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MASTERS' UNION × ADA CHIKANKARI

Pre-Read

1. About Ada Chikankari

Ada Chikankari is a premium chikankari retail brand based in Lucknow, India, built around the idea of bringing authentic, hand-embroidered chikankari to a modern, global customer base. It was founded by Vinod Punjabi, a third-generation entrepreneur in ethnic retail whose family previously ran Saree Bhawan, a well-known Lucknow bridal and formal-wear store that operated for nearly 80 years before Ada took shape. Co-founder Rhea Punjabi has led the brand's digital and social media presence since 2008, helping Ada build a strong online identity alongside its physical retail roots.

Today, Ada sells through both a large flagship store in Lucknow and an e-commerce platform, with products including women's kurtis, kurtas, sarees, lehengas and anarkalis, men's kurtas, home decor pieces like bed linen and cushion covers, and accessories such as potlis and clutches. The brand positions itself at the premium end of the chikankari market and states that it ships to thousands of pin codes across India and to customers in over 60 countries.



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2. Ada's Business Model

Ada's business is built around a simple but powerful idea: connect a large, decentralised network of artisans to a modern retail and e-commerce business, without owning a traditional factory. Instead of manufacturing everything in-house, Ada works with a wide cluster of women artisans, known locally as kashidakars, who hand-embroider each piece. The brand states this network includes over 30,000 artisans across Lucknow, making Ada's supply chain fundamentally craft-led and people-intensive rather than machine-led.

Founder Vinod Punjabi is also closely involved in the wider chikankari industry as Senior Vice President of the Lucknow Chikankari Handicraft Association, and has played a role in efforts to formally protect the craft through Geographical Indication (GI) status. This positions Ada not just as a retail brand, but as a business with a stake in protecting and growing the entire craft ecosystem it depends on.

Ada's stated mission is to make authentic Lucknowi chikankari accessible globally while helping artisans build financial independence, and its retail experience is deliberately designed to reflect Lucknow's own culture and "ambience." This blend of heritage storytelling, artisan livelihood and modern retail is central to how the brand differentiates itself from mass-produced, machine-embroidered lookalikes in the market.

3. About Chikankari

Chikankari is a traditional white-thread embroidery craft that originated in and around Lucknow, and it remains the defining craft of the city today. In December 2008, it was granted Geographical Indication (GI) status, which is a formal, legal recognition that ties the name "chikankari" specifically to Lucknow, similar to how Champagne is protected as a name tied to a specific region in France.

The craft is entirely hand-done and involves several stages: a design is first created, then stamped onto fabric using carved wooden blocks (block printing), after which artisans hand-embroider over the printed outline using a variety of stitches. Once the embroidery is complete, the fabric is washed to remove all trace of the printed guide, leaving only the finished stitched pattern behind.

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Traditionally done in white thread on fine, sheer fabric like muslin, chikankari today also appears on materials like georgette, silk, organza and chiffon.

What makes chikankari particularly special, and worth watching closely during the visit, is how much skill and time go into something that looks delicate and effortless. A single piece can involve multiple different stitch types, each requiring years of training to master.

4. About the Sessions During Immersion

Theme: *From Chikankari Production to Retail and Market Strategy*

The Ada Chikankari immersion is designed to take students through the complete journey of a chikankari product, from how it is actually made to how it eventually reaches a customer, whether in a store or online. The sessions will cover the following:

No.	Session / Activity	What It Covers
1	Walkthrough of Chikankari Production	A guided walkthrough of how chikankari is actually made, including the different stages of production and the people involved at each step.
2	Store Visit	A visit to Ada's retail store to see how a handmade product is presented and sold to a customer, and how it transitions from workshop to shopfront.
3	Retail Strategy	A discussion on how Ada decides what to stock, how products are displayed, and how the in-store experience is designed to sell a premium, handcrafted product.
4	Distribution Strategy	Understanding how products physically move from where they are made to where they are sold, including inventory and logistics.
5	Pricing	A look at how Ada prices its products, and what factors, from artisan labour to brand positioning, go into that decision.
6	Sales	Understanding how Ada converts customer interest into an actual sale, both in-store and online.

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No.	Session / Activity	What It Covers
7	Marketing	A discussion on how Ada communicates its brand story, the craft itself, and product value to customers, both online and offline.

5. Omni-Channel Strategy

Omni-channel strategy means a brand sells and engages with customers across multiple channels, physical stores, a website, social media, and sometimes other marketplaces, while making sure the experience feels consistent and connected across all of them. It is different from just having "a store and a website" separately; the goal is that a customer can move between channels seamlessly. For example, a customer might discover a product on Instagram, check available sizes on Ada's website, and then try it on in person at the Lucknow store, all as part of one smooth journey rather than three disconnected experiences.



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For a brand like Ada, this matters for a few clear reasons. It widens reach, since the brand is not limited to customers who can physically visit Lucknow, but can reach buyers across India and internationally through its website. It builds trust, because seeing a product online and then being able to view or purchase it in a real store, or vice versa, reassures customers, especially for a relatively high-value, handcrafted purchase. It also protects the brand's premium positioning, since a well-designed store experience and a well-designed website can reinforce the same "authentic, high-quality craft" story, rather than one channel feeling premium and the other feeling generic.

During the visit, it is worth observing how Ada actually executes this in practice, whether pricing, product availability and brand messaging feel consistent between the physical store and the website, and how the team thinks about which channel drives discovery versus which channel drives the final sale.

6. Glossary

Tepchi	A long running stitch, usually the first one applied, that forms the outline other stitches are built on.
Bakhiya (shadow work)	The signature chikankari stitch, worked from the back of the fabric so only a soft "shadow" of the thread shows through on the front.
Murri	Tiny, rice-grain-shaped knots, usually used to fill flower centres; considered one of the most skilled and time-intensive stitches.
Phanda	A simpler knot stitch, larger than murri, also used for flower centres and small decorative dots.
Jaali (net/trellis work)	A delicate, lace-like effect created by carefully separating the fabric's own threads and securing the gaps, rather than cutting or adding new material.
GI Status	Geographical Indication, the legal recognition (granted in December 2008) that ties chikankari specifically to Lucknow as its place of origin.