could be opened through government efforts and community-based organisations.

During our interviews, the respondents were asked if they would join a centre outside their homes, considering many do not go outside. This question was asked with the foresight that a centre or cluster would help the women to mobilise, be mobile, and make decisions, adding to their agency. A cluster centre near their homes would enable home-based workers to set a wage rate and avail of social services and protection. Fourteen respondents said they would join the centre if it was close to their homes and paid a higher wage rate than what they currently receive.

“haan acche honge paise toh chale jayenge. paise kisko bure lagte hain. Bure waqt mein yahi paise kaam aate hain pade hue. Abhi lockdown mera lockdown mein bacha hua tha toh hospital toh sab sarkari band the. Toh hum private mein gaye toh yahi kaamdani ke paise hi toh kaam aaye. sarkari mein sab band tha koi admit hi nahi kar raha tha.”

“If the money’s good then I’ll go. Who doesn’t like money? In bad times, money is helpful. During the lockdown, I had a baby and all government hospitals were closed. So I went to a private hospital, and it was here that the money earned from kaamdani helped me. In government hospitals, everything was shut, nobody was admitting us.”

Saba*

(personal communication, July 4, 2022)

More than a lack of education, these women face two other difficulties preventing them from entering formal or higher-paying informal employment: lack of mobility and the burden of unpaid housework. The patriarchal divide between public and private spaces dictates women’s mobility and access to formal or better-earning opportunities. Women are forced to stay in private spaces like their homes. On the other hand, they are also forced to take on additional work due to poverty. In addition to their unpaid housework, they are converting their private spaces into their places of work. This conversion indicates that they are housewives in their social appearance. However, wage workers are fully assimilated into a world market-oriented production system (Mies, 2012). For women who work in the kaamdani craft, the lines between paid work and unpaid housework blur. The narrative of women as home-based workers in crafts they had taken up as hobbies appears to characterise them as readily available and disposable labour power. Their daily unpaid housework or unemployment is not the responsibility of either the middle person or the affluent contractor (ibid.). As a result, the definition of ‘home-based workers’ concerning women artisans obscures production relations by implying that women who work from home are not wage labourers but

housewives dabbling in hobbies. This interpretation contributes to their exploitation. To break this cycle of women's exploitation, it becomes imperative that the spheres of work and home are separated. Joining a cluster centre near their homes will allow women artisans to entail benefits like fixed time, creche service, fixed and improved wage rate, proper lighting, and ample space to work. They could transition to visible wage labour, which was hidden due to the intermingling of work and home spheres. Of course, this alone will not alleviate the appalling conditions of the women engaged in the kaamdani craft. A comprehensive roadmap to formalise this precarious wage work is much needed. Moreover, the policy has to consider the existing patriarchal notions and limited education of these women to dismantle this system of exploitation.

EXISTING POLICIES

The handicrafts sector has been an essential generator of jobs and a means to preserve the cultural heritage of different crafts in the country. However, the heritage embodied in crafts differs from museums and archaeological sites. No entity or organisation preserves this type of cultural heritage. Furthermore, the collective nature of this heritage means that while it belongs to everyone in a society, no one is responsible for its perpetuation over time. As a result, these cultural assets remain public goods, freely accessible and unprotected (Barrere, 2016 as cited in Grobar, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to consider policies by the government that would help empower the artisans, thereby making an effort to preserve the crafts practised throughout the decades.

According to the Ministry of Textiles (n.d.), the handicrafts industry employs around 70 lakh artisans, of which 56.13% are women. However, the condition of the artisans is deplorable despite the numerous contributions of their skills to the heritage. A question that arises is their socio-economic conditions and poor quality of life. The existing policy that the report studied was the Artisan Credit Scheme which provides a loan to artisans to purchase equipment and machinery. However, most existing schemes are for clusters and not home-based workers. Many respondents mentioned that they were unaware of any such scheme. The artisans demonstrated a lack of awareness and faith in these schemes, believing that most are initiated but not appropriately implemented. It was reported by the artisans that earlier, a process for cards was initiated concerning the different forms of embroidery and embellishment work. However, due to the existing structural issues, officials came to their homes to make a card and take photos, but to no avail.

