

## **Historiographical Trends in Heritage Studies: Critical Discussion with a Special Emphasis on Lucknow's Embroidery Industry**

*Bidisha Dhar*

### **Abstract:**

*The article, at the outset, explores the problematic of the concept of heritage, the various strands of heritage studies, and the ways in which the heritage industry incorporates these ideas according to its convenience. In the following two sections, it attempts to explore how these ideas are incorporated within the artisanal industries in India and what are its implications, for specific industries like the embroidery industry of Lucknow.*

**Keywords:** *Artisans, Heritage Industry, Heritage studies, tangible heritage, intangible heritage.*

### **Introduction:**

This article intends to critically discuss the historiography of heritage studies. The problematic of the beginnings of heritage studies, its deep connections with the tourism industry, as well as the (re)/(mis)-presentation of historical facts through the latter, persistently dominated the exploration of the varied themes within the literature on heritage studies in the last quarter of the last century. This is evident from the wide range of article publications in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, along with many other publications under the Heritage Studies theme that will be discussed below. The beginnings of the heritage studies as contextualized by David Harvey is grounded in the critique of modernity that emerged around the 1960s and the 1970s, giving rise to post-modernism, the cultural logic of late capitalism, where history becomes an unreality, a simulacra or a shadow of what it really is and transforms itself in to heritage studies, that is, an analysis of the heritage industry. (Harvey 1990; Lowenthal 1985; Wright 1985; Hewison 1985). When the heritage industry intermingles and collaborates with tourism, it becomes capable of adding value, creating infrastructure, and preparing the local products for export. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett Autumn, 1995: 367-380).

Harvey agrees with Lowenthal, Wright, and Hewison that since the 1960s, economic and political decline in Britain propelled the rise of the heritage industry that became one of the principal industries of Britain to an extent that Britain was transforming itself from the producer of goods to the producer of heritage. Harvey notes that this cultural evolution occurred in a social, political or economic scenario of late-capitalism, as already mentioned above, that is, on the one hand, an obsession with excessive commodity production and the

mass-market demands, as against the ethos of any aesthetic innovation or experimentation had become integral to all aspects of the daily life under capitalism like fashion, pop art, television and other forms of media image. On the other hand, new waves of immigrants from Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines, and Central America, along with the older groups from Japan, China, etc., were making strong interventions into the culture of the metropolis.

The resultant cultural formulations strengthened the urgency to 'preserve' the past because that would be complementary to preserving the self, or if pushed a little further, would be akin to what was being interpreted as the 'authentic' self. Thus, the metropolis tried to preserve itself by creating beliefs and perceptions about certain icons of its past. In the erstwhile colonies, the heritage industry does not try to reverse the process of deculturation that had been initiated by the colonial administrators and missionaries. Instead, the industry provided them with a value of the past, difference, exhibition, and wherever possible, an impression of indigeneity. In the process, it went on creating the past itself as if the past, or rather certain aspects of the past, were threatened by some crisis.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett agrees with Pierre Nora's *lieux de memoire* concept that the repeated creation, or rather proliferation of memories through archives, museums, memorials, commemorative events, etc., is an indication of the crisis that the memory is going through. In Britain, for instance, it was vested in a particular presentation of its past, that is, one unblemished by either class struggle or political unrest. Its vanguard was a universal middle class grounded in property ownership and free enterprise, and a vehement representative of nationalistic politics. The author further suggests that the memory required to be created regularly, and that it was never in so much need to be created as in the late twentieth century.

A tourist's memory, for instance, can be definitively influenced by tourist brochures or sometimes even the narrations of the tourist guides. These programmes strongly help to create illusions or representations of ideas about heritage, in a manner that leaves them in no position to question the created representations of heritage. Sometimes, also, the tourists do not bother to question these created histories or representations because their minds are already textured by a certain strand of historical studies, which is akin to mythology. This significantly blurs the distinction between history and distorted historical representation. The tourism promotion authority could be the state, which is often the case, or any private enterprise, or, in most cases state-sponsored private enterprise.

The promotional discourse often entails a history that is either bereft of historical facts or comprises compromised historical facts. The latter, often popularized as local or popular history, has the capacity to cause serious political upheavals. The interaction between 'tradition' and tourism adds value to contemporary heritage productions with claims to the past. In most cases, the 'tradition' or the context that the heritage represents is a created

one with illusions and concealed facts, and that is why history students must examine or analyze the context.

Thus, heritage studies need to study and unravel the hidden and the concealed behind every religious site, folk festival, museum exhibition, historical village, concert party, postcard, etc. To push this argument a little further, this concealment could hide a community's history and simultaneously bring to the fore some other community's history. Thus, every illusion showcases and hides histories simultaneously.

The beginnings of this kind of heritage industry, when the concept of heritage became an expression of the interests and responsibilities of particular civic society and not that of individuals, as suggested by Marie Louise Stig Sorensen and John Carman (Sorensen and Carman 2009) can be pushed to the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. It is this period in which many contemporary institutions, involved with the contemporary formulations of the heritage concept, can trace their beginnings.

