

Study of Value Chain of Indian Textile Handicrafts : A Case of Lucknow Chikankari

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Abstract

This paper studied different types of existing value chain models of Lucknowi Chikankari in context of the value chain model given by Porter (1985). Chikankari being an unorganized sector, the paper focused on the primary activities of Porter's value chain model. To have an in-depth understanding of different models and to highlight differences between them, field-based qualitative research in an informative manner seemed appropriate. Therefore, multiple-case-based research methodology was adopted for data collection and analysis. The study identified and outlined the prevalent three types of value chain models as traditional, contemporary, and mixed with respect to the primary activities of the value chain. The findings drew a comparison between various types of value chains prevalent in the industry, highlighting the relevant differences among them and suggesting the best suited one in artisans' interests. The study stated that the interventions that can be undertaken through collaboration of government, private organizations, and NGOs to improve the situation of artisans and contribute towards sustainability of the craft can be achieved by improvements and modifications in design and execution of activities. The suggestions and recommendations were made pertaining to eliminating the involvement of middlemen to reduce the cycle size and increase artisans' wages. The government should work towards educating the progressive artisans in e-commerce and linking them to e-commerce portals. The study suggested that for development of organizations, government, marketers, and producers (artisans), evolving a sustainable value chain in the interest of artisans and the industry is required.

Keywords : value chain, textile handicrafts, chikankari, direct marketing, e-commerce, production management, textile

JEL Classification : L25, L31, L23, L67, L81, M1, M11, M14, M3

Paper Submission Date : February 6, 2018 ; **Paper sent back for Revision :** April 11, 2018 ; **Paper Acceptance Date :** April 27, 2018

The history of Indian handicrafts is as old as one of the oldest civilizations of the world. The government started taking measures for preservation of crafts and upgradation of skills in the 1970s. However, later, the focus shifted to exports, until recently, when it was realized that the national heritage is in danger, and active measures are now being taken to provide a backbone support to the artisans and the crafts. Handicrafts are defined as: Items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and are generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They are also objects of utility and objects of decoration (VSE Division, Planning Commission, 2012).

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The handicrafts industry in India is part of the unorganized sector (Sarvamangala, 2012) and operates as cottage or small-scale industry. Handicrafts play an important role in the economy of the country and employment generation as it employs more than 7.3 million people (National Skill Development Corporation, 2016) ; the actual figures are believed to be much higher than those captured because of it being an unorganized sector, which is largely unaccounted for. According to NSDC (2016), the handloom and handicrafts sector is estimated to grow by 16% in the next 5 years and is expected to employ 17.79 million people by 2022. Even with such huge potential, the low wage rates for artisans, market price gap, lack of education, and lack of awareness of technology is forcing artisans to take up alternative livelihood options ("Art to mart: How can we build an end-to-end value chain that brings artisans profitably to market?", " 2015). The non - farm sector comprising of cotton textiles, wood, pottery, food, metal products, other handicrafts, etc. accounted for 60% of rural GDP in 2010 and is expected to contribute to 70% of the rural income by 2020 (Kashyap, 2012).

This paper aims at identification of value nodes and doing a comparative study of the prevalent value chains in the Chikankari handicraft industry of Lucknow. The Chikankari industry is dominated by women artisans, and most of these women belong to weaker sections of the society. To achieve and sustain higher growth in this sector, we need to work to increase the income of the artisans so as to motivate them to continue the traditional profession and bring sustainability overtime. Developing an end-to-end sustainable value chain will help in improving the income and living conditions of the artisans. A recent study on factors contributing to the upgradation of the socioeconomic status of women stated that enhancement in monthly income and spending contributed the most to it (Patel, Patel, & Patel, 2018).