“Unhone ne bhi kuch nahi kiya. Ab wohi ab humne kaha ki ab hum kisi ko nahi denge. Ab hum ek pareshan insaan hai itni koshishe karke kar rahe hai aur uske baad bhi kuch na, thoda toh takleef hoti hai, toh ye hai bas.”

“They also did nothing. That's what I said, now I won't give my details to anyone. I'm worried, despite the numerous efforts, nothing will happen. It's sad, and painful.”

Sidra*
(personal communication, June 25, 2022)

The government has not introduced policies for home-based artisans, leading to zero benefits for these women. Even if the Artisan Credit Scheme was followed through, it was seen that it was not easy to get a card made.

“I’ve tried to get the artisan card made for some artisans, it is a nightmare. It is difficult, like any other card. Adhaar cards get made easily. What happens is (through the card), they get access to these exhibitions. But it’s all so limited. Even in marketing you have no women. They don’t have that collectivization for marketing, being independent, the power to bargain the rates and it’s not going to change till it remains a home based industry.”

Madhavi Kukreja,
(personal communication, September 29, 2022)

A problem with the existing policies is that they are for clusters and the marketing of an organised collective, which does not consider home-based workers. Home-based workers, especially kaamdani workers, do not have an organised collective. These women function individually, which reduces their bargaining power and knowledge about the policies that might help them.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policies for home-based workers are indispensable for their protection and social security. The first step should be to recognise home-based workers as workers who contribute to the country’s economy and society at large. The government must prioritise strategies and programmes to empower women engaged in home-based work.

- The non-availability of data on home-based workers restricts knowledge about the number of women involved in the sector and specific crafts. Subsequently, this can be implemented by taking the necessary steps to identify home-based workers and create a database of women engaged in different crafts all over the country. This database would help initiate a formalised process for their identification. For the same, the Artisan Credit Scheme could be extended through awareness and efforts for robust implementation by the state governments. This recognition would ensure that every artisan’s separate category is created according to the craft they are engaged in, making it easier to reach out to artisans in case of a scheme.
- Having the same home and work spaces impacts women workers’ mobility and productivity. Most respondents live in a one-room house with their family, which does not have all the requirements for proper working conditions. Improper working conditions, in turn, expose them to various health concerns, especially weak eyesight and back pain. Therefore, the government must introduce schemes to finance housing and services to allow artisans to upgrade their home-cum-work places to make them productive. Efforts for social protection, including health benefits or insurance, and pensions for home-based workers, should be considered.

- Home-based women workers lack a formal employer-employee relationship, which often leaves them with low bargaining power regarding per-piece prices because they all function individually. The low bargaining power of craftswomen can be improved if the state governments collectivise home-based workers through clusters to give them agency. Drives to reach out to women workers/artisans must be incorporated, and awareness regarding cluster services must be encouraged. The government must invest in establishing small centres or clusters in areas where numerous home-based workers are present. These clusters can include women artisans in the decision-making, policy-making, and planning stages, thereby increasing their agency. The government should set a minimum wage rate for every piece to ensure the artisans earn a decent income. The government could support cooperatives that work to benefit women and their empowerment.
- The state government must develop a welfare fund for home-based workers to help establish services like creches and medical and maternity insurance. These services would permit the artisans to avail benefits for any health condition, thereby enhancing their productivity. Most artisans have a unique set of skills. However, what they lack is marketing. Efforts towards capacity-building could be taken by introducing home-based workers to technology and marketing skills. Upskilling centres could be set by the government, pushing women to engage in other jobs and avenues. These skills would enable women to understand market dynamics, upgrade their skills, and build capacities to manage home and work time, and especially the younger generation, to look for alternative job options.