These developments were rooted in the socio-political tendencies of that time. Firstly, this time saw the setting up of museums, zoological gardens, botanical gardens, etc. Secondly, this was also the time that experienced the development of the relationship between the nation state, nationalism, and the growth in the interest of studying the past, along with the growth in the conservation movement and preservation societies, and also the national and local antiquarian or historical societies.

Third, a distinct public sphere and the public were created as an outcome of the political movements during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, like the French Revolution. It transformed the ideas of citizen and civil rights, giving rise to a conscious, educated, and civilized middle class vis-à-vis the state that was no longer being represented by the king. The citizens would no longer accept or leave knowledge production unquestioned, and hence came to dominate the heritage debate to a large extent towards the end of the twentieth century.

The public sentiments about the preservation of the past got a further fillip in the nineteenth century from the impact of industrialization. On one hand, the ideas of progress were being articulated through the industrial revolution, and on the other hand, a section of the public was showing resentment against these ideas. The latter was primarily due to the regrets about the world that was fast disappearing from the effects of random and widespread mechanization, conservation movements around the world, as well as the professionalization of heritage practices. The latter included the establishment of museums, legal measures, and the allocation of rules.

The gradual professionalism in heritage study led to the replacement of the former category of antiquarian activities exercised by a small, select, and interconnected group of individuals with strong ties to multiple disciplines, such as archaeology, Classics, Anglo-Saxon Studies, etc. The heritage study was exported from Europe to its colonies of Asia and Africa through the colonial administrators.

The Euro-American heritage model was transported to almost all the countries of the world, and even to those countries that did not experience colonial domination. These are reflected in the increased engagement of international organizations of heritage management. This resulted in the creation of laws and legislations like that of the National Heritage Acts in the United Kingdom since the 1980s that involve issues such as the illicit traffic in antiquities, the protection of heritage during armed conflict, and international regulation of the maritime heritage. These and definitive definitions about heritage like the UNESCO's declaration in 2003 that states that 'Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations' that includes intangible cultural products and World Archaeological Congress or the WAC's definition of 2008 together tried to define heritage and contributed significantly in the carving out of the distinct academic category of Heritage Studies.

But these definitions and legislations at the international level opened up gaps and incompatibilities in attitudes between the traditional 'owners' of heritage and those of the institutional guardians, resulting in the clash between different knowledge and belief systems and raising questions about whose heritage one was considering and who was making the definitions. An open definition and a multi-disciplinary analysis of the history of heritage practices and research would, it is believed by the authors, reflect upon the various ways heritage has been perceived through time.<sup>1</sup>

Dennis Hardy's article 'Historical Geography and Heritage Studies' (Hardy Dec. 1988: 333-338) explores the various interventions of the variables of class, gender, and locality as well as the dominant and subversive ideologies that either reinforce or challenge the existing patterns of power. The author advocates that students from various disciplines have to be made conscious about interpreting the term as per its conservative and radical contexts. The former, the author discusses, has in a determining role, the factor of nostalgia, that is, representing the past through sentimentality of the artefacts like wallpaper designs, best-selling historical novels, post-modernist architecture, etc., that become part of the heritage industry. Nostalgia, with the strong intervention of nationalism and patriotism, was very closely interwoven in the everyday lives of the people. And that is why to think of heritage as just colonial exploitation and nothing else would be a grossly oversimplistic idea.

On the other hand, the concept of heritage as a radical concept, argues Hardy, explored the work of preservation that was initiated to a large extent by William Morris. For Morris, preservation was not just the reflection of an interest in the aesthetics of the past but also

---

<sup>1</sup> These issues are further elaborated in the Marie Louise Stig Sorensen and John Carman eds. *Heritage Studies Methods and Approaches* volume's introductory section, 'Setting the Scene', that has three essays by John Carman, Marie Louise, and Stig Sorensen and Barbara J. Little.

the production of the past's scape with strong intervening social relations. This approach by Morris meant the capacity for a true conception of history, that is, a power to make the past a part of the present. He successfully illustrated that the glory of the heritage of palaces and national symbols is just one of many perspectives. Morris agreed, further argues Hardy, that the experiences of the oppressed are studied in their own right and very clearly exhibited to be part of larger and complex historical processes.

It is these larger and complex historical processes that Hardy suggests as something that would be truly befitting the heritage histories. Where not only the history of the dominant classes comprises heritage studies, but also those of the dominated, and in this sense, heritage history opens up a lot of possibilities. A historical geographer, for instance, is well positioned to build an empirical basis in not only identifying landscapes but also unearthing the past communities and cultures hidden in them and then amalgamating them in heritage studies. And, secondly, they can also unravel the hidden layers of ideologies that go into making these landscapes. Thus, combining these investigative and humanistic skills with those of the core Marxist methodologies might lead to a more serious, interdisciplinary heritage Studies—a combination of the core empirical basis of historical geography and the urgency to unravel the structural contexts of the heritage sites.<sup>2</sup>

John E. Tunbridge questions the accuracy of the conservative/radical polarization in heritage studies outside Britain in his write-up 'Geography, Historical Geography and Heritage Studies: Some Further Reflections' in *Area* (Tunbridge September 1989: 316-317). He argues that in Canada, the awareness of the vernacular heritage, that is, the heritage of the common people, had been firmly established by the 1970s. No doubt the elite were in a dominant position to exploit the residential and commercial potential of the vernacular heritage, but since the 1980s, some kind of gentrification of the process of heritage conservation had begun, which had lessened the degree of socio-economic displacement. Thus, while the polarization between the radical and the conservative was not completely wrong, the degree of polarization could be questioned.

