Chapter – 2

Social Profile of
Women Embroiderers
Chapter-2

SOCIAL PROFILE OF WOMEN EMBROIDERERS

The city of Aligarh being a feudal hub with a number of aristocratic houses, there has traditionally been demand for embroidered patterns on the dresses worn by elite women and heavy embroidery on wedding clothes in golden and silver threads, zari, zardozi, karchobi, aari, moti work, etc. Such products are sufficient to maintain embroiderers in these crafts traditionally. Traditionally, the embroidery engaged women of secluded households, even of elite families, so much so that during the early twentieth century campaign for women’s education in Aligarh, the meetings were accompanied with exhibition of women’s needle work, presenting the high art by women (Minault, 1998). The attempts were to establish their capacity and efficiency as learners through their fine arts. However, the needle work was treated not as women’s work but as feminine leisure-time activity. Such discourse over embroidery continues even though now done by poor women. This home-based work engaging poor women is marred by the discourse of ‘khali waqt mein’ (in free time) which reduces the status of the embroidery as proper work, ignores and marginalizes the women’s work - this being the case with other embroideries as well where these are portrayed as use-value production (Wilkinson-Weber, 1997).
Leisure associated with embroidery done by women (Maskiell, 1999) moved into the domain of work with men in the craft. The very notions of embroidery became different when worked by men in *karkhanas* or removed from the house hold site. With increasing commercialization there arose a class of male embroiderers for cultural productions that were previously made by women at home to either decorate their own garments, spreads for home furnishings, or the handmade gifts etc. In Aligarh, men in the craft had opened up their respective shops in the market hub of Amir Nishan – the traditional ladies market of Aligarh. The continuing middle class fashions for embroidery on everyday women’s dressing provided them a ready demand. Besides, the shops for hand work embroidery, there had sprung up shops for machine-embroidery, with boys taking up apprenticeship with the masters in the shop for learning the craft. There are special demands for *zari*, *zardozi*, *karchobi*, etc. embroidery on wedding dresses, the *ghararas* and *shararas*, besides catering to the demands from the big showrooms in the city - all of these being the domain of male embroiderers in Aligarh. On the other hand, the home based embroidery by women continues to be bogged down as household feminine activity, obscured and mixed with the routine household chores.

Noticeably, the women embroiderers’ population is scattered all over in the laboring localities of Aligarh’s civil lines area bordering the university
and its middle class residential area. They work from their homes. There are a number of working class localities neighboring the middle class colonies, not much spatially separated as in big cities, but still distinct laboring localities. With university at the centre and the middle class localities next to it; the poorer serving population (including those serving as fourth grade employees in the university) live in localities beyond these. Previously the outlying areas were dotted with agricultural lands, and the university was also bordered by a number of villages (*Dhorra* to its northeast, *Bhamola* in the west, *Bhagwangarhi - Ramnagar* in the northwest, in the east *Jeevangarh* bordered by the agricultural lands of villages of *Kwarsi* etc.); now these peripheral semi-agricultural areas have increasingly been turned into larger ghetto of working population; the nearby agricultural lands passing into the growing residential colonies or the expanding laboring localities. The opportunities of livelihood through mixing a number of pursuits with agriculture that had been previously the case had been considerably reduced for the working population of the area.

The present day localities in which the bulk of home based embroiderers are found are scattered all over in these working class localities, mainly Muslim dominated namely - *Jamalpur, Hamdard Nagar, Asif Nagar, Firdos Nagar, Bhamola, Loco Colony, Alam bagh, in the west; Purani Chungi, Patwari Nagla, Maulana Azad Nagar towards north; Islam Nagar, Ahmed*
Nagar, Zohra Bagh, Jeevangarh in the east etc. However, there are a few pockets of working people living amidst the middle class locality. Home based women embroiderers were also found living in the middle class Zohra Bagh and Ahmed Nagar locality. The women of impoverished middle class families who got depressed in circumstances also account in the work force.

