

Small Businesses of Indian Community Centered Crafts: A Study through Aari Embroidery Artisanal Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

Aari embroidery is a prominent textile craft, integral to Indian apparel, and sustained through the consistent practice of a nationwide community of specialized embroiderers. The craft's significance has expanded substantially, driven by the escalating market demand for embroidered occasion wear, which has consequently prompted skilled artisans to migrate from their traditional locations to urban centers to establish their small businesses. These artisan-led business units are critical components of the local fashion ecosystem, operating as entrepreneurial ventures. However, despite the substantial expansion of the fashion industry, these businesses, which primarily rely on job-work orders, have not achieved corresponding economic growth. This paper presents case studies of a select sample of Aari embroidery small businesses in Ahmedabad, India. The research undertakes an in-depth analysis of these enterprises to evaluate the sustainability of their current business model, product offerings and infrastructure, alongside a comparative analysis of the craft with similar artisan led communities. The main aim was to identify the key factors contributing to their restricted economic advancement. Primary data was generated through structured interviews, and the subsequent analysis provided insights into their current operational practices.

Keywords: Aari Embroidery, Artisan, Small Businesses, Entrepreneurship, Community centered crafts

INTRODUCTION

Historically, India has maintained a preeminent global position in the decorative arts, particularly embroidery. Contemporary echoes of this legacy are visible in the operations of major international fashion houses that continue to outsource their intricate needlework to Indian export firms. This tradition originates from the Mughal era, a transformative period where Persian design sensibilities were synthesized with indigenous textile techniques to produce opulent royal attires. Such artistry eventually reached a broader social strata, becoming central to communal life and regional festivities. Artisans historically found consistent patronage through the creation of elaborate bridal trousseaus and ceremonial attire for families across the subcontinent. Beyond matrimonial contexts, the cultural calendar—including major festivals like Eid and Diwali—provided a steady demand for specialized items such as gold-embellished Lehengas, Cholis, and Zari-embroidered hats (Bhatia, 2016). These workshops typically functioned as familial enterprises, ensuring the preservation of technical mastery through intergenerational knowledge transfer. Since the fifteenth century, Ahmedabad has served as a critical nexus for this royal heritage, emerging as a primary center for Aari embroidery. The region's history under successive dynasties—including the Sultanates, Mughals, and Marathas—fostered a robust environment for artisanal patronage (Baral, 2017).

In India, crafts are an integral part of communities and cultures merging together into clusters. The cultural fabric of these artisanal clusters is woven through the shared identity of the workshop, where technical mastery is traditionally inherited through kinship. This phenomenon is characteristic of many small-scale Indian craft communities, where intergenerational knowledge transfer forms the backbone of the micro-enterprise. Over

centuries, these regional networks have evolved into sophisticated communal ecosystems. Such community-based structures allow these small businesses to absorb the massive surges in demand during India's peak festive and wedding seasons, ensuring that the ancient craft remains a viable, though economically pressured, livelihood.

The conceptual domain of embroidery is traditionally delineated as the art of creating designs on fabric through the manipulation of needle and thread, with its etymological roots tracing back to the French term *border*. Beyond mere ornamentation, needlework functions as a tangible reflection of a community's cultural inheritance, differentiating it from other forms of handicraft (Bhushan, 1990). Within the variegated context of Indian textile arts, the specialized practice of needlework is often delineated by gendered roles, although men frequently attain proficiency across diverse artistic modalities (Wilkinson-Weber, 1997). From a scholarly Indian viewpoint, the intrinsic design elements and the meticulousness of execution are often considered more paramount than the material substrate upon which the work is executed (Sinha, 1926).

Aari embroidery, a technique recognized for its significant historical role in value-adding to ornate Indian textiles since the 12th century, exemplifies this cultural richness. The craft employs a distinct, long, pen-shaped instrument—the Aari tool—which functions similarly to a crochet hook with a curved tip. This technique, resembling a cobbler's stitch, involves piercing the fabric to pull the thread to the surface, securing the preceding loop. This specialized skill has fostered geographically dispersed communities of artisans.

The vitality of the small business sector in sustaining such community-centered crafts extends beyond Aari work to traditions across India. For example, the fine Chikankari of Lucknow, which utilizes shadow work and various stitches, the Kantha embroidery from Bengal having a distinct identity with a cultural significance that exists till date in the regions of Bengal are a few that demonstrate similar models of micro-enterprise. These crafts highlight the potential for adaptation and innovation while maintaining deep-rooted cultural heritage.