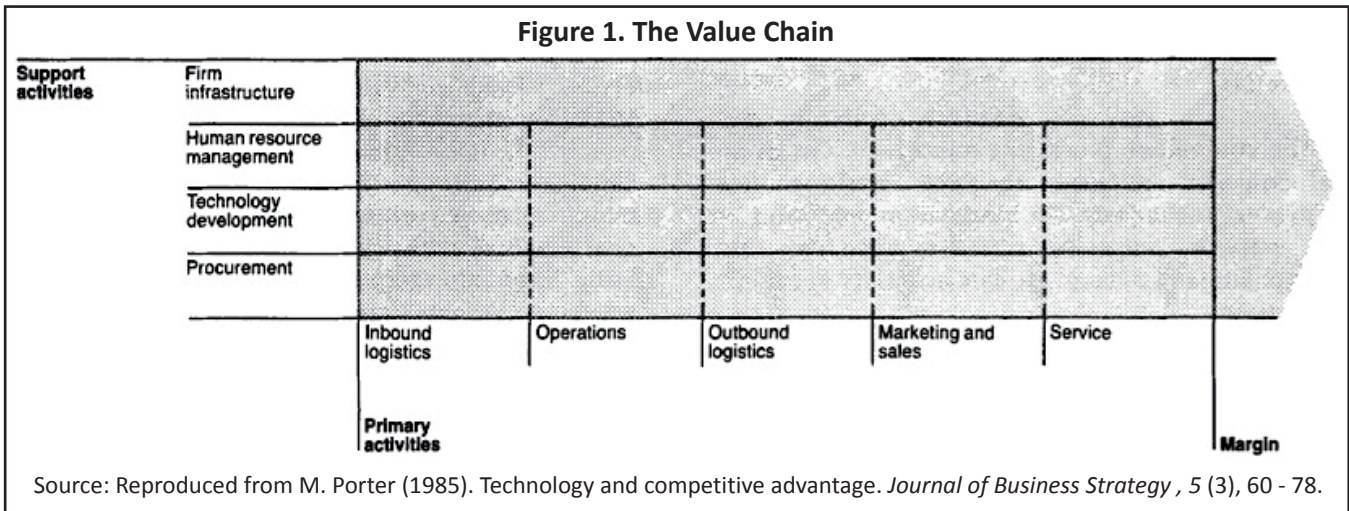
The city of Lucknow has a prominent place in history for its art and cultural heritage. It is known as the 'City of Nawabs.' Lucknow is the capital city of Uttar Pradesh State, having a population of 4.58 million people (Directorate of Census Operations, Uttar Pradesh, 2011). The city primarily offers employment in administrative and other services with less opportunity for industrial or commercial activities (Farooqui, 2014). The city is famous for hand embroidery called 'Chikankari.' The word is derived from the Persian word 'chik,' which means 'purdah' or 'a bind.' It is believed that the craft came to India 400 years back with Noorjahan, the queen of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, and flourished in Lucknow since then (Sharma, 2015). The craft is being practised by a large number of artisans, primarily women. It is the source of livelihood for millions of households in the region. This makes it imperative to work for the upliftment and benefit of the craft and artisans practising it.

Review of Literature

In general, value chain has a number of definitions and interpretations. Michael Porter explained a value chain as a system of interdependent activities that are connected through linkages and value chain analysis as a systematic study of competencies and activities of an organization that determines its competitive advantage (Porter, 1985). He developed the value chain model to highlight that competitive advantage depends on the value that is offered to the customer. Porter's value chain model comprises of nine value-adding activities, five primary and four secondary. The Figure 1 shows the value chain model as it was given by Porter. However, his definitions are restricted to organizational perspectives, and in last decade, global and industrial perspectives of value chain analysis have emerged.

Gereffi and Memedovic (2003) used the global value chain framework to explain the transformations in production, trade, and corporate strategies that altered the apparel industry over the past decades and changed the conditions for innovation and learning in the industry. The paper explained two types of international value chains: producer driven and buyer driven. It identified the apparel industry as a buyer - driven value chain that contains three types of lead firms: retailers, marketers, and branded manufacturers. The paper was written in the context of North America. Comparing the situation of handicrafts with the two value chains, it is observed that overall, textile handicrafts follow a buyer driven value chain.

Figure 1. The Value Chain



Value chain, as defined by Kaplinsky and Morris, is the range of activities through which a product passes from conception to phases of production, distribution channels, and finally to end consumers followed by disposal or recycle (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001).

Globally, a number of studies have been conducted on supply chain, logistics, and value chain in agriculture and apparel industries on value chain, highlighting the importance of study of value chains in any industry or trade. A study conducted in the electronics manufacturing industry revealed that organizations are adopting flexible approaches in terms of their logistics and value chain practices in order to gain benefits and fulfil their customers' requirements, which is being done through different levels of integration and implementation strategies responding to different volume and product mix requirements (Hock Soon & Mohammad Udin, 2011).

A study on supply chain integration and performance (Prajogo & Olhager, 2012) revealed the effect of integration of information and material flows among supply chain partners on operational performance by considering long term supplier relationships as the driver of integration. It highlighted that logistics integration affected the performance significantly, which in turn was affected by the information technology capabilities and information sharing.

A paper on insights from different global value chain (GVC) studies stated that the most important contribution of GVC studies has been that the studies have highlighted how activities are related and organized among firms at the industry level, and shifted the focus on industrial value chains rather than organizational chains. It also specified that knowledge flow and innovation dynamics within the industrial value chain play an important role (De Marchi, Di Maria, & Ponte, 2014).