At the level of the international debates, too, the question of whose heritage was being conserved and being marketed had also been discussed. The class discord had been broadened to include the cultural dimension because there were chances that there were deep differences between the two sections, that is, of the majorities and the minorities, at times also having serious political implications, like that evident in South Africa. However, Turnbridge concluded that irrespective of any biases, all geographers had a strong role to play in heritage conservation at the national, and global levels since conservation is integral to a geographer's work.

Paul A. Shackel, 'Pursuing Heritage, Engaging Communities' in *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Archaeologies of Engagement, Representation, and Identity (2011), pp. 1-

---

<sup>2</sup> Hardy, Dennis. Dec., 1988. "Historical Geography and Heritage Studies". *Area*, 20: 333-338.

9, suggests that archaeologists involved in heritage studies and civic engagement movements work towards making a difference in the public lives of communities. They also help to promote an improved quality of life through political and non-political processes. Meaningful historical awareness, along with the various kinds and degrees of empowerment, could provide a new sense of community building.

Archaeology could be part of creating more relevant and inclusive stories, and it could be a sphere of dialogue within the broader conversation of the past and the present. And archaeologists should have a wide-ranging concern, such as environment, resource extraction, health, labour, race, class, gender, etc., and contextualize them historically.

A pertinent point is made here by Nick Merriman, who suggests that heritage should represent the past of those communities or people whose past were not represented in the museums and heritage sites. Merriman's work almost initiated a movement for the representation of the alternative voices within the heritage representation movements around the world and across disciplines, for instance, in the field of Museology, Geography, Archaeology, etc. The World Archaeological Congress that was organized at Southampton in 1986 championed the cause of the peoples 'without history'. With the gradual emergence of other important aspects of heritage studies, historiography of the 1990s stepped into a new domain of considering heritage open to misrepresentations on one hand and capable of providing an identity on the other hand. (Merriman, 1991) The notion of 'community' found within the field of heritage needs to be rethought as suggested by Emma Watson and Laura Jane Smith in their article 'The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage' published in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 16, Nos. 1-2, January-March 2010, 4-15.

In most of these heritage projects, the idea is to involve things that are done for communities. The author further suggests that heritage professionals and policymakers find this particular rhetoric of community useful because it makes one feel good about the work that one does, especially in the midst of political and social exclusion, intolerance, and injustice. The kind of projects that dominate this sector have been best applied to the white middle class. There was a presupposition of a particular economic means, Western schooling, access to a specific range of skills, and the freedom not only to get involved but also to choose or change identities.

Thus, community involvement and collaborations with indigenous people, residents, as well as lawmakers and politicians have emerged as major elements around which heritage studies have come to be organized. Recent research has also added several strands to the investigation of heritage. There has been works about disenfranchised groups, particularly the working class, the role of heritage in cultural tourism, heritage and environment, in particular climate change, both in terms of how heritage was affected by these changes and in terms of how understanding of heritage may be tacked on to perceptions of a changing world. The role of heritage in peace building and processes of reconciliation, and the role

of the reconstruction of cultural heritage during and after violent conflict, has also been investigated. Non-governmental organizations and funding agencies like the European Union and the impact of reconstruction on people's sense of belonging, their identity and ability to reconstitute meaningful lives is also being studied. (Sorensen and Carman 2009: 19-20). Community participation to preserve the intangible heritage, in fact, opens up a whole range of issues pertaining to the artisans' community the world over. The discussion about these forms is given in the next section, which helps to broaden the scope and the field of heritage studies itself.

### **Section I:**

#### **Vestiges of the Intangible Heritage: A Discussion in the Global Context:**

Literature on artisanal communities, their practices, expressions, lifestyles, etc., that form an important element of intangible heritage (Ahmad 2006: 292-300) abounds in the Indian context. They pertain to different eras of Indian history. However, they might not necessarily be classified as literature on heritage studies. The purpose of the following discussions is to bring multifarious facets of artisanal literature on the same platform and attempt to blur the distinctions between various classifications as far as possible. In the process, literature about artisanal communities at the global level would also be considered.

In India, a range of writings since the 1980s, tried to critically engage with the issues of culture and community, caste and religion. (Mehta 1997; Knorringa 1999; Gooptu 2001; 1984). Deepak Mehta, in his study on the weavers of Barabanki, argued that the world of the weaver was a composite entity where their Islamic identity was enmeshed with their work of weaving and their social structure, which Mehta terms as the 'cultural capital'.<sup>3</sup> But is the weaver's social world shaped entirely by his religious inheritance? Does the weaver not forge any kind of solidarity beyond his immediate religious and social bonding? Is he not influenced by external and professional factors like the market? The market dynamics are important to study, as exhibited by Peter Knorringa's study of the Agra footwear industry. (Knorringa 1996).<sup>4</sup> An attempt to unravel ethnographically the artisan's

---

<sup>3</sup> Mehta uses Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'.