The contemporary economic environment in India increasingly foregrounds the importance of entrepreneurship, job creation, and the fostering of creative capital. A vigorous and dynamic entrepreneurial private sector is fundamentally requisite for a nation's holistic economic and societal advancement (Ugoani et al, 2015). Entrepreneurship operates as a primary engine for job creation. Specifically, the designation of "self-employment" refers to individuals engaged in distinct occupational pursuits, often shaped by familial precedent or socio-demographic factors (Panda, 2021). Critically, entrepreneurs, particularly those steering small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the unorganized sector, contribute substantially to the societal framework through the provision of essential employment opportunities (Panda, 2021). Nevertheless, notwithstanding established theoretical frameworks and continuous systemic and policy adjustments designed for indigenous Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) (Ugoani et al, 2015), the overarching objective of decisively mitigating unemployment via entrepreneurial initiatives remains substantively incomplete.

The operational reality of micro-enterprises is characterized by individuals sustaining livelihoods through small-scale professional ventures. A significant contingent of these units, particularly in urban centers like Mumbai, consists of migrant laborers working in small teams, typically comprising six to ten individuals. These artisan-led units are embedded within a hierarchical, tiered production system. In this model, Aari workers execute designs pre-laid on the fabric, functioning as a specialized segment of a larger supply chain where they receive materials from contractors and return the completed embroidered components. A critical issue is the informational asymmetry: workers often lack a comprehensive understanding of the entire supply-demand process, operating instead on a piece-rate compensation model calculated solely on the embroidered area. This structural disconnect results in a pronounced gap between artisan earnings and the final market profit captured by contractors, leaving the wages markedly lower than the product's retail price and exposing the work to significant market volatility (Imran, 2019).

A foundational transformation is currently underway within the artisanal community, marked by a deliberate transition from conventional craftsmen roles to that of micro-entrepreneurs, essential for the enduring sustainability of their practice. This transition is indispensable for long-term viability, moving their perception from mere skilled labor to that of strategic entrepreneurs capable of ensuring both economic and social longevity.

In recent decades, following the formalization of India's fashion industry, Aari embroidery artisans have increasingly migrated from rural localities to major urban hubs. Here, they established entrepreneurial micro-enterprises centered on fulfilling job-work commissions from local fashion and retail organizations. Despite the demonstrable expansion of the fashion sector supported by these businesses, their corresponding socioeconomic advancement has been negligible. These city-based enterprises are heavily reliant on highly seasonal job orders from various vendors, retailers, and designers, orders which are often defined by critically low remuneration that barely suffices to cover basic operational and labor costs.

From a macroeconomic perspective, the Indian handicraft sector remains pivotal for poverty alleviation through its generation of employment, particularly for youth and women. However, these indigenous small businesses face formidable competition from industrially mass-produced goods that frequently mimic the aesthetic appeal of handcrafted items and target the same consumer demographics (Bhat, H. 2016). Entrepreneurship is nevertheless a significant driver of enhanced living standards by creating essential jobs and addressing consumer needs, whereby entrepreneurs actively develop and implement work opportunities that augment quality of life (Guha et al, 2022).

An artisan-run unit is formally defined in this study as a micro-enterprise managed by a skilled artisan, typically employing 6–10 migrant workers dedicated predominantly to Aari work. Functioning within the established supply chain, these units receive base material, apply the embroidery, and return the finished components to a contractor. The remuneration structure, based on per-square-inch pay, continues to reflect the workers' limited knowledge of the broader supply-demand dynamics (Imran, 2019).

This research aims to conduct a descriptive inquiry into micro-artisanal units specializing in Aari embroidery, with a distinct emphasis on dissecting their community-centered small businesses, encompassing both general and comparative methodologies. Ahmedabad, India, was selected as the research locale due to the significant clustering of artisan-operated units within the city and its socio historical significance of aari embroidery within the region. A critical analytical component of this study is the implementation of a SWOT framework for each constituent unit, as well as a comparative swot analysis with similar crafts, facilitating a nuanced synthesis of observations and academic discourse, the findings of which are intended to heighten awareness among key stakeholders regarding the production process. The primary scholarly contribution of this study resides in its successful augmentation of stakeholder awareness—specifically among artisans and consumers—by providing a comprehensive, holistic perspective on the complex operational paradigms inherent in the production of embroidered textiles by community based artisan run small businesses.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory research design, utilizing a multi-stage sequential sampling strategy to investigate the operational paradigms of artisan-operated Aari embroidery small businesses in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

