



Invisible Hands in the Perfume Capital: A Thematic Analysis of Women's Labor in Kannauj's Attar Industry

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Abstract: The traditional art of making perfumes in Kannauj district, Uttar Pradesh, is considered one of India's oldest and most culturally rich industries. Kannauj attars have survived for many years because of the deg-bhapka distillation process used in attar making. Although many studies have examined the history, economy, and culture of attar making, few have focused on gender differences in the industry's labour force. This paper examines women's involvement in attar making, entrepreneurship, and family businesses in Kannauj. The study adopts a qualitative research design through field observations, structured interviews, and participatory interactions with women in attar making. The findings show that although women are actively involved in attar-making processes in various capacities, including seasonal labour, flower harvesting, and informal activities, they are restricted from participating in formal activities such as decision-making, ownership, and entrepreneurship. Several barriers can be identified in this respect. According to the research, empowering women through education, skills training, entrepreneurial programs, and institutions can play a crucial role in gender equality and a sustainable traditional perfume industry. This article contributes to the literature on gender studies, traditional industry, cultural heritage preservation, and rural entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Attar Industry, Gendered Labour, Women's Entrepreneurship, Kannauj, Cultural Heritage, Feminist Political Economy.

Nomenclature:

ODOP: One District One Product

I. INTRODUCTION

One of India's ancient crafts is preparing attar, a fragrant

Oil made by distilling aromatic flowers, spices, herbs, and other fragrant substances. Attar is believed to have originated from the Persian term 'itir,' meaning fragrance. Through hydro-distillation, the Persian doctor Ibn Sina (Avicenna) developed the art of attar making, whose works were well known for flower oil distillation, especially roses. Over time, these methods spread to Asia and became integral to perfume making in India. Kannauj, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, is considered one of the earliest and most significant centres of natural perfumes in the world and is currently referred to as the "Perfume Capital of India." Kannauj's perfume business is well known for the traditional deg-bhapka distillation technique, which uses copper distillation units, bamboo condensers, sandalwood oil, and natural fragrances like rose, jasmine, kewra, vetiver, saffron, and herbs. Later in the topic discussion, the key steps of this process flower picking, distillation, perfume blending, and sales are demonstrated. Its advantageous location makes it feasible to grow fragrant crops like marigold, jasmine, vetiver, and damask rose. Because these natural products are now among the top providers of attars and essential oils to international fragrance companies, its centuries-old perfumery history has been preserved [1]. Despite the modernisation and expansion of the synthetic fragrance industry, the city maintains its centuries-old traditions of aroma extraction and ageing. This industry is still limited by "low-level equilibrium" because of information asymmetry, resource scarcity, and technological stagnation, even though it is essential to economic stabilisation and links the rural agricultural sector with the urban trading sector [2]. These initiatives have contributed significantly to India's cultural legacy while also ensuring population prosperity. This study examines the current challenges facing this traditional industry and how the art of making attar conflicts with capitalist characteristics [3]. This study examines the gendered aspects of labour in Kannauj's attar industry. It would emphasise obstacles to women's engagement in the process, entrepreneurship, and their role in manufacturing. Although less advanced than in other countries, India's female entrepreneurs are growing and have the potential to reduce poverty [4]. It would also examine how cultural gender norms affect people's access to economic opportunities.

A. Statement of the Problem

India's rural economy and cultural legacy heavily rely on traditional industries. In this context, Kannauj's attar industry stands out for its long history, superb craftsmanship, and economic contributions. Despite this company's recognised significance, it still operates within a strong social framework that shapes ownership, employee

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involvement, and decision-making. The most notable aspect of this business is the unequal engagement of men and women in the manufacturing and entrepreneurial processes. Field studies in Kannauj show that while women play an integral role in the production process by collecting flowers, cleaning and sorting flowers, doing seasonal work, and supporting their families, they do not participate in leadership, ownership, or market transactions. In some cases, even when businesses are operated in women's names, they have little control over them and no decision-making authority. In most cases, women lack the knowledge, finance, marketing, and skills needed to participate in entrepreneurship. Despite limited capital, sociocultural constraints, low levels of education, and a lack of government support, Indian women entrepreneurs have strong aspirations for economic empowerment and independence [5]. The invisibility of women's work in the attar industry can be attributed to the prevalence of gender discrimination in traditional family-owned industries. Previous literature has widely studied the history of Kannauj's perfume industry, the manufacturing process, and its economic implications; however, comparatively less literature addresses gender issues related to labour and entrepreneurship. Information on women's experiences in the industry, the challenges they face, and the benefits of their inclusion for sustainable development remains insufficient. This research aims to fill this gap by studying women's involvement in the traditional attar industry of Kannauj. In particular, it explores the socioeconomic and institutional factors that affect women's involvement and identifies opportunities for women's empowerment.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guided the study:

- To examine the nature and extent of women's participation in the traditional attar production process and in family-owned attar businesses in Kannauj.
- To analyse the gendered division of labour in the attar sector and identify the social, cultural, and economic barriers that restrict women's involvement.
- To explore opportunities for strengthening women's entrepreneurship, decision-making roles, and economic empowerment within the industry.
- To provide policy-oriented recommendations for promoting gender-inclusive development in Kannauj's perfume industry.

