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MASTERS' UNION × ADA CHIKANKARI

Post-Read

Running a Heritage Craft as a Modern Fashion Business

Why This Session Matters

The Ada Chikankari pre-read set up the craft and the business model in outline: a decentralised network of artisans, a family-run brand now several generations deep, and a product built on centuries-old embroidery. This session filled that outline in with the actual decisions a business like Ada has to make every day, how to plan a collection, price handmade work fairly, run a store that sells a heritage product to a modern customer, and grow a craft brand without hollowing out the craft itself. It is one thing to know that chikankari is hand-embroidered and GI-protected. It is another to hear, from someone actually running the business, what that means for costing, production planning, and retail execution.

Meeting the Third Generation: Ms. Vartika's Vantage Point

The session was led by Ms. Vartika, representing the third generation at Ada Chikankari, and its value came from how openly she discussed the ordinary, unglamorous mechanics of the business alongside its heritage. This is worth noting as a pattern across family-run craft businesses more broadly: the founding generation solves for survival and authenticity, and it typically falls to the following generations to solve for scale, consistency, and modern retail, without breaking the thing that made the business worth continuing in the first place. Ms. Vartika's session was a live example of that second problem being worked through in real time.

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The Craft in the Room: What the Materials Showed

Having the wooden printing blocks, threads, and embroidery samples physically present while Ms. Vartika explained the process made the pre-read's description of chikankari concrete. The pre-read had already outlined the stages, design, block printing, hand embroidery, washing, but seeing the blocks and thread samples directly alongside the finished work they produced made it clear how many individual, skilled decisions sit inside a single finished garment. That visible density of skill is also the reason chikankari cannot be rushed or standardised the way a factory-made garment can, a point that shaped nearly everything else discussed in the session.

Running a Handmade Business at Fashion-Business Speed

The central tension Ms. Vartika described was straightforward to state and genuinely difficult to manage: chikankari is handmade, which means production takes real time, individual pieces vary from one another, and costing has to reflect the actual work involved rather than a fixed factory rate. Running a fashion business on top of that reality requires deliberate planning rather than intuition alone. She described how collections are planned in advance, how work is allocated according to individual artisans' particular strengths rather than treating the artisan workforce as interchangeable, and how sales data is combined with the team's own accumulated experience to make production decisions, neither pure data nor pure instinct on its own. This is the operational reality behind the artisan-network model the pre-read described: a network of 30,000-plus artisans is not a supply chain that runs itself, it is actively managed, planned, and matched to demand.

The Retail Experience Is the Brand

The pre-read's Omni-Channel Strategy section discussed selling consistently across store, website, and social media. This session made that idea specific and tactical. Ms. Vartika walked through how product display, staff behaviour, trial rooms, packaging, and post-purchase follow-up each shape whether a customer buys and, just as importantly, whether they come back. For a premium,

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handcrafted product, this matters more than it would for a mass-market brand: the in-store experience is often the only place a customer can appreciate the craftsmanship closely enough to justify the price, which makes every one of those touchpoints part of the actual value proposition rather than incidental service detail.

Strategy Before Identity: What You Sell, Who You Serve, Why They Choose You

Perhaps the most transferable idea from the session was Ms. Vartika's sequencing: decide what you sell, whom you serve, and why they should choose you, before working on a logo or a website. It is a direct challenge to the more common instinct among early-stage founders to start with brand identity and visual presence. Her framing treats identity as the output of a clear strategic position, not a substitute for one, a distinction worth carrying into any venture-building exercise this cohort works on afterward.

Adapting a Legacy Craft Without Losing It

Ada's expansion beyond traditional wear into contemporary clothing and home products was presented as a case study in extending a craft's relevance without diluting it, applying the same embroidery and the same artisan network to new product categories rather than changing what the craft itself is. Ms. Vartika's emphasis on documenting and preserving the craft's techniques ran alongside this expansion, and the two are connected: growth that is not paired with deliberate documentation and preservation risks losing the knowledge that made the product worth growing in the first place.

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Questions Worth Sitting With

- Ms. Vartika described blending sales data with the team's experience when making production decisions. Where should that balance sit for a craft business, and what happens if data-driven decision-making starts to override the artisan-level judgement the product actually depends on?
- Her sequencing, what you sell, who you serve, why they choose you, before logo or website, is a strategy-before-identity argument. Is this true for every business, or does it hold especially for craft and heritage brands specifically?
- Ada has extended chikankari into home products and contemporary clothing while preserving its identity. What is the actual test for whether a craft extension strengthens a heritage brand versus quietly diluting it?
- If costing depends on the specific work involved in a handmade piece, how should a growing craft brand price consistently enough for customers to trust it, without flattening the very variation that makes each piece genuinely handmade?

Glossary

Kashidakar	A skilled artisan who hand-embroiders chikankari, working from a network the brand coordinates rather than employs directly in a factory setting.
Collection planning	Deciding in advance what a business will produce for an upcoming season, balancing artisan capacity, demand forecasts, and design direction.
Artisan allocation	Assigning production work according to individual artisans' particular skills and strengths, rather than treating a workforce as interchangeable.

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Omni-channel retail	Selling and engaging customers consistently across multiple channels, physical store, website, and social media, so the experience feels connected rather than fragmented.
GI Status	Geographical Indication, the legal recognition (granted in December 2008) that ties chikankari specifically to Lucknow as its place of origin.
Craft documentation	The deliberate recording of a craft's techniques and history, done to preserve knowledge that might otherwise be lost as a business scales or generations change.

Source: [Ada Chikankari](#)