**Brief profile of Patti work**

*Phool patti ka kaam* is a traditional appliqué embroidery style from Aligarh in North India. The only other location in India where this is also practiced is Rampur. Appliqué refers to a needle work technique in which pieces of fabric, embroidery or other materials are sewn onto another piece of fabric to create designs, patterns and pictures. *Phool patti* was initially made only on *organdi* and cotton fabrics on which *patti* of *rubiya* cloth was cut and stitched but now *organdi* fabric becoming expensive the suits mostly for the local market are made of mixed cottons on which there are *organdi* patches stitched. However, this embroidery is also done on a variety of fabrics like *tissue, chanderi, silk, net-cloth, cotton, organdi, semi organdi, organza, etc.*

There are no written records on the history of *patti work* yet through the interviews with the shopkeepers of Amir Nishan market, contractors in the business, embroiderers, etc. it was possible to have some information on the background of this embroidery work. *Patti* embroidery is held to be of as early
as the *Mughal* period and was originally done by using fine cotton fabrics (Usmani, 2008). It is believed that *phool patti* work was done by court embroiderers initially on the *shalukas* (blouses) worn by the begums of *Nawabs*. It was done by the maidens of the courts for their *begums* to please them and as a part of their leisure activity. With the university town becoming the feudal hub and the aristocratic - *nawabi* families settling in Aligarh, the craft reached Aligarh. The embroidery reflects Persian influence and draws on *Mughal* art designs.

Till 1960s-70s *patti* work was mostly done by veiled women and girls for their daily wearing and also for the preparation of dowry (Usmani, 2008). At that time there were no shops selling *phool patti* work in the city. It was around late 1980s when this work was started by few contractors on a commercial basis in Aligarh - a work that exclusively employed home based women work force. Interestingly, females from the beginning have always been contractors in this business. It was later that the shops were established in the Amir Nishan market (post 1985) and gradually men took over as the main contractors in the business. However, till today there are number of lady contractors in the business. The *cut work* embroidery also started at the same time and presently, the market of *patti work* and *cut work* has become quite large. It is not only sold in the shops of the Aligarh city but also in the big cities of India and abroad. Contractors have informed about parties working in this
business in Middle East, South East, US and UK etc. Besides, there are
exclusive designers in Aligarh with their own boutiques or their products
entering big stores like ‘Fabindia’, ‘Concernindia’, and one such designer of
Aligarh patti work entering big stores under their exclusive label is ‘Rummis.’
The product in silk and tissue are generally not for sale locally in Aligarh. These
are usually meant for high end markets.

The expansion of market had led to increase in the number of women
embroiderers. The working pockets of embroiderers have extended now.
Many patti embroiderers introduced the craft in the localities they went after
marriage. The work in this manner has now spread in the adjoining localities
of Aligarh and to newer localities like ‘Jalaali’, ‘Radgaon’, ‘Sahawar’, ‘Kher’
etc. (around 20-30 kms from the city). Similarly, the girls who got married into
families of patti embroiderers learnt the craft from the marital family.
Obviously the growing demand for embroidery provides much scope for
extension of embroidery in newer localities.

Girls learn the embroidery skill within their families. There is an inter-
generational element in the transfer of work and skills between mothers and
children. Like all other household works in which the female members of the
household usually cooperate, and the daughters initiated since childhood
(Mehrotra & Biggeri, 2007); the embroidery work at home similarly draws
daughters into the work. Initially by helping mothers in this work, they
gradually learn the skill sufficiently to attract greater orders of *patti* work in the household. Women also learn this skill from their neighbors and friends, and begin working in their homes. The home based *patti* embroidery thereby remain the domain of women embroiderers.

The general market rates of hand embroideries are much high. The rates in Amir Nishan definitely remain much high compared to embroidery by machine. But the hand embroideries done by women at homes are quite low priced. The long hours of labor and the skills in embroidery are not regarded here as sufficient to raise their rates. Separated from the main customers, unlike embroiderers in the market, they have little bargaining power to raise their rates.

In the *patti* business there are men, but mainly as entrepreneurs, contractors, subcontractors while few of them are also tracers, tailors and launderers but not as *patti* embroiderers. Whereas women in this business are mainly embroiderers (*though women- contractors, subcontractors are many in business*). The *patti* embroidery is typically regarded as feminine work. There is a network of subcontractors, mostly residing in the locality belonging to the same community, who bring work from the main contractors or shops in Aligarh and distribute it among embroiderers in their own locality. The designs are traced on the fabric and along with the desired color combinations handed over to the subcontractors who give it to home based embroiderers who use
their own thread and needle for the embroidery. Sometimes these home-based embroiderers also take the work directly from the contractors, in that case they earn more.