Sampling Strategy and Rationale

The sampling process adhered to a structured two-phase model. Phase One utilized a Simple Random Sampling technique, systematically drawing a statistically representative initial sample of 300 artisans from 30 units with a minimum of 10 artisans each ($N = 300$) from the total accessible population of 103 Aari embroidery manufacturing units listed on the IndiaMart B2B platform within Ahmedabad. This approach maximized the external validity and representativeness of the initial sample vis-à-vis the broader B2B-listed sector.

Phase Two involved the purposive selection of 2 units with 15 artisans each ($n = 30$) from the initial sample of 30 for in-depth, case-study analysis. The rationale for this final purposive sample selection was based on stringent, pre-defined operational criteria to capture units facing the most significant need for strategic diversification:

- The unit must employ 10 to 15 full-time, in-house artisans specializing exclusively in Aari embroidery.

- Aari embroidery must constitute the sole technique practiced by the entire unit.
- The unit must be entirely dependent on third-party job work orders.
- The unit owner's primary income must depend entirely on the unit's operations.

Critically, the selection criterion prioritizing complete income dependency was designed to focus the study on the units most acutely vulnerable to market fluctuations, as these units are in the greatest need of strategic business model re-evaluation and design diversification to ensure economic growth and long-term sustainability.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Data collection was executed in two phases corresponding to the sampling strategy. Phase One involved telephonic screening interviews with the 30 units selected via random sampling, of minimum 10 artisans each to quantitatively assess their operational characteristics against the defined criteria, focusing on artisan employment figures, percentage of Aari work performed, and the extent of reliance on job-work and unit income.

Phase Two employed a detailed, two-part interview protocol. Part One utilized a structured interview schedule administered to the unit artisans, focusing on collecting detailed operational data to facilitate the subsequent case studies. Part Two consisted of in-depth, semi-structured Group Interviews with 15 artisans conducted at each of the 2 selected micro-enterprises. These group discussions were guided by a specific Interview Instrument designed to elicit qualitative insights into the artisans' long-term entrepreneurial outlook, specifically their:

- Interest in pursuing and enhancing traditional skills.
- Perceived capability to scale and grow their business ventures.
- Inclination toward product diversification and experimentation with new products.

Qualitative Data Analysis and Coding Procedures

The primary qualitative data generated from the group interviews and case studies was subjected to rigorous Qualitative Content Analysis to derive actionable conclusions.

The analytical method used involved a systematic process:

- Coding Procedures: Interview transcripts and field notes were initially segmented into relevant data points. Initial coding involved labeling key concepts related to entrepreneurial challenges, skills, and product diversification.
- Analytical Framework: The core framework for deriving conclusions was the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. A distinct SWOT matrix was developed for each of the five case-study units and their corresponding product categories. This framework moved the analysis beyond descriptive observation by systematically linking internal factors (Strengths/Weaknesses, drawn directly from artisan capability and unit operations) with external factors (Opportunities/Threats, related to market dynamics and labor retention) to justify the final conclusion regarding the necessity of product diversification.

The findings from this qualitative synthesis were then organized into tabular formats for clear presentation and discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research findings are categorized into sequential phases, beginning with broad community interviews and progressing to specific case studies. This evolution of the artisanal unit from a service-provider to a potential manufacturer aligns with the theoretical constructs of *cultural entrepreneurship*, where aesthetic value is

balanced with economic innovation. The primary investigation revealed that while high-quality technical skills are consistently applied to products like intricately designed saris and ghagra-cholis, these units often function as fragmented segments of a larger supply chain. This positioning reflects the challenges inherent in *informal economy studies*, specifically regarding informational asymmetry and piece-rate compensation models that limit the capture of market profit.

The operational context highlights a heavy reliance on job work, which is a characteristic feature of *micro-enterprise development* in urban centers. While the interconnectedness of this artisanal ecosystem encourages localized innovation, the economic reality for the individual unit owner is often precarious. The financial reliance on Aari embroidery as a sole income source underscores the vulnerability of these enterprises to market volatility. Analyzing these units through the lens of *sustainable livelihoods* reveals that technical mastery alone does not ensure economic growth, necessitating a strategic balance between traditional craftsmanship and entrepreneurial requirements.