■ CONCLUSION

Home-based workers in India face numerous challenges that further marginalise them. Women artisans in the handicraft industry, particularly kaamdani, work from their homes. Working from home may appear to be a more convenient option on the surface, but it comes with its own set of challenges socio-economically and due to the gendered nature of the craft.

This study revealed that women enter this industry out of necessity rather than choice. Women who work in the informal sector, particularly those who work from home, tend to be poorer than males. Home-based female employees are paid substantially less than male informal labourers at *karkhanas* for the same work. We discovered that most women pursue informal home-based kaamdani embroidery/embellishment, not by choice but owing to a lack of alternative livelihood options. Furthermore, primary household responsibilities fall on these women restricted to their homes and unable to find convenient formal jobs near their homes. Due to a lack of suitable formal employment opportunities, many are forced to take up informal employment as home-based workers in the kaamdani industry.

The kaamdani craft employs several women. The craft is carried out through these women's homes, who continue to adorn the fabric with kaamdani work. Most women artisans were earning meagre income from doing kaamdani work to sustain their families within the peripheries of their dwellings. The artisans' wages are as low as Rs 60 per day, with long working hours. Over the years, the consistently low wage rate underlines the absence of bargaining power for home-based women workers in the craft hold, with little space for negotiation. The central role of intermediaries in the craft restricts the workers from directly connecting with the employers, reducing the bargaining and negotiating power of these home-based women workers.

Through our findings and observations, it can be inferred that the kaamdani craft is slowly diminishing. One of the reasons for this is the low wages the artisans receive for the kaamdani work. Men moving away from kaamdani and towards higher paying jobs means that the people trained in the craft do not practise it, and new people are not learning it for several reasons. These reasons could lead to the diminishing of the craft slowly over the coming years. As could be gathered from conversations, men's daily earnings increase significantly upon driving e-rickshaws. The women,

However, continue working on the craft despite the low wages and poor working conditions due to a lack of options. Some respondents said they would continue with kaamdani as they do not have other opportunities due to their low educational background. Most respondents have not received school education but are eager to get their children educated as they believe it is the way forward.

The study discusses the poor living standards of home-based workers, who mostly live in a room, constantly sharing the space for their home and work life. The pile-up of paid and unpaid work leaves women hardly any time to interact with other community members. Women got together at each other's houses when they were done with the housework and did their kaamdani work together whilst interacting and sharing to support each other. Home-based piece-rate work without appropriate workplace requirements, like proper lighting and seating arrangements, drastically impacts these women's health. Many respondents mentioned they suffered from back pain and poor eyesight.

In terms of policy, there are no set policies for home-based workers. Therefore, the first effort by the government must be in the direction of recognising home-based workers as workers. It was also noticed that the artisans were unaware of existing policies like the Artisans Credit Scheme. Most respondents did not trust government schemes, believing they would not make a difference. Some respondents mentioned they had filled out a form to avail the scheme, and people came to enquire. However, there was no follow-up. Instances like these have instilled deep mistrust among the artisans, who now do not want to pursue any scheme. Therefore, state governments must reach out via awareness drives to inform artisans, the carriers of our heritage, about these schemes and their benefits.

APPENDIX

The process of creating Kaamdani art involves the following raw materials and tools:

Raw materials:

Fabric - Typically, lighter-weight fabrics like chiffon, georgette, muslin, cotton, and silk are used for kaamdani embroidery.

Badla Taar (flattened metal wire) - Metal wires called badla composed of metals like copper and aluminium are utilised.

Challa (ring) - Plastic/metal rings are used as frames for badla ke taar to make designs on fabric

Neel (Indigo) - For chapayi (printing), a gum/kerosene and neel (robin blue or indigo) combination is used on a white cloth, whereas safeda (chalk) is used on a dark fabric.

Tools:

Khaka (Butter paper) - Pencil and a carbon paper is used for drawing the design over khaka.