Women’s work is regarded as ‘leisure activity’ whereas the products and proceeds are controlled by men. Maria Mies work on lace makers of Narsapur in Andhra Pradesh demonstrates that the expansion of the lace industry into the global market led not only to class differentiation and total feminization of the production process but also to masculinization of all non-production jobs especially the marketing of product. Men sell women’s products and live on the profits from women’s work (Mies, 1982 p.488). The case of embroiderers of Aligarh is the same. There is gendered division of labor where all women embroiderers working from homes earn little, while the male contractors, traders, shopkeepers earn higher profits. Such gendered division of labor with the embroidery seen as leisurely engagement rather than productive work goes to further depress the conditions of workers. The ‘leisure activity’ discourse regards their work as of inferior quality. They thereby receive low wages and are hardly considered as ‘serious’ labor. Their skills are considered rudimentary and embroiderers themselves come to regard their work as little specialized and requiring lesser skills. Notably, while they receive low wages for their ‘lesser skill,’ the finished products are sold at
much higher rates. Interestingly, there is distinction made of high quality work on the basis of the skill involved.

There are not only male traders, agents or contractors in the business who account for employment/oppression of an undifferentiated women labor force in embroidery rather there are women contractors as well. There are categories within embroiderers themselves (see chapter 3 for classification of embroiderers according to their work in the craft) and there appears unequal relations between embroiderers themselves. Beside the income differential between embroiderers on account of the skill or years spent in the craft (see chapter 3), we have disparity between the pure embroiderers and women working as agents of traders and contractors in the business who amass a larger share per piece. Few women in the craft have found opportunity of subcontracting for the bigger agents while continuing with the embroidery work and thereby earning better income than the rest.

Interestingly, there is restricted movement of embroiderers between the different embroidery types even though their rates vary. There is hardly much movement from patti and cut work to karchobi work. The movement remains restricted mainly to embroiderers of cut work who may take up some patti work or karoshia as per the demand. Besides, a patti worker may also do the bit of karoshia work needed on the piece as the requirement may be or may do the (aari, kaamdaani) work on the same piece if the order demands
so. Even though not considerable, still the presence of this section of embroiderers in the region which can move from one form of embroidery to another as per demand helps to lower the wages of these embroiderers. There were few karchobi workers who were initially doing patti embroidery but had now shifted to karchobi work. There is thus little possibility for rise in wage rates of embroiderers.

**Description of locality:**

The localities bordering the university premises towards its west were the adjoining localities of Bhamola, Alam bagh & Loco colony. These appear as mixed class localities with many middle class houses and bungalows built as well in the locality. The embroidery done in this locality is only patti work. Another area of patti workers near the university premises was the Aftab Manzil in Shamshad market (which is again amidst middle class residence). 25-30 households are engaged in this craft here. This area was inhabited by owners of Aftab Manzil (a palatial bungalow) who provided dwelling spaces to their servants at a very nominal rent (Rs 100 per month). The men generally served in the bungalow and the wives were engaged in patti embroidery as the owner herself was among the early entrepreneurs in patti embroidery. The other area where patti embroidery is done is the bigger Jamalpur, Hamdard nagar & Asif nagar areas towards the north west of the university. In this large locality, women were also found doing kaamdaani and karchobi
embroidery. In between Bhamola and Jamalpur belt is the Purani chungi area where women are engaged in patti, karchobi and kaamdaani but mainly patti work is done. Another locality across the railway line (broad gauge) in the west passing Purani Chungi is Firdos nagar (also north of bhamola) which has a number of women in patti craft.

Other pockets are Maulana azad nagar and Patwari Nagla, situated on the outskirts of the city in its north west, where a large number of women are engaged in patti embroidery. These localities are in a very pitiable condition with pathetic roads and extremely poor drainage. Women of Maulana Azad Nagar were also found working in meat packaging at the slaughter house (katti ghar). Maulana Azad Nagar also called as ‘jamalpur line paar’ is divided by a huge ‘naala’(drain). On one side, women are engaged in patti work and work in katti ghar. On the other side, women are fully engaged only in karchobi embroidery. All these localities are separated by a distance of around 3-4 kms from the university. Other localities spatially separated from the university area, adjoining the middle class locality of Sir Syed Nagar in the east are Ahmed nagar and Zohra bagh localities. These are primarily middle class localities in which were found contractors in the business of patti and cut work and workers too reside here. These are however not the ‘main areas’ of patti embroiderers. Adjoining this is the large working class locality of Jeevangarh comprising mainly of the cut work embroiderers. Very few patti
workers were found and embroiderers were doing \textit{patti} work only in case of non availability of order for \textit{cut work}. It was a very poor locality with very bad drainage, extremely bad roads and small houses. Islam nagar- 1-2 kms from jeevengarh was another \textit{patti} and \textit{cut work} area which was amidst middle class locality (\textit{refer map in the introductory chapter p. 18})