<sup>4</sup> Caste antagonism between the dominant Punjabi trader-entrepreneurs and Jatav artisans in this industry, along with the increased availability of plastic footwear and the collapse of some export markets, aggravated the artisan unemployment and precarious employment conditions since the 1990s. Only a small group of artisans, who are employed in small-scale export-oriented factories run by non-Agra entrepreneurs, enjoy relatively better employment conditions.

Since the Punjabi traders were in greater control of the capital and the market system, including the retailers, it was easier for them to oust the lower caste *Jatav* competitor by making salient the *Jatav*'s untouchable status within the market network. By the 1990s, practically all larger workshops and all factories were owned by the non-*Jatavs*, and the *Jatavs* only owned home-based production units that predominantly operated in the direct sales channel. Apart from the status-set conflict, the

notion of space, time, body, and freedom, or ‘popular culture’ and their ‘internal logistics’ was made by Nita Kumar (Kumar 1988).

Throughout the twentieth century, leisure activities of the Benaras artisans, such as the *Bahri alang*, *akharas*, *melas*, *sringars*, *urs*, *mehfils*, *Ramlila*, celebratory processions, *Nakkatayya*, together with the values they encoded, were being gradually relegated to the ‘lower class’ domain. This act of marginalizing an erstwhile composite social activity to the domain of the ‘peripheral’ and the ‘backward’ also implied a repositioning of a certain basic philosophy of life, which is termed by Kumar as the ‘cultural change’. The artisans’ resilience to the changing conditions of the time, their lived experiences, and their memories of the time are explored through the complexity and subtlety of their identity and their relationship with the leisure activities, which Kumar terms as ‘*Banarasipan*’. The mode, rhythms, relations, and hereditary nature of artisan production within the silk weaving, brass and copper work, and wooden toys industries of Benaras explain these subtleties and complexities. There is a need to discuss the conflicts and contradictions and push the contours further. Are the contradictions and conflicts within the leisure activities subsumed under the author’s description of it as ‘*Banarasipan*’? What is the popular culture of women artisans?

This question has become important since the 1980s, when women formed a large section of the home-based artisans and workers. (Singh and Kelles-Viitanen 1987; Mies 1982). Their work was ‘invisible’, undervalued, and classified as ‘subsidiary activities’ or even dismissed as having no value at all, the primary reason being that the work was carried out within the confines of the home along with their unpaid domestic tasks. Women also, at times, found it difficult to separate their professional and their other concurrent home activities.

From the 1990s, a range of writings coincided with the dawn of liberalization policies in India. While the earlier works had highlighted the ravages of the lived experiences through cultural adaptations by the artisans, Tirthankar Roy considered these adaptations as an important factor in the survival of the handicraft industry throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. He argued that a large number of artisans, around 10 million, continued to function alongside the factory even at what Tirthankar calls the peak of de-industrialization in 1900 (Roy 1999: 13-23).

A whole range of recent literature has discussed these issues and has researched the plight

---

Punjabis also wanted to control the process of production more directly. Gradually, by the 1990s, the caste-based identity clash, between the Punjabi traders and *Jatav* master artisans in many cases shifted to relations within the workshops and small-scale factories where the latter often operated as gang leaders, recruiting and supervising workers.

*Jatav* resistance comes in the form of their pride in their hereditary skills and their reluctance in taking up unskilled jobs in other sectors. They strive to improve their position within the artisan hierarchy by trying to work out continuously their limitations. However, this is seldom successful.



of artisan labour within a globalized world economy. In the Indian context, Sanjay Kathuria suggests that the trade in artisan goods itself is largely dominated by a handful of importing countries, viz., Germany, USA, UK, France, illustrating that the industry is largely at the disposal of dominant First World corporations and trading regimes. (Kathuria 1998: 21)

For the global scenario, Timothy J. Scrase provides a very useful review of this literature, drawing upon recently published research conducted in various countries in Central America, Asia, and Africa. (Scrase 2003: 449-461). These include the case of Malay peasants for whom craft production is a 'weapon of the weak', an activity which frequently operates at the margins of the mainstream economy and the state (Scott 1985). It also includes works on African art and Kuna crafts (Steiner 1994), which explore the process of internationalized craft commercialization in terms of commodity chains linking artisans, wholesalers, and first-world department stores. Also, other works on Oaxacan woodcarving (Chibnick 2000: 225-242) and Zapotec weavers (Wood 2000: 133-148) have reported on artisan communities that seek market niches or develop flexible specialization in their manufacturing of crafts in order to survive. In the case of Indonesian textiles, the development of this industry, based on a large, commercialized manufacturing process which created 80,000 jobs, has led to the subsequent demise of an estimated 4,10,000 traditional artisan jobs in weaving and associated crafts like dyeing. (Buchanan 1985: 133-148).