Detailed literature review reveals the importance of value chain studies in different contexts and perspectives. A study of existing literature suggests that studies on value chain have been done for a few industries, like, agricultural produce (Meaton, Abebe, & Wood, 2015), global apparel, etc. A recent study on supply chain of SMEs in the textiles industry highlighted that supply chain strategy plays a crucial role in the performance of a supply chain (Ganeshan & Suresh, 2017).

Studies done on handicrafts include supply chain, marketing interventions, market segregations, etc., and some of these studies highlighted that direct linking of artisans to their consumers has proven to be a better way of marketing and it helps in improving the situation of crafts and artisans (Singh, Agarwal, & Modi, 2015). Singh et al. (2015) also highlighted that production capabilities and basic organizational skills of producers and artisans are to be worked upon so that the artisans are able to earn enough to be motivated for pursuing their traditional art and craft as their preferred livelihood option. As a matter of fact, in Chanderi, weavers fail to meet the demand of

FabIndia due to lack of organizational skills and production capabilities leading from inconsistency in number of artisans and weavers for various reasons, such as, alternate livelihood opportunities, availability of work, etc.

However, there is scarcity of literature for value chain in case of textiles handicrafts. Cultural and economic importance of handicrafts across the globe makes it imperative to do a value chain study of the industry so that the challenges can be identified and policy changes can be made.

This paper aims to study the different value chains prevalent in the Lucknowi Chikankari Industry and to do a comparative study among them. This will help us identify the more efficient chain with maximum value addition and returns. The study also identifies the role of key actors involved in the process of Chikankari and the relationships among them. This would enable us to further suggest measures that can benefit the artisans primarily and all the other stakeholders as well.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

The chikankari industry, being an unorganized sector, has a complex structure in terms of market competition, production models, relationships between different stakeholders, etc. Therefore, experiments or survey based statistical analysis would not have been effective in studying the relationship patterns among diverse stakeholders and functioning of the industry minutely. Key sources of information for the study are SMEs, NGOs, shopkeepers, other producers, marketers, and artisans involved in the process of Chikankari handicrafts and govt. officials. To meet the objectives of this research, it is imperative to understand the entire cycle of production and marketing including the challenges faced by different actors at each level. Therefore, to have an in-depth understanding of different models and to highlight the differences between them, field based qualitative research in an informative manner (Miles, 1979) seemed appropriate. Qualitative study has also been undertaken in light of very little previous literature in the field of Chikankari value chain analysis. The qualitative study gives the benefit of indepth analysis from a multiple stakeholder point of view (Merriam, 1998).

It was decided to take up the multiple-case-based research methodology for data collection and analysis. Multiple cases helped us to analyze the prevalent value chains in the Chikankari industry in a comparative light. It also gave us a comprehensive outlook towards the complexities in the value chain of a typically unorganized and predominantly low socioeconomic multiple producers industry. Cases were selected on the basis of preliminary interviews with industry experts, such that each case offered a unique and differing value chain from its competitors, thereby providing opportunities for comparative analysis. Efforts were made to identify organizations belonging to different homogenous groups that are heterogeneous to other groups. Industry experts included officials of District Industries Centre (DIC), Lucknow ; experts from All Indian Artisans and Craftworkers Association of India (AIACA) ; Regional Office of Development Commissioner - Handicrafts. Data were collected over the time period of around six months from November 2016 to April 2017. The findings that emerged during the case analysis were tested across other cases, thus enhancing reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn (Eisenhardt, 1989 ; Yin, 2009).

The selection of organizations and respondents was done on the basis of theoretical sampling per category on the interviewers' judgement (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The sampling involved selection of six organizations

Table 1. Identified Cases

Value Chain	Case Identified
Traditional	National Chikan, Sai Seva Chikan, Agarwal Chikan
Contemporary	Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)
Mixed	Almas Chikan, Adaa Chikan

in total. Three organizations, that are major representation of the industry and follow a traditional approach are referred to as 'traditional model' hereafter. Two organizations that have evolved from being traditional and have adopted some new practices that have worked in their favour were also studied, named as 'mixed model' since they seem to be using a combination of traditional and contemporary approach. However, for the third kind of case, 'the contemporary model,' only one organization could be studied, as it seems that the other major players in the industry are yet not following these practices. The Table 1 shows the cases identified and studied in this study.

The data collection involved collection of data from diverse sources, such as, any form of published information, organizations' websites, focus group discussions with key stakeholders, interviews, observations, etc. This helped in triangulation of data for establishing data validity and reliability. The data analysis was done in an elaborate manner. Case by case analysis was done. For case analysis of each organization, raw data were converted into meaningful codes. A separate case report was created from the transcripts of interviews and FGDs with artisans. A draft report was made for each organization showing the key value processes and relationships among actors. Thereafter, organizations with similar patterns were grouped into one category. The results are discussed ahead.