For these artisans, the craft represents a vital expression of cultural heritage, yet the current business model remains financially constrained. The symbiotic relationship between creative endeavor and financial sustainability is central to the resilience of these units. Collectively, this inquiry provides a holistic perspective on Aari embroidery micro-enterprises, emphasizing their role as cultural commodities and their critical, yet economically pressured, position within the broader societal framework.

The primary phase of data collection involved telephonic screening of 30 units to establish the final study sample. These preliminary interviews aimed to identify units that met the specific inclusion criteria for detailed analysis, with the resulting data set illustrated in Figure 1.

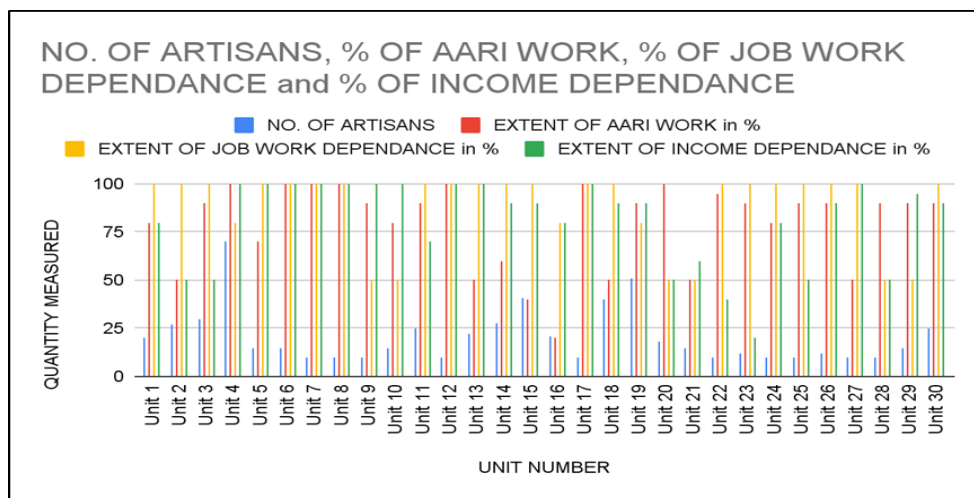


Figure 1: Graphical representation of data collected for identification of main units.

The research specifically prioritized units exhibiting 100% economic dependence on Aari embroidery. This criterion was strategically selected to focus the inquiry on micro-enterprises possessing the highest imperative for strategic design diversification as a mechanism for business growth and long-term sustainability. Consequently, two units were identified for in-depth analysis, each providing a sample of 15 artisans:

- 15 artisans from Modern Hand Embroidery, located in Vatva, Ahmedabad
- 15 artisans Taj Bhai Bharat Wala, located in Juhapura, Ahmedabad

The subsequent qualitative investigation was guided by three core thematic areas designed to evaluate the artisans' entrepreneurial trajectory:

- Mastery and continuous enhancement of traditional skills.
- The perceived potential for business expansion and scalability.

- The inclination toward product innovation through experimental design.

The first dimension of the inquiry rigorously investigated the artisans' intrinsic commitment and passion for the Aari craft, assessing their dedication to technical mastery. This focused on illuminating the personal and socio-cultural aspirations that fuel continuous pursuit of excellence, linking directly to the non-economic drivers essential for cultural entrepreneurship and the preservation of cultural capital.

Secondly, significant scholarly attention was directed toward evaluating the units' strategic viability and capacity for business growth, a central tenet of micro-enterprise development. Probing questions encouraged reflection on the unit owners' strategic vision and entrepreneurial mindset, exploring mechanisms to leverage their technical skill for broader commercial success and ensure long-term sustainable livelihoods within a volatile market.

Finally, the protocol explored the artisans' openness to cultural entrepreneurship through innovation and experimentation, particularly concerning product line diversification. By encouraging perspectives on embracing creativity beyond traditional job-work, insights were gained into their potential to navigate and transcend the systemic limitations characteristic of the informal economy, facilitating market differentiation and value-chain capture.

Following the administration of the two-part protocol to the two purposely selected micro-enterprises, the generated qualitative data was systematically collected and tabulated. This facilitated the subsequent development of individual, descriptive case studies, which served as the foundational input for the overarching analytical discussion.