In the midst of the above discourse, one has to take into consideration the agency of the artisans. In the case of the Taiwan artisans, they partake in constructing their identity by building up the idea of their work as both 'Indigenous' and 'heritage' through practices and discourses that, in turn, contribute to Taiwanese national identity as well as Indigenous identity. In public spaces such as museums, community centres, workshops, and local markets, indigenous identities and cultures are performed and displayed and, in the process, transformed and reinterpreted. This, at times, raises questions about the authenticity and value of the craft that are framed as 'heritage' as well as on the indigeneity of their makers, thus justifying the label 'indigenous heritage'. To serve their own understandings of 'Indigenous heritage', the Taiwanese indigenous artisans are far from being subservient and passive and can make use of the government programmes through four main practices—i) a focus on objects' materiality, ii) focus on visual display and performance, iii) cultural research, and iv) transmission of knowledge. The important point is that the artisans use their work as springboards for narratives like those of memories, anecdotes, stories, and legends to provide for the cultural and historical contextualization of their objects. Artisans also use technology and other modern methods to advertise their products as well as to make the process of production visible. They also give a lot of importance to training their next generation of artisans in various skills and other kinds of knowledge. (Varutti 2015: 1036-1049). In the case of Elda and Alcoy, the construction of the artisans' and workers' identities was based upon everyday relationships and on living and working together in the same space as their employers. (Tovar et.al., 2011: 331-343).

In Alcoy, official documents and the city tourist guide also refer to the events of the eighteenth century, for instance, the labour conflicts between the merchants/industrialists and the weavers/workers, the violent Luddite actions, the later anarchist union movements demanding wage improvements and the reduction of long working days, the intense labour conflicts and revolts during the late 19th century including the Alcoyan labour movement of 1873. The last one was an anarchist revolution involving almost 6000 workers demanding wage increases and an eight-hour working day. All these movements form strong memories as well as heritage ideas of the present-day Alcoyan workers and their unions.

Certain developments from the end of the nineteenth century to the last years of the decade of the 1970s helped in the emergence of the traditional identity of the local workers. The developments included rapid industrialization in Spain, and this led to the simultaneous rise of labour movements in many parts of Spain, influenced by the anarchist-libertarian ideologies in both Elda and Alcoy. However, whatever may be the case, the continuous crisis in the industry in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s has resulted in weaker unions, demobilization of workers, and progressive deindustrialization in Alcoy and Elda. Ironically, collective mobilizations are now about both the owners and workers, calling for political protection of industrial activity.

This implies that the heritage of the working class is under tremendous threat of being incorporated under a common realm of cultural heritage and acquiring a common identity of the workers and the industrialists, as represented in/by museums, statues, street names, etc. The latter is important in keeping intangible cultural heritage alive, but it also reflects how the elements of cultural heritage from different social groups are mixed up in cultural production and then appropriated by different social groups that did not participate originally in their creation.

Thus, Elda became a 'shoe city' even though a large section of their population never participated in the industry. And Alcoyan's nineteenth-century 'revolution' became a city symbol, even if anarchist traditions were no more than a distant voice. Another important case study has been conducted on the traditional wood working activity in the Viljandi County (Estonia) that examined how to produce knowledge that would allow formal institutions, especially educational institutions, to contribute to the sustainability of heritage-based livelihoods and to facilitate intergenerational transmission of craft-related skills and practices...The underlying idea of this methodology was to facilitate the formulation of integrated development agendas that would combine the educational and practical economic needs of communities with the goals of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

And the findings suggested deep satisfaction amongst the respondent artisans as far as the viability of their livelihoods was concerned. They also showed a certain traditional attitude, displaying a willingness to adapt to the changing economic and cultural environment. The

following section considers a specific case study of Lucknow and its artisans to analyze certain aspects that contribute to the making of intangible heritage.

## Section II:

### Intangible Heritage in the Making: A Case Study of Lucknow's Artisans

Lucknow and the embroideries of *chikan* and *zardozi* are almost synonymous with each other. Any contemporary brochure or website would announce this association with the 'City of the Nawabs'<sup>5</sup> with immense aplomb. The popular idea advertised is to guide a visitor to the *Imambara*<sup>6</sup> and then go on to visit the famous market of *Chowk*, which is famous for its *chikan* 'craft' shops and chicken kebabs, a popular dish from the Mughal cuisine.

People entering the *gallees* or the lanes of *Chowk* would be struck by the plentitude of shops selling a variety of *chikan* embroidered fabrics, stitched garments, etc. I can recollect this picture very vividly, not only as a memory but also as an aspect of the city that has not only remained unchanged but also grown in magnitude over the last two and a half to three decades. Along with this, the embroidery of *chikan* has also 'grown', 'adapted', and 'modernized', according to the general perception. Colored threads are now used to stitch it on all kinds of fabrics. Shops selling embroidery have multiplied and spread all over the city, although *Chowk* still maintains its status of being a wholesale and cheap market for *chikan* goods.

Down the memory lane, I also remember that, gradually, during my numerous excursions to *Chowk*, I came to know about *zardozi*, another kind of embroidery that was not essentially an exclusive identifier of Lucknow but was nevertheless quite widespread in the city. While *chikan* was stitched with white cotton threads on white cotton cloth in the 1980s and then became varied, *zardozi* was stitched with golden colored wires that remain the same even after thirty years. But except for the change in the quality of the raw material *zardozi* had not become popularized as *chikan* even in the 1980s and the early 1990s. In the last decade, *zardozi* too has become 'visible', in the sense that a new variety of 'popular' *zardozi* has made interventions into the market, the machine *zardozi*. A visitor to *Chowk* in the present times would find both complete and partial machine-embroidered, cost-effective *zardozi* and *chikan*, possibly being sold in the same shop.