Discussion on the Value Chains in Chikankari

The detailed presentation of key findings from the study derived after extensive analysis of data collected from the field is given ahead. The key value chain activities and actors involved in Chikankari are studied and explained in Table 2 in relation to the definition of value chain activities (Holsapple, 2001) with certain contextual modifications.

The 'outbound logistics' are regulated by shopkeepers/mahajan/business houses/NGOs. They procure the raw material and decide which product is to be made, such as, noorie, saree, dupatta, etc. Accordingly, they get the fabric stitched by tailoring artisans, then the design is printed over the cloth using blocks by printing artisans (operations). After printing of designs is done, the shopkeepers either get the embroidery done directly by the artisan groups (operations), or they outsource it to middlemen. Middlemen then carry the bundles of stitched and printed fabrics along with raw material to artisan groups and distribute the work at fixed wages after deducting their share from the wages offered by the shopkeepers. Once the work is done in a pre-defined time, the middlemen collect them from artisans and give it back to the shopkeepers. Middlemen do quality check while collecting the work from artisans and deduct money from their wages in case of any discrepancies. Then shopkeepers again outsource the washing and ironing of the stock to washer men (operations). The shopkeepers take care of 'inbound logistics,' 'marketing & sales,' and 'services' offered to customers. After packaging, they sell the final products received from washer men to the customers through retail stores, exhibitions, e-commerce portals, etc. The Figure 2 shows different types of value chain models prevalent in Lucknow Chikankari Craft. Each model is discussed ahead in the paper one by one.

The three prevalent value chain models that came up in the Chikankari industry are :

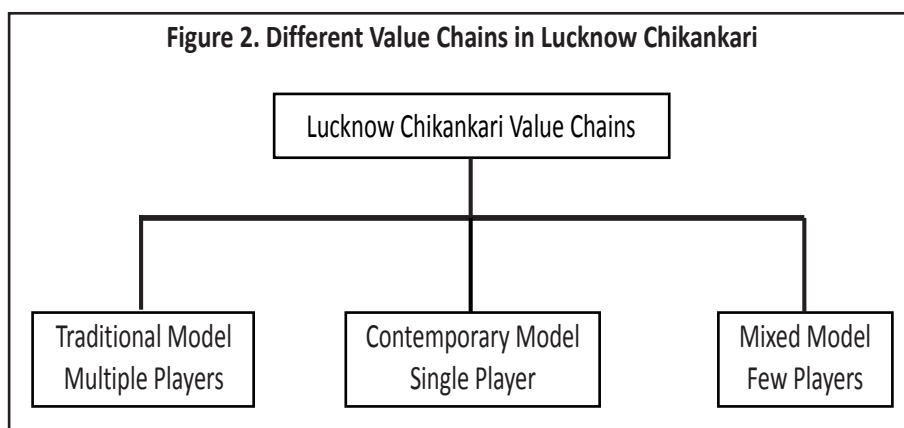
- (i)** Traditional Model - being followed by majority of the players since ages,
- (ii)** Contemporary Model- being followed by just one major player since the inception of the organization, and
- (iii)** Mixed Model- being followed by a few of the players and is a combination of contemporary and traditional models.

These models are studied in detail and differences and best practices of each are highlighted. The Figures 3, 4, and 5 depict the prevalent value chains of the Chikankari industry.