Thus, the main localities of \textit{patti} workers include Jamalpur, Firdos Nagar, University farm, Alam Bagh, Bhamola, Loco colony, Maulana Azad Nagar, Aftab Manzil, Purani chungi, Hamdard Nagar, Asif Nagar, Patwari Nagla. The \textit{cut work} belt is mainly the areas of Ahmed Nagar, Zohra Bagh, Jeevengarh, Palli paar, Islam Nagar, Baigpur, Vikram colony. The \textit{karchobi} embroidery was mainly done in the area across Jamalpur crossing. These working class localities of embroiderers are generally shanty localities. These mostly have \textit{kuchcha} roads, dingy lanes, over flowing drains, garbage strewn all over etc. The houses were congested with poor ventilation and were dark and humid inside. These had 1-2 rooms, an \textit{aangan} (a little open courtyard) and veranda was common in almost every house. The houses had proper latrines and bathrooms built within their houses with a separate kitchen.

\textbf{2.1 Community milieu}

Studies have brought to light many Indian communities, especially Muslims and some of higher castes with long established customs prohibiting
women from working outside their homes (Wilkinson-Weber 1999; Mies 1982). Attitudes regarding women’s sphere and the devaluation of their home based activities are deeply rooted in the cultural practices of the societies in which they live in. Moreover, this ‘leisure activity’ is regarded best suited for women of castes and women’s seclusion in homes as their status symbol.

The women embroiderers of Aligarh are predominantly Muslim home based workers whose employment opportunities are adversely affected by purdah restrictions. Moving out of homes for work is looked down as lowly. One could easily notice the middle class norms of restrictions on women in these working class families, perhaps as extension of the normative. Embroidery has been traditional occupation of women, traditionally done by even elite middle-class women. The needle work considered the only option of women in middle class. Extension of these ideas had conveniently moved to laboring population. Domestic work or work in construction area even though these fetches higher earnings are considered lowly compared to home based work. Besides, women belonging to low income families with middle class norms whose conditions got worsened (a trend towards feminization of poverty) are also engaged in the craft.

Though the discourse on purdah restrictions is quite powerful in explaining the conditions of home based embroiderers, there is definite lack of alternative work opportunities available in the area. In some of the outlying
localities bordering the agricultural lands, there were avenues of income through the farm land for women. Some women from these localities are now solely engaged in this craft for income. There are little opportunities of work in the neighborhood except in the domestic or the construction work, not considered respectable and thus restricts their choices in work. They would not take to domestic work even if it brings greater earnings. They generally eye on the opportunities of little jobs in the universities. As told by one of the respondents, “hum se nahi hoti kisi ki ghulami, allah ka shukar hai ghar bethe izzat se thoda bohot kama lete hain.” (We can’t be slaves of others; by the grace of God we are able to earn some money with respect from our homes- Razia Bi resident of Islam nagar). They treat embroidery work as adding to their little earnings, even though meagerly.

The discourse on purdah properly keeps women confined to their places. However, at the same time, Muslim women of the same class and locality have taken up other sorts of job (even with limited opportunities). For instance, Muslim women living in localities around the slaughter house/meat packaging industry (katti ghar) are employed in different operations of the industry. Women of Maulana Azad Nagar (the locality were we found patti embroidery) have found jobs in the katti ghar. Some women embroiderer work as casual workers in the university during the time of examinations when there is a demand for work. Few work as security guards, waitresses in dining
halls, *buas* (helpers) in girl’s hostel of the university. Thus, *purdah* by itself could not have been the viable self explanatory factor explaining the conditions of what is regarded as monolithic ‘Muslim women’ category. Looking only at their problems from the perspective of community based cultural practices would amount to deny spaces to their more genuine economic grievances. It obscures the problems of work and the issues confronting this category of working class women. Women are restricted to low paid embroidery with little other options of work. While the discourse on *purdah* and socially restrictive situation for women tries to establish women embroiderers as inferior workers. The pittance offered is therefore a sort of a favor done to women who could not move out of home – a wage to ‘supplement’ their family income without needing to move out of home. The restricted work opportunities create abundance of women labor confined to homes and available for embroidery.