These observations are not to imply that handcrafted *chikan* and *zardozi* have vanished completely. They primarily comprise the higher end of the embroidery market. Between

---

<sup>5</sup> Lucknow is popularly known as the 'City of *Nawabs*'. The *Nawabs* were the rulers of the State of Awadh in the eighteenth century, they ruled till their state was taken over by the British colonial state in 1856. Lucknow was their political and administrative capital and the seat of their culture.

<sup>6</sup> The *Imambara* is also known as the *Bhool Bhulaiyya* because of its underground labyrinthine structures.

the higher and the lower end of the market, there is a diverse quality of embroidered products. In the mid-1980s, the National Institute of Fashion Technology (henceforth, NIFT) was established under the aegis of the Ministry of Textiles. The graduates from this fashion institute set about the revival of many, what was termed as the ‘traditional’ handicraft industries, including *chikan* and *zardozi*, resulting in a definite fillip in the commerce of the embroidery as far as Lucknow was concerned. In addition to that, Lucknow’s embroideries began to be sponsored by the fashion designers associated with the international fashion world, some of them associated with NIFT, and some of them outside NIFT; the most popular amongst the latter were the duo of Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla.

Along with the India Handicrafts Board, which has existed since 1952, in the late 1970s and the 1980s, local and international non-government organizations were also partaking in highlighting Lucknow’s embroidery. One such organization whose trajectory of development I am familiar with and about which I intend to document in the following work is the Self-Employed Women’s Association or SEWA. It was set up in 1984, based on the 1979 UNICEF-sponsored study of the *chikan* artisans. In the public memory, this organization even now stands for reviving the *chikan* embroidery of Lucknow and supporting the embroiderers, primarily minority and lower caste women, and its history and for documenting their contribution (Wilkinson-Weber 1999: 184-186). This was perhaps the first instance of highlighting the plight of the embroiderers. Since then, a large number of organizations have come up, and the economic status of the embroiderers has been highlighted in many of the Government of India’s Committee Reports.<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, the metaphors that romanticize the link between the present status of Lucknow’s embroidery industry and ‘tradition’ consider the latter as a glorious pre-colonial past. Even the Geographical Indicator that has been earned for the embroidery industry has used these representations as its foundation argument. The history of colonial Lucknow is completely absent from these representations that, at times, seem to be caught in a time-rap, as if Lucknow has remained an unchanging, unmoving, slow, unindustrialized, undeveloped city.

To the above discussion, I shall add a few new aspects that explore the nature of work in the embroidery industry of Lucknow. The idea of incorporating this sub-section is deliberate so that the nuances of the varied aspects of the making of the craft are highlighted. The underlying idea is that it is not just enough to talk about heritage but also to discuss the world of the people who created this heritage.

---

<sup>7</sup> “Economy and Employment: Situating Muslims”. In *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim community of India, A Report, Prime Minister’s High-Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India*. 89-137. Government of India, 2006.

The 'field' in this proposed work is the people involved in the embroidery industry-artisans and non-artisans, men and women, across generations, who have 'lived' the socio-economic changes. The attempt would be to read their different perceptions about similar historical occurrences or even everyday life experiences across generations, gender, communities, castes, and class, and vis-à-vis the 'official' histories.

### **Work, Education, Resistance: Contexts, Questions and Objectives**

In Lucknow's embroidery industry, embroiderers' skill, the capacity to combine mind, eyesight, and hand movement, has been enhanced with age and experience. This entails permanent physical incapacitation in the form of eyesight loss, and temporary ailments like severe headaches, nausea, etc. But enhancement of skill, even at such a loss, leads to an increase in pride in work and enhances the bargaining power of the embroiderers.

An important means of labour in the embroidery industry is the idea of designing, making striking symmetry, choosing colour combinations, and selecting the fabric, etc. The copyright or the possession of skill, therefore, becomes an important issue. The artisan or the worker might possess the idea, but they do not have the freedom to apply it. Religious affiliations play crucial roles in employing such ideas. Certain designs and colours are considered to be 'Muslim colours' by the Hindu consumers. Muslim producers also at times refrain from making certain designs and using certain colours for what they consider as against the tenets of Islam. The owners, again mostly Hindus, most often decide colours and designs, and this marginalizes the producers' choice, mostly Muslims.

The relationship between the workers and what they produce is also quite abstract in the embroidery industry. This is because the product, that is, the embroidered fabric, does not remain in the possession of any particular artisan or worker, or labourer. The final product is sold off to a buyer who possibly does not know anything about the effort that has gone into the preparation of the embroidered fabric.