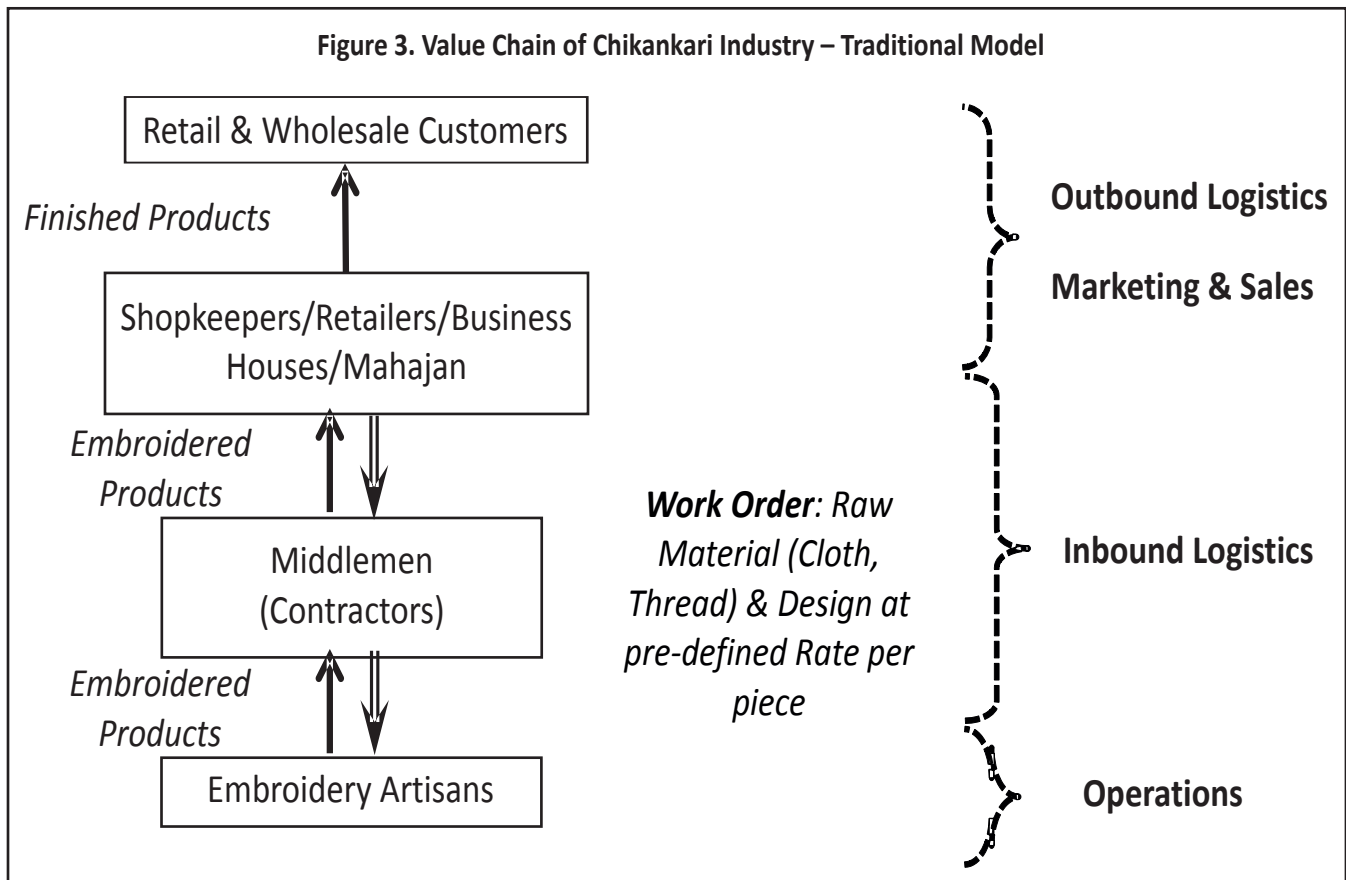
Table 2. Value Chain Activities in Chikankari

Activity	Definition	Actors Identified
Primary Activities		
1. Inbound Logistics	Receiving, storing, and distributing materials to manufacturing premises (artisans). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement and storage of raw materials. • Distribution of raw materials to artisans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopkeepers/Mahajan/Business Houses/NGOs • Middlemen
2. Operations	Transforming inputs into finished products. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Printing • Stitching • Embroidery • Washing & Ironing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artisans (different artisan groups for different activities.)
3. Outbound Logistics	Storing and distributing products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopkeepers/Mahajan/Business Houses/NGOs
4. Marketing & Sales	Promotion and sales efforts.	
5. Service	Maintain or enhance product value through post-sale services.	
Secondary Activities		
1. Infrastructure	Support for the entire value chain, including general management, planning, finance, accounting, legal services, government affairs, and quality management.	Chikankari is part of an unorganised sector; therefore, the actors for these activities are not clearly defined. However, most of the activities defined here are controlled and executed by the shopkeepers/business houses/NGOs themselves.
2. Human Resource Management	Recruiting, hiring, training, and development of employees.	
3. Technology development	Improving products and manufacturing processes.	Purchasing inputs.
4. Procurement	Support for the entire value chain, including general management, planning, finance, accounting, legal services, government affairs, and quality management.	