Detailed Case Studies of artisans

- **Study of 15 artisans from Modern Hand Embroidery:**

The case study of Modern Hand Embroidery, an enterprise with a 45-year operational legacy, illustrates the complexities of micro-enterprise development within the aari and zardozi embroidery sectors. Employing 15 to 17 artisans, the unit focuses on high-value bridal wear—including saris, chaniya, blouses, and dupattas—serving a prestigious client base of Ahmedabad-based boutiques and designers such as Asopalav, Roopkala, Deepkala, and Dulhan. This family-led unit exemplifies cultural entrepreneurship, where traditional technical mastery is leveraged for commercial activity; however, it remains embedded in the structural constraints typical of informal economy studies. Currently, the unit's infrastructure consists of six aari frames, with four utilized concurrently for sari production, each supporting two to four artisans.

The enterprise serves as the singular framework for the sustainable livelihoods of the participating artisans' families. Compensation is structured on an hourly basis, with skilled and semi-skilled workers earning between Rs. 60 and Rs. 80 per hour. Consistent with the demanding cycles of the fashion industry, artisans typically work 60 to 72 hours per week, generating a weekly income of Rs. 3,600 to Rs. 5,760, with overtime beyond 12 hours daily compensated at 1.5 times the standard rate.

From a financial perspective, the unit achieves an average weekly turnover of approximately Rs. 60,000, yielding a narrow net profit margin of 6% to 7%. The labor force reflects broader migration patterns inherent in urban artisanal clusters: 50% of the artisans are local to Ahmedabad, while the remaining 50% are migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, recruited through established kinship and community networks in Lucknow.

- **Study of 15 artisans from Taj Bhai Bharat Wala, Juhapura:**

The case study of Taj Bhai Bharat Wala, an independent artisanal unit operational for eight years, provides a critical lens into micro-enterprise development within the specialized sectors of Aari and Zardozi embroidery. Comprising a team of 10 to 15 skilled artisans, the unit functions as the primary mechanism for the sustainable livelihoods of the participants' families. Within the framework of cultural entrepreneurship, the enterprise leverages inherited aesthetic mastery to navigate the commercial apparel market, yet its operational model

remains deeply characteristic of informal economy studies. The unit primarily serves as a service-provider for bridal wear boutiques and high-end designers, such as Shayona Junction and Denba SBR, while also engaging with a single international export channel.

Infrastructure within the unit is limited to ten Aari frames, with labor utilization fluctuating between four to five frames concurrently. Each frame typically supports two to four artisans, reflecting a collaborative production model. Despite the high technical rigor required for their product range—encompassing saris, chaniya, blouses, and dupattas—the financial returns remain constrained. Artisan compensation is structured on a daily rate and disbursed weekly, with skilled and semi-skilled workers earning between Rs. 700 and Rs. 1200 per day. This translates to a weekly wage of Rs. 4200 to Rs. 7200 for a workweek exceeding 60 hours, with overtime beyond 12 hours daily compensated at 1.5 times the standard rate.

From a macroeconomic perspective, the unit exhibits a monthly turnover of approximately Rs. 80,000, achieving a net profit margin of 10%. This slim profitability highlights the economic vulnerability inherent in micro-enterprises that lack vertical integration and operate as fragmented segments of a larger supply chain. Furthermore, the unit’s composition reflects broader migration patterns and the reliance on mobile labor within urban artisanal clusters: 80% of the artisans are migrants, primarily originating from West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. This reliance on migrant networks underscores the role of community-centered kinship in sustaining the craft, even as the enterprise faces systemic financial pressures and limited market autonomy.

SWOT Analysis of Aari embroidery artisans

Based on the above case studies the detailed qualitative SWOT analysis was done for the unit artisans, observing their Strengths: Cultural Capital, Weaknesses: Informal Constraints, Opportunities & Strategic Pivot, Threats & Policy Recommendations as below in Table 3.

Table 3. Detailed SWOT analysis of the artisans from the 2 selected units.