At times, the producers belong to the larger family or the kinsmen group of the people for whom they work, but the relationship between them can remain that of employer-employee. Alternatively, an employer-employee relationship sometimes provides the space for the latter to bargain. Here, skill is an important form of bargaining power. Paradoxically, it is also a kind of bondage. Skill training is a very important form of education. In fact, skill training is itself an important form of education. And different generations of people involved in the embroidery industry analyze this aspect in different ways.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the discourse about education, both literary and 'practical', has taken place in the pages of the Education Department Proceedings. This discussion was in the context of the intervention of machine production, which was gradually speeding up the volume of production. It is important to visit this discourse to

ascertain and analyze the characteristics or nature of this discourse. This discourse deals with education in the colonies, which shows how to draw a cleavage between literary and industrial education; the latter was also sometimes called training. These discourses were different in the metropolis and the colony and were linked to the state policies regarding various handicrafts industries throughout the colonial and the post-colonial period. (Dhar 2013).

The meanings of work in Lucknow's embroidery industry are determined through skill education, and if one analyzes the nature of this alternate system of education, it is clear that minorities such as Muslims are dominantly accessing this system of education. (Kumar, 1988; Raman, 2010; Mies, 1982).<sup>8</sup> Historically, too, Hindu-Muslim and Shia-Sunni relations within this industry (Hasan and Gupta 1993) and the city as a whole have revolved around the work culture of this industry, an enmesh of social relations intervened not only by the religious identities but also by those of caste, gender, and class identities. And within these interventions and enmeshment of identities is embedded (or hidden?) the scripts of resistance.

The industry of embroidery comprises hand-printers, carvers, designers, drawing masters, embroiderers, etc., who call themselves *kaarigar* or artisans. Apart from them, tailors stitch the embroidered dress material after the washermen, mostly Hindu lower caste *dhobis*, have cleaned it. The varied activities are gendered<sup>9</sup>, divided (or organized?) on caste and community lines, intervened with notions of religiosity. And, couched within their unfathomable layers is the notion of class, and if pushed a little further, class-consciousness.

For instance, the dominant notion of women's 'work' of *chikan* embroidery within the industry, especially amongst their male counterparts, is that of leisure/free/complementary labour, whereas the 'work' of men is considered to be an artisan/craft/skilled work of *zardozi*. Again, printing or *chapaai* is 'work' as men dominate it. These shifting meanings of work/non-work are ubiquitous dividing lines between men and women artisans/workers/labourers, which contribute considerably to their respective identities within the industry and decide the dynamics of domination within the household and the outer world. These dynamics are particularly evident in the market where the fabric is procured, distributed, or sold, and the wages are decided. Kinship, settler-migrant, and neighborhood ties also contribute to artisan/worker/labourer identities and to the overall structure of the industry.

---

<sup>8</sup> Minorities dominate most handicraft production sectors in India, for example, the weaving industry.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, the embroidery of *chikan* (embroidery with white and colored cotton threads) and *zardozi* (embroidery with golden colored wires) is dominated by women and men respectively.

However, the household and the market are not distinctive entities. The former could itself be the market or the place of production of embroidered goods and their allied goods, along with being the place for the reproduction of labour. In both production processes, women's work is relegated to invisibility and silence.<sup>10</sup> Then, sometimes traders, traders-cum-artisans/workers/labourers, or only the latter are members of the same family settled in different neighbourhoods of the city, or at other times, they could be neither. If they are from the same family, then, in most likelihood, they would all be either Hindus or Muslims. And amongst the latter, they would be either Shias or Sunnis. Similarly, if they are Hindus, then they would all belong to the same caste. Neighbourhoods, too, are most often divided along caste or community lines. So, there would be the Shia neighbourhoods, or the Sunni neighbourhoods, or those belonging to particular Hindu castes.

From the past century and a half, since the mid-nineteenth century, when the province of Awadh (of which Lucknow was the capital city) was annexed to the British colonial state, to the present times, the urban space of Lucknow has changed manifold. A distinctive change is the polarization along the inter-religion and intra-religion lines. These changes have distinctly intervened into the embroidery industry, which is one of the two existing artisan/cottage/handicraft industries of Lucknow's rich repertoire of artisan industries, gradually disappearing over the last four centuries. An organization of production where relations of production and negotiations about production are based solely on trust, loyalty, and unwritten rules and protocols, turns the seemingly 'safe', 'secure' and 'free' haven of the household and the neighbourhood into a place where jealousy, insecurity, betrayals, and bondage are deeply entrenched. Any history of the people involved in this industry has to take into account these emotions, as well as the emotions of loss, happiness, nostalgia, memories, pride, and stress. It is important, therefore, to document the changes in the composite as well as the contradictory nature of the embroidery industry over the last few generations, across gender, community, and class lines.

This is especially true of the artisan works of embroidery, hand-printing, and carving where production is all about the coordination of the mind, eyes, and the hands of the artisan and the perfection of skill or *hunar* of the artisans is directly related to the experience of the artisan; where the transfer of knowledge is intervened by gender and community notions, kinship ties. The system of skill formation is central to the life of the artisans. It is here that they distinguish themselves from the other forms of labour.

In the last two decades or so, Lucknow's embroidery industry has got a fillip with national-level designers sponsoring the craft, with some having high-level international connections with the fashion industry. With the expansion of the city's urban space, industry has also expanded and assumed a global character. The network of trade of the embroidery products of Lucknow has found markets in the countries of the Middle East, Europe, the United

---

<sup>10</sup> The physical construction of the households is also important here. Many a times the rooms are just one-room accommodations.