Source: Authors' own and Holsapple (2001)



The traditional value chain model has a prominent position for middlemen, who deal with the artisans directly and get the work done for the shopkeepers. These middlemen deduct their margin from the wages that are to be paid to the artisans. This affects the wages received by the embroidery artisans. It is sad to note that the artisans get the



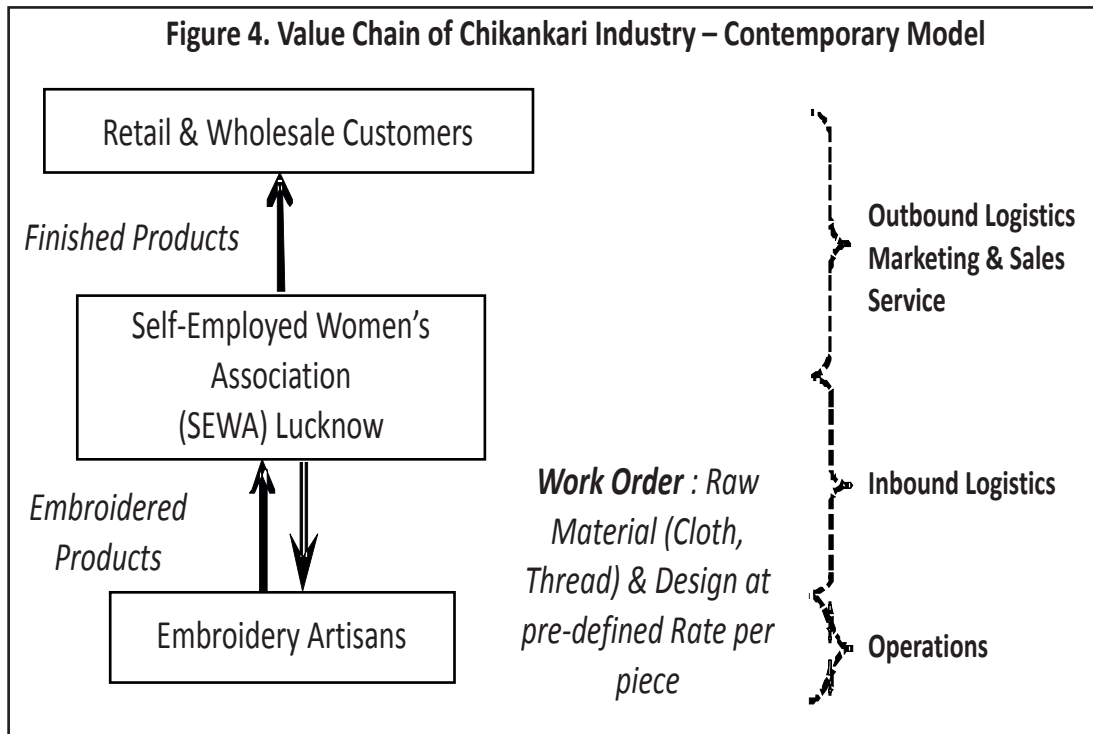
least from the craft even though they do maximum value addition to the product and moreover, the artisans do not even get fixed minimum wages, rather they are left on the mercy and wish of the middlemen.

“...the middleman is not lenient, he deducts money from our wages if he is not satisfied with the work or if the fabric is spoiled...” (by artisans).

...it is required to deduct money otherwise these artisans will be careless in handling the fabric, they always get it dirty, sometimes the fabric gets tea stains...also the quality of embroidery is important, if we won't be strict, they will do sub-standard work... (by middlemen)

Unfortunately, being business oriented, the organizations are concerned only about the work and not about the situation of the artisans. With multiple objectives of bringing an end to the exploitation of artisans, revival of craft, and providing livelihood option to women, an organization by the name of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) stepped into the industry in 1984. The value chain model of SEWA is presented in the Figure 4 and is categorized as the contemporary model.

The contemporary model followed by SEWA eliminated the involvement of middlemen from the chain and started working with the artisans directly, thus putting an end to the exploitation of artisans by middlemen. Also, the margin of artisans increased in the form of increased wages.