Sahi ka Kanta (Porcupine quill) - Sahi ka Kanta is used for perforating the butter paper or fabric

Needle - Used for takaayi or embroidery

Kauri (Cowrie Shells) - Kauri, or sand filled glass, is used for ghutayi (removing underlying stains of print).

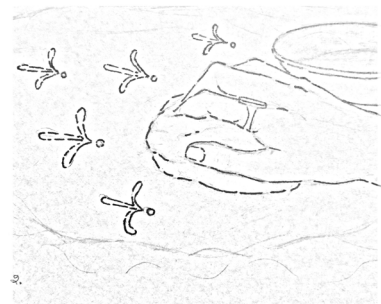
Main Process:

Cutting and preparation of fabric

The cloth pieces are trimmed to fit the client's needs or specifications. The majority of the finishing and washing is done after the embroidery.

Chapayi or printing

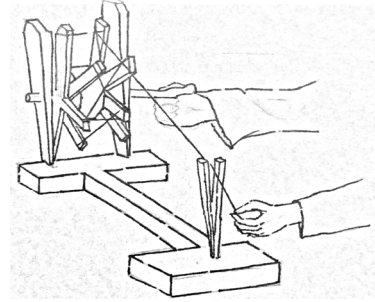
The client informs the karigars (artisans) about the intended design. Then, using a pencil or carbon paper, the karigars create the pattern on the khaka. The sketched pattern is then punctured with a needle called sahi ka kaanta. Putai is the term for printing a design or motif on fabric by wiping a wad of wool or cloth (phuchara) over the tracing on khaka after being



dipped in a solution of kerosene and neel. The khaka's perforated holes allow the mixture to pass through, tracing the pattern.

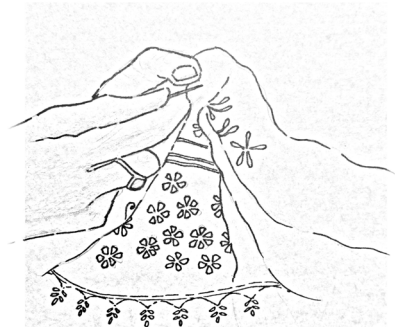
Preparation of badla taar

First is kandilakashi, that is, hammering out of a metal bar and the subsequent drawing into thick wire. Second is tarkashi, the process of stretching out thick wire into very thin wire or thread. The degree of thinness depending on the intended purpose of the wire. Then the process of badla making begins. The round wire is transformed into flat wire with varying thickness and width in the third step after the wire exits the tarkash. The project is known as tardabkana, and the worker is known as a tardabkaya, dabkaya, as well as a chapariya. A machine called a masha, which is identical to a charkha but smaller, is used to reel the wires onto it.



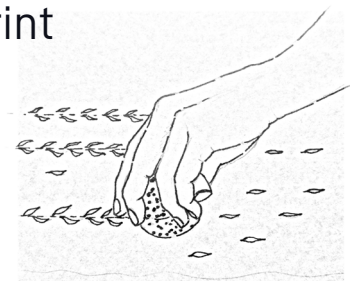
Takaayi or embroidery

The badla taar's end has a little thread affixed to it. The material is then twisted to form designs before being punctured into the cloth with a needle. By wrapping the badla taar around the fabric's warp and weft, the pattern is filled with straight or angular stitches. Chikankari stitches are included in badla work. The fardi ka kaam pattern is the most popular, although embroidery may also be seen on challa (rings), teeki (flat sequins), chaalu (elaborate designs like petals etc.), and patti (leaves). In fardi ka kaam, teeki or dots are generally made and distributed in a symmetrical pattern.



Ghutayi or removing underlying stains of print

After the embroidery is completed, it is rubbed over with kauri or a glass bottle filled with sand. It removes frayed edges and polishes metal threads. This process also involves the removal of stains from chapayi. It is now done with machines at karkhanas.



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