States, and the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh. It has sharpened class identities and class-consciousness that is evident through the formation of organizations like the Anjuman-e-zardozaan or the congregation of the *zardozi* artisans, an entirely male organization.

### **Conclusion:**

The above discussion has tried to elaborate on the pertinent point of questioning familiarities, assumptions, given and apparent ‘facts’, and why it is important to study the history of the making of heritage production in a seemingly non-industrialized city like Lucknow. It has tried to do this by critically analyzing and bringing together the existing literature on heritage and artisanal labour.

The idea of explaining the various aspects of the lives of the labouring population is to bring them into focus and, in the process, go beyond the official tourism and heritage representations of the craft. The crucial contribution that the artisans make in preserving and augmenting the tradition of this craft production is at times submerged in the producers’ narratives as they focus more on their present-day realities rather than harping on tradition or the past. There is a ‘past’ that exists in their narratives, but the focus is more on the struggles to keep their present alive. And the last section of this article tries to do justice to this urgency of the producers.

### **Selected Bibliography:**

- Ahmad, Yahaya. May 2006. “The Scope and Definitions of Heritage: From Tangible to Intangible”. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12: 292-300.
- Buchanan, K. 1985. “Center and periphery: reflections on the irrelevance of a billion human beings”. *Monthly Review*, 37: 133-48.
- Chibnick, M. 2000. “The evolution of market niches in Oaxacan woodcarving”. *Ethnology*, 39: 225-242.
- Dhar, Bidisha. 2013. “The Artisan and Technical Education in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-century India”. In *Education in Colonial India: Historical Insights*, ed. Deepak Kumar, Joseph Bara, Nandita Khadria and Ch. Radha Gayathri, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 257-278.
- “Economy and Employment: Situating Muslims”. In *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim community of India, A Report*, Prime Minister’s High-Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India. 89-137. Government of India, 2006.
- Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth – Century India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Hardy, Dennis. Dec., 1988. "Historical Geography and Heritage Studies". *Area*, 20: 333-338.
- Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hasan, Mushirul and Narayani Gupta. 1993. *India's Colonial Encounter: Essays in Memory of Eric Stokes*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors.
- Hewison, R. 1987. *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, London: Methuen.
- Kathuria, Sanjay. 1998. "Indian craft exports for the global market". In *Artisan Industries in Asia: Four Case Studies*, ed. S. Kathuria, V. Miralao and R. Joseph, Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 1-29.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. Autumn, 1995. "Theorizing Heritage". *Ethnomusicology*, 39: 367-380.
- Knorringa, Peter. 1996. *Economics of collaboration: Indian shoemakers between market and hierarchy*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Kumar, Nita. 1988. *Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Lowenthal, D. 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mehta, Deepak. 1997. *Work, Ritual, Biography: A Muslim Community in North India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Merriman, Nick. *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, Heritage and the Public in Britain*, Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Mies, Maria. 1982. *The Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Product for the World Market*, International Labor Organization.
- Raman, Vasanthi. 2010. *The Warp and the Weft Community and Gender Identity among Banaras weavers*, London: Routledge.
- Reddy, William. 1984. *The Rise of Market Culture, the Textile Trade and French Society, 1750-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roy, Tirthankar. 1999. *Traditional Industry in the Economy of Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, James. 1985. *Weapon of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Scrase. Timothy J. 2003. "Precarious production: globalization and artisan labor in the Third World". *Third World Quarterly*, 24: 449-461.

- Shackel, Paul A. 2011. 'Pursuing Heritage, Engaging Communities' in *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Archaeologies of Engagement, Representation, and Identity, pp. 1-9
- Singh, Andrea Menefee and Anita Kelles-Viitanen. 1987. *Invisible Hands: Women in Home-Based Production, Women and the Household in Asia – Vol. I*, New Delhi, London: Sage Publications.
- Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim community of India, A Report*, Prime Minister's High-Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, 2006.
- Sorensen, Marie Louise Stig and Carman, John. 2009. *Heritage Studies Methods and Approaches*. New York: Routledge.
- Steiner, C. 1994. *African Art in Transit*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, E.P. 1977. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, Merlin Press.
- Tovar, Francisco Jose, Maria Arnal, Carlos de Castro, Arturo Lahera-Sanchez and Juan Carlos Revilla. 2011. "A tale of two cities: working class identity, industrial relations and community in declining textile and shoe industries in Spain". *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 17: 331-343.
- Tunbridge, John E., 1989. "Geography, Historical Geography and Heritage Studies: Some Further Reflections". *Area*, 21: 316-317.
- Varutti, Marzia. 2015. "Crafting heritage: artisans and the making of Indigenous heritage in contemporary Taiwan". *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 21/10: 1036-1049.
- Watson, Emma and Smith, Laura Jane "The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage" *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 16, Nos.1-2, January-March 2010, 4-15.
- Wilkinson-Weber, Clare M. 1999. *Embroidering Lives: Women's Work and Skill in the Lucknow Embroidery Industry*, Albany: State University of New York.
- Wood, W. W. 2000. "Flexible production, households and fieldwork: multisited Zapotec weavers in the era of late capitalism". *Ethnology*, 39: 133-148.
- Wright, P. 1985. *On Living in an Old Country*, London: Verso.