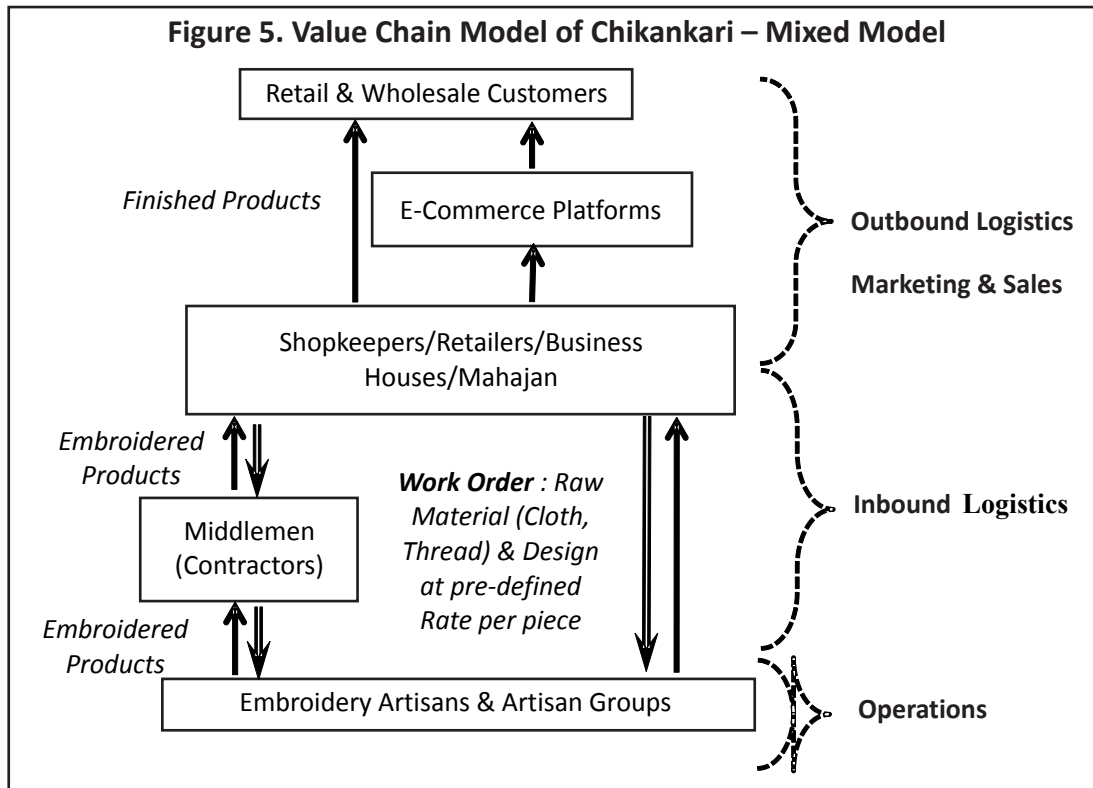
... we have artisans working with us who are salaried, then there are artisans who take the work to their homes and are paid wages, there is no middleman involved, we deal with the artisans directly...our salaried employees or community representatives do the quality check and allocation of work for us... (by SEWA)

...our production cost is higher than other players in the market because maintaining a workplace for artisans incurs cost, but we have customers who are ready to pay a premium price for good quality work...we are able to deliver quality because of being in direct touch with the artisans... (by SEWA)

“...we have our centres on field as well so that the artisans living far off can collect work from there ; also, some artisans work in the centre itself, they are paid salary by us...” (by SEWA).

The organization allocates work to artisans and maintains a record of the quantity allotted to the artisans and time taken by them to complete the work. Wages are fixed per piece before work allocation, and deadlines are communicated to the artisans. Initially, women artisans were not so open to come out of their homes to collect work from the office of SEWA. So, the members from the SEWA team started visiting the houses of these artisans to distribute work. Gradually, a system was established and now even artisans freely come directly to the organization for collecting and submitting embroidered clothes. SEWA sells their products to retail and wholesale customers through retail stores and primarily through exhibitions. Women artisans are encouraged to take loans and become entrepreneurs. They are also provided with counters in the exclusive exhibitions of SEWA.

“...we have got a loan from the bank with the help of SEWA, and now we do our own work...we also get a stall in SEWA's exhibition to sell our products...” (by artisans).



“...we will work only for SEWA and nobody else...” (by artisans).

Then, there are organizations that follow a combination of both - the traditional and the contemporary model. The Figure 5 shows the mixed value chain model. The organizations following this model get the exquisite work done by selected artisans directly ; whereas, all the other work is done through middlemen. However, some organizations have gone a step ahead in accessing the market. Other than retail stores, they sell their products through e-commerce portals as well. This gives them an advantage of reaching out to customers who are sitting miles away.

"...we also have a tie up with the leading online portal...we don't have much knowledge on how to use it. So far, we have not benefitted from e-commerce..." (by organization official).

"...we have our own e-commerce portal, and we do get orders from it, but mainly, sales are through our retail outlets only..." (by organization official).