The home based embroidery of Aligarh thus employs poor Muslim women on *piece rates*. The study also brings in the consciousness of the different castes prevalent among the Muslim embroiderers. Women embroiderers (*as table 2.1 would show*) were from various low Muslim castes of the region. Majority of *patti* and *cut work* embroiderers belonged to *alvi syed* a backward caste among Muslims who are called *faqeer* in spoken language in India whereas in *karchobi* it was found that majority of women
embroiderers were thakurs (a high caste Hindu converted to Islam). There were women from high castes in depressed circumstances also taking to embroidery.

Besides, the class of predominantly Muslim women engaged in home embroidery, we find Hindu women in certain localities also involved in patti and cut work (not in karchobi embroidery). These were in the areas around Aftab Manzil, Bhamola, Vikram colony and Baigpur and mainly belonged to the castes of dhobi and jaat.

### Table 2.1 Different castes in embroideries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different castes</th>
<th>Patti work</th>
<th>Cut work</th>
<th>Karchobi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alvi syed</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansari</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheikh abbasi</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saifi</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thakur</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey

Other castes included the Muslim castes of naqvi, teli, malik, rangrez and banihar etc. and Hindu castes of mainly dhobi and jaat.
2.2 Personal Profile:

Age of embroiderers

The home based embroidery is done as a collective family craft. It was observed that daughters learned this craft quite early from their mothers and by the age of 16-18 years, they became expert in the craft. This is very true from the study of other home based embroideries as well phulkari, chikankari, zardosi, etc. (Maskiell 1999, Weber 1997, Mehrotra & Biggeri 2007). So, very few households had single earners (refer chapter 3 for female helpers). In most of the households all the female members including daughters and sisters, daughter-in-laws, sister-in-laws were working together. However, the main embroiderer-earner in the family is considered in this study.

Table 2.2 Age of embroiderers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (in years)</th>
<th>Patti</th>
<th>Cut work</th>
<th>Karchobi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-55</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 &amp; above</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey
**Marital status:**

Embroiderers were predominantly married women with children. A typical home-based worker is generally a woman married with children (Mehrotra & Biggeri 2007). This gives an insight to the lack of married women’s opportunities of work and mobility on account of the household. The women take up this work as the household chores could be taken care off along with some earnings through embroidery in ‘free time’. The household normative too had been an issue with this class of women – confronted with child care and education, care of homes etc. as we will see.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status of women embroiderers</th>
<th>Type of embroidery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patti work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey

The percentage of married embroiderers has been calculated by considering the entire sample of 220 embroiderers.
Karchobi workers however appear as exception in this case. Whereas in patti and cut work there were older married women, majority of women engaged in this embroidery were unmarried young girls. Karchobi- intricate work is quite strenuous for eyes compared to the other two embroideries. No embroiderer in karchobi was more than 35 years of age.

The mean age of married patti embroiderers was 38.3 years and unmarried was 18.9 years which was almost similar to cut work embroiderers (married 38.7 years and unmarried 18.6 years). The mean age of married karchobi embroiderers was 33.5 years and unmarried girls was 17.4 years.

Family of embroiderers: nuclear but large families

The data brings in an early age of marriage of women embroiderers. In case of patti workers, it was 17.1 years (17.4 years for cut work embroiderers,
and 16.7 years of karchobi workers) – i.e. below the legal adult age of marriage.

The reason for nuclear families can be attributed to small houses, lesser space available and migration. Meager earnings also could not provide for a joint family set-up. The adult married sons move to another unit as the space in the house is already crammed. The family thereby mainly consists of adult unmarried daughters and sons. The adult working sons also move out of the household on finding work at distant places, even within Aligarh.

Table 2.4 Type of family of women embroiderers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of family</th>
<th>Type of embroidery</th>
<th>Patti</th>
<th>Cut work</th>
<th>Karchobi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey

Taken together for all embroideries, there were on an average 7.5 members per family. Out of these, there were 2.9 children whose care must have been heavy on married women’s responsibilities. There were 2.2 men, hardly contributing in the household. The average female adults in a family were 2.4. The household duties of women were therefore enormous (for earners in the family, see chapter 3).
2.3 Class profile

*Occupation of husbands/fathers*

The husbands/fathers of women embroiderers were engaged in a variety of jobs which included rickshaw pulling, tailoring, cycle repairing, street vending, carpentry, daily wagers in lock industry etc. Many were daily wagers and casual laborers with no stability at work. If they were to be treated as ‘main earners’ in the family, their unstable low incomes in these occupations only suggest poor vulnerable households.