Unit & Development Context	Strengths: Cultural Capital	Weaknesses: Informal Constraints	Opportunities & Strategic Pivot	Threats & Policy Recommendations
Modern Hand Embroidery (Legacy Micro-Enterprise)	High technical competency anchored in a 45-year legacy of cultural entrepreneurship; robust B2B linkages with prestigious boutiques ensure consistent specialized job-work.	Structural vulnerability typical of informal economy studies: extreme reliance on manual labor-intensive cycles and inconsistent artisan retention hindering scalability.	Potential for vertical integration; leveraging product branding to move from service-provider to independent manufacturer, capturing higher value-chain margins.	Policy: Establish institutional artisan financing to mitigate labor attrition; implement skill preservation programs to attract younger generations.
Taj Bhai Bharat Wala (Migrant-Led Artisanal Unit)	Rich inter-state sustainable livelihoods leveraging migrant artisan networks (West Bengal/UP); strong collaborative production capacity within community clusters.	Severe capital constraints and credit-dependency; informational asymmetry regarding market pricing leading to limited financial autonomy for the unit owner.	Diversification into contemporary lifestyle products; utilizing digital marketing and e-commerce to bypass intermediaries and access global ethical fashion markets.	Policy: Facilitate market access through state-sponsored exhibitions; provide credit-risk insurance to stabilize the micro-enterprise development lifecycle.

The SWOT analysis of Modern Hand Embroidery and Taj Bhai Bharat Wala revealed that while these units possessed significant cultural capital through intergenerational technical mastery, they remain ensnared in the structural vulnerabilities of the informal economy. Within the framework of cultural entrepreneurship, these artisans leverage aesthetic heritage for commercial ends, yet their role as fragmented service-providers prevents them from capturing higher value-chain margins. This positioning is aligned with informal economic studies that highlight how piece-rate compensation and informational asymmetry regarding market demand lead to constrained financial autonomy for the unit owner. From a sustainable livelihoods perspective, technical rigor alone is insufficient; the high labor attrition among the younger generation—driven by a search for financial stability outside the artisanal sector—threatens the very preservation of the craft.

The most critical strategic pivot identified for these micro-enterprises is a shift from service provision to independent manufacturing through vertical integration. To facilitate this transition, several policy-oriented interventions are recommended. Firstly, establishing institutional artisan financing is essential to mitigate credit-dependency and provide the necessary capital for independent production. Secondly, there is a profound need for state-sponsored skill preservation programs that incorporate modern design thinking to attract youth and ensure the intergenerational transmission of expertise. Furthermore, leveraging digital marketing and e-commerce platforms can empower artisans to bypass traditional contractors, allowing for direct market access and enhanced product branding. Finally, facilitating access to global ethical fashion markets through exhibition support and credit-risk insurance will stabilize the micro-enterprise development lifecycle, ensuring both economic and social longevity for these community-centered crafts.

Thus to conclude, the most promising opportunity available to these small businesses lies in immense potential for artisans to independently conceptualize, design, produce, and market novel and contemporary products. This expansion beyond traditional commissioned work and into independent product creation can significantly enhance their current sustainable practices, allowing them to capture a larger share of the value chain. This shift offers a pathway to increase the artisans' income, improve their economic resilience, and make the craft a more financially attractive career. A typical workspace of one of these units depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2. A typical setup of the workspace of aari embroidery units in Ahmedabad, Image Credit: Saha, P

Comparative swot analysis of Aari with other community based crafts

A qualitative comparative swot analysis with similar artisan communities was conducted post the data collection, using detailed, structured interview data. from the aari embroidery units and secondary data of other embroidery crafts. This analysis involved assessing their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and the findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparative SWOT analysis of aari embroidery along with other similar community centred Indian embroidered crafts.

CRAFT NAME	Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat
<i>Aari Embroidery</i>	Deep-rooted, multi-generational expertise and high technical competency sustained through community-centered knowledge transfer.	The current business model is service-based and financially constrained, resulting in low profit margins and modest income for artisans.	Immense potential for product diversification and a strategic shift from service provision to manufacturing, enabling artisans to independently market finished goods.	Significant labor attrition and disinterest from the younger generation due to insufficient financial returns, alongside competition from mass-produced goods.
<i>Chikankari Embroidery</i>	Profound cultural heritage with established geographical identity (Lucknow), high market perception due to delicate 'shadow work' and intricate stitch mastery, sustained by community skill transfer.	Extreme reliance on time-intensive, non-mechanized human labor limits scalability; high vulnerability to market penetration by low-cost machine imitations, leading to wage exploitation of women artisans.	Strategic potential for product line expansion into contemporary home furnishings and high-end accessories; leverage of e-commerce platforms for direct global marketing to capture higher value-chain margins.	Rapid disengagement of skilled youth due to low financial returns and lack of formal labor structure; absence of consistent institutional support for quality control, branding, and defense against counterfeit machine production.
<i>Kantha Embroidery</i>	Profound Bengali heritage, emphasizing sustainability through the resourceful repurposing of textiles. The narrative stitching technique possesses high intrinsic artistic value and cultural capital, primarily empowering female artisans in a community-centered framework.	Production is highly labor-intensive and manual, resulting in low comparative wages and long production cycles. The reliance on individual, decentralized production limits quality standardization and scalability for high-volume market entry.	Significant potential to penetrate global ethical and slow-fashion markets by leveraging its distinct sustainable narrative. Opportunities exist for modern product diversification into interior decor and contemporary apparel to enhance profit margins.	Intense, price-based competition from low-cost, mass-produced machine embroideries and synthetic imitations. Risk of skill attrition among younger generations due to insufficient economic returns and lack of formal protection for artisanal labor.