...we get our exquisite work done by the artisans that we have hired and pay directly to them, but most of the regular work is given through middlemen...we don't want to allocate our resources in direct dealing with artisans...dealing with artisans is not an easy task... (by organization official)

Concluding Remarks

The key activities involved in all the three value chain models are in line with the model given by Porter (1985),

that are, outbound logistics, inbound logistics, operations, marketing & sales, and services. However, Chikankari, being part of an unorganized sector, the secondary activities given in Porter's value chain are not taken into consideration in the study. Inbound activities, outbound activities, and operations are key functions of production process in Chikankari that is done either on work order basis or on market anticipation. Type of production decides the marketing process and strategy. In the work order basis production, wholesale customers (export houses, business houses, popular designers, etc.) place orders with mahajans and shopkeepers. In market anticipation, the mahajans/shopkeepers produce as per their seasonal demands and sell the products to the retail customers through shops and exhibitions. As regards the marketing & sales part, mahajans, shopkeepers, retailers, etc. sell the finished products to retail and wholesale customers (export houses, business houses, e-commerce sites, designers, etc.) through shops and exhibitions.

It must be noted that in both the types of production, the artisans who add the maximum value to the product are at maximum loss, since they work on meagre wages and do not have any share in profit. To safeguard the interest of the industry, we need to work in the best interests of the artisans. Therefore, the need of the hour is to promote end-to-end value chain that can maximize the benefits of the artisans.

The contemporary model that we came across in this study can be one of the feasible options. The term 'contemporary' here does not imply the newness, as it has been in practice for more than three decades now. It indicates the approach that is working in the best interests of the artisans (comparatively). The organization incurs higher costs of production compared to other players, yet it manages to end up in a win-win situation by maintaining quality of the products and charging premium prices for the same. Customers are ready to pay premium prices for exquisite works. The contemporary model is a successfully running example that can be adopted by other players. However, few more advancements like linking artisans directly with customers, e-commerce platforms, profit sharing for artisans, encouraging entrepreneurship skills among artisans, training them to take up other roles across the value chain, etc. will be welcoming.

Interventions that can be undertaken to improve the situation of artisans and weavers and contribute towards sustainability of these crafts over generations are rooted in the modifications of the value chain. As stated by Porter (1985), competitive advantage can be achieved by improvements and modifications in design and execution of activities through cycle time reduction, productivity improvement, cost reduction, exploring new marketing & distribution channels, etc. Moreover, studies in the past have highlighted the fact that organizational justice plays an important role in trust building among workers and improving their work engagement (Sharma & Yadav, 2018).

Implications and Recommendations

The current study provides not only policy implications, but also contributes in offering managerial implications that can prove to be of benefit to firms operating in the handicrafts and retail apparel space. Producers using the contemporary value chain model can add to the sustainability of the value chain by nurturing the artisans, thereby ensuring a valuable asset development in the form of artisan pool for future transactions. Artisans in closer contact with the corporate houses would show greater affinity and loyalty as compared to artisans who are only approached through middlemen. Artisans working in closer association with the corporates could also be inspired to adopt more efficient work processes, thereby cutting down on operating costs and processing time. The corporates could train and monitor the artisans at the most fundamental level, ensuring work that is more conducive to the product line of the buyer in terms of design, quality, material, etc. Also, minimizing the middlemen in the value chain would make the value chain more agile, and the producer would be able to exert greater control over efficiency and costs.

Few of the strategic recommendations that could benefit the livelihood of artisans are :

- ↳ Organizations should adopt a model that eliminates the involvement of middlemen, thereby increasing the wages of artisans and reducing the cycle size.
- ↳ Organizations may appoint their employees or identify the progressive artisans among the community to be responsible for allocation and submission of work and can also be trained to manage e-commerce portals for artisan groups.
- ↳ Strengthening of SHGs should be done so as to develop them into self-sustained groups working in the Chikankari livelihood.
- ↳ Marketing assistance should be given by government departments in the form of exhibitions and linkage with e-commerce portals.
- ↳ Efforts should be made to educate and link progressive artisans directly to customers through electronic platforms and train them in business and organizational skills.
- ↳ Organizations should opt for e-commerce portals for marketing of handicrafts products, this will help them in increasing their market reach as they will be able to reach out directly to overseas customers.
- ↳ Handicraft marketing support centres can be made as contact points for artisans willing to use e-commerce portals.
- ↳ Different e-commerce start-ups should be encouraged by the government to work directly with the artisans so that the benefit percolates down to the artisans easily.

The aforementioned steps are likely to improve the overall situation of the artisans, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the craft. A collective effort is to be made from all the stakeholders to develop a value chain for sustainability of artisans and crafts.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

Limitations of case study research include generalization, as the method is restricted to a bounded context and a small number of subjects. Also, this method generates a huge amount of data, managing which is a challenge and selecting from this data may be subject to researcher's bias and overlook.

The study leaves scope for further studies on value chain analysis quantifying the value added and benefits received at each node of the value chain. This will validate that artisans add maximum value and receive minimum benefits in the current value chains in practice. Moreover, the existing models can be developed further to ensure sustainability over time.

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