At the same time, many men were also with stable incomes. The husbands/ fathers of women in all the embroidery type were almost equally divided in the category of men with stable-unstable incomes. Few of them were also employed in the university as permanent employees. Among the husbands of *patti* and *karchobi* workers, they were more into stable occupations (*refer chapter 3 for stable-unstable incomes of husbands/fathers*). Some were in skilled occupations. In fact, there was a very broad category ranging from that of manual laborers, daily rickshaw pullers to government employees and fourth grade permanent employees in the university etc. Women from depressed middle class section were also into this craft. This class category of women (through their husband’s/father’s) explains why these women do not take up the menial- domestic or construction work even though it fetches better earnings. The class status of their husbands ties them
to a level where they are not too menial to seek domestic jobs. Besides, middle class notions of domesticity have its own effects.

Education

Education also provides an insight to the class character of the embroidery households. There appears a considerable gap between the earnings and education in the household. The data shows a greater lack of education among the adults in spite of the fact that they were earning stable and relatively good income. Similarly most of the women embroiderers were illiterate. Very few had the chance to pass the high school. Look at the pie charts below comparing women embroiderers’ with their men’s education.
Chart 2.2 Education of embroiderers and their husbands

**Patti embroiderers**
- Primary: 27%
- Secondary: 46%
- No education: 4%
- Total: 77%

**Husbands**
- Primary: 43%
- Secondary: 46%
- No education: 11%
- Total: 100%

**Cut work embroiderers**
- Primary: 20%
- Secondary: 76%
- No education: 4%
- Total: 100%

**Husbands**
- Primary: 36%
- Secondary: 56%
- No education: 8%
- Total: 100%

**Karchobi embroiderers**
- Primary: 60%
- Secondary: 33%
- No education: 7%
- Total: 100%

**Husbands**
- Primary: 50%
- Secondary: 30%
- No education: 20%
- Total: 100%

Source: field survey
Table 2.5 (a) Years of formal schooling of women embroiderers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of schooling</th>
<th>Type of embroidery</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patti</td>
<td>Cut work</td>
<td>Karchobi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No schooling</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 8 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 10 years</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey

It was found that overwhelming majority of women embroiderers had no formal schooling at all in all the three category of embroidery. Only 5 out of 140 embroiderers in patti work had passed high school whereas 2 each in cut work and karchobi work reported to have completed their studies up to high school. The mean years of schooling for patti embroiderers was therefore 1.85 years (1.38 years for cut work and 2.36 years for karchobi workers).

Majority of embroiderers had no formal schooling and few of them who went to school mostly dropped out before high school. Poverty, social and family restrictions appear as the main reasons for their dropping from school. A number of embroiderers were forced to leave their studies before high school on account of family problems such as parent’s illness, looking after daily household chores, looking after their younger siblings, etc. Many of them left their studies before completion due to social barriers such as
schools being far off and young girls not allowed by families to go that far. Few left schools as soon as their marriages were fixed and sometimes by the decision of would be in-laws. *(See table below)*. Besides they had little access to informal education and technical skills. It was observed that the women embroiderers did not have access to any technical skills except their embroiderries. Few of them were expert in stitching, painting and other skilled embroiderries like zari work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for dropout</th>
<th>Type of embroidery (no. of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own disinterest</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reasons</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social restrictions</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey

Thus, limited in education and restricted by their class and community, they could not take up menial jobs nor were they equipped to take up the jobs requiring literacy, such as the fourth grade employment in the university or elsewhere. The class fourth grade section in the university remains sizably male dominated.
**Education of children**

The aspirations for social and economic mobility through education are visible in the families of embroiderers and these women appear keen for their children’s education. Though some women were disinterested in educating their girl child, there were instances of women keen to educate their daughters so that they could lead their lives with dignity and would not have to labor so hard like their mothers. In the following table children attending school both at primary and secondary level has been presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.6 Number of children attending school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not going to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey
(Note: Only children of school going age have been considered here)

The above table shows the disparity in the male and female children attending school at both primary and secondary levels. While percentages of male children going to school is higher than percentages of female children going for primary education there is a sharp decline in the percentages of both male and female children going for secondary level of education.
The social milieu of embroiderers speaks of depressed state, lack of opportunities, cultural practices which restricts women’s mobility, patriarchal practices of the families and community etc. The work for wages is attempt by these women to improve their lot, working within the norms of dominant domesticity and with whatever limited opportunities of earning.