The comparative analysis rigorously positioned Aari embroidery based on its deep-rooted, multi-generational technical competency, which constitutes its primary competitive strength within the Indian craft ecosystem. This instrumental expertise allows Aari to flexibly serve a highly demanding job-work market, differentiating it from the distinct aesthetic specialization of Chikankari's shadow work and Kantha's cultural capital focused on textile repurposing. Aari's technical versatility provides a robust foundation for high-level ornamentation services, positioning it as a highly capable provider in the apparel sector.

Despite this technical rigor, Aari embroidery faces a critical structural weakness rooted in its financially constrained, service-based business model. Unlike the labor-intensive issues limiting the scalability of other crafts, Aari's constraint is organizational, artisans function solely as job-work units providing only a segment of the final garment. This value-chain fragmentation prevents micro-enterprises from capturing final market profit, resulting in low piece-rate compensation and acute structural economic vulnerability.

Consequently, Aari's long-term sustainability hinges on leveraging its greatest strategic opportunity: a fundamental shift from service provision to independent manufacturing through vertical integration. This structural re-engineering is more critical than the market-based expansions identified for Chikankari and Kantha. The data confirms that Aari embroidery's sustained existence depends entirely on executing this pivot to become an independent, profit-capturing manufacturer of finished, diversified goods, which is necessary to mitigate the pervasive threat of labor attrition.

CONCLUSION

The empirical evidence synthesized from the primary data collection in Ahmedabad reveals a profound structural paradox within the Aari embroidery micro-artisanal sector. While technical proficiency remains exceptionally high, indicative of robust intergenerational cultural capital, these units are ensnared in a cycle of high skill and low profit, a hallmark of the structural vulnerabilities inherent in the informal economy. The research suggests that the precarious financial standing of these enterprises—typified by narrow profit margins between 10% and 15% and monthly artisan incomes fluctuating between ₹8,000 and ₹20,000—is a direct consequence of value-chain fragmentation. Operating primarily as mid-stream service providers within a tiered production system, these units lack vertical integration, which prevents them from capturing final market profits and exacerbates their economic marginalization.

This financial stagnation serves as the primary driver for the alarming disengagement of the younger generation from this traditional vocation. To mitigate these systemic issues and ensure the enduring sustainability of community-centered crafts, a strategic pivot toward independent manufacturing and comprehensive product diversification is imperative. The transition from service-based job-work to a value-added manufacturing model requires targeted policy interventions across five critical domains. First, the establishment of institutional artisan financing is necessary to alleviate credit-dependency and provide the liquidity required for independent production. Second, digital marketing initiatives and product branding strategies must be implemented to empower artisans to communicate their unique value propositions directly to consumers, thereby bypassing exploitative intermediaries. Third, skill preservation programs should be modernized to incorporate design thinking, ensuring the craft remains relevant and attractive to the youth. Finally, facilitating direct market access through state-sponsored platforms and e-commerce integration will allow these micro-enterprises to capture a more equitable share of the global ethical fashion market.

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Conflicts of Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Statement of Academic Integrity

The authors affirm that this study strictly conformed to established ethical research protocols, ensuring that all primary data was gathered following the informed consent of the participating artisanal entrepreneurs. The results presented herein constitute an original synthesis of the primary field investigations, and all secondary scholarship has been meticulously cited to recognize the intellectual foundations and previous contributions within the domains of Indian handicrafts and small business management.

AI and Tools Disclosure

In the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized the generative AI platform Gemini to refine linguistic precision and paraphrase specific segments of the original text. Subsequent to these automated interventions, the authors conducted a rigorous review and manual refinement of the generated material, thereby assuming full accountability for the integrity and accuracy of the final content.

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