A. Research Gap

The passage under consideration serves as a theoretical positioning statement, the kind of paragraph that typically appears in the literature review or introduction of an academic paper in which the authors stake out the specific intellectual gap their research intends to fill. Rather than simply describing what is known about Kannauj's attar industry, this passage performs a more sophisticated scholarly move: it identifies the theoretical lenses through which existing knowledge has been produced, argues that these lenses have systematically excluded gender as a category of analysis, and introduces the specific theoretical frameworks Feminist Political Economy, the Theory of Invisible Labour, and

Kandiyoti's concept of the Patriarchal Bargain that the present study will use to correct this omission.

The current scholarship on Kannauj's perfume industry is largely anchored in economic history and production-centric frameworks. This is a precise and consequential characterisation. It suggests that researchers who have studied Kannauj to date have approached the industry primarily through two related but narrow analytical lenses. The first is economic history, treating the industry as a case study in how a traditional craft economy has developed, adapted, and persisted over time, typically measured through indicators like output, trade volume, market reach, and the industry's contribution to regional GDP or employment figures. The second is production-centricity, a focus on the technical and material processes of manufacturing itself, especially the indigenous deg-bhapka distillation method, which has received substantial scholarly attention as a marker of craft authenticity and technical heritage.

Both of these frameworks, while valuable in their own right, share a common limitation: they tend to treat "the industry" as a relatively undifferentiated economic and technical unit. They ask questions like how this industry has evolved, how this distillation technique works and what makes it distinctive, or how this industry is adapting to globalisation and the pressures of synthetic fragrance competition. These are legitimate and important questions, but they share an implicit assumption: that the industry can be adequately understood without asking who, specifically, performs which labour, who holds decision-making power, and how economic and social value is distributed among the people who sustain the trade. In other words, these frameworks are gender-blind not necessarily because researchers deliberately excluded women from consideration, but because the analytical categories themselves output, technique, market adaptation do not require or invite disaggregation by gender. Treating the industry as an undifferentiated whole obscures the fact that men and women within it occupy fundamentally different structural positions, with different degrees of visibility, recognition, and power.

To address this gap, the study draws on Feminist Political Economy as a guiding theoretical framework. Feminist Political Economy is an interdisciplinary approach that emerged from the broader field of political economy, which traditionally examines how societies organise the production, distribution, and exchange of resources and who benefits from those arrangements, but adds a critical gendered dimension. Where mainstream political economy might ask how wealth is produced and distributed in this industry, Feminist Political Economy asks a further question: how this production and distribution depend on, and in turn reproduce, gendered divisions of labour, gendered access to resources, and gendered structures of power. Scholars working in this tradition argue that economies, including small-scale, traditional, artisanal economies like Kannauj's attar trade, are never gender-neutral systems. Rather, they are built upon underlying assumptions about which kinds of work count as economically significant, typically, work performed in public, formal, remunerated settings, historically associated with men — and which kinds of work are treated as natural, background, or supportive,



typically domestic, informal, or seasonal work, historically associated with women. By applying this lens to Kannauj, the study examines not just how much attar is produced or how the industry has evolved historically, but how the industry's entire economic structure its ownership patterns, its wage and non-wage labour arrangements, and its formal and informal work categories has been built upon gendered assumptions that have gone unexamined by prior scholarship.

The second framework used is the Theory of Invisible Labour, which complements Feminist Political Economy by focusing specifically on the mechanisms through which certain forms of work become socially and statistically unrecognised. This theoretical tradition, which draws on decades of feminist economic scholarship examining domestic work, subsistence agriculture, and informal sector labour across the Global South, argues that labour becomes invisible not because it fails to occur or fails to contribute economic value, but because of how labour itself is defined, categorised, and measured within dominant economic and social frameworks. Work that occurs within the household, work that is unpaid or paid informally rather than in cash wages, work that is seasonal rather than continuous, and work that is framed as an extension of a woman's domestic or familial role rather than as employment all of these tend to fall outside standard labour statistics and outside the categories that both governments and researchers use to measure economic contribution.

Applied to Kannauj, this framework helps explain a pattern that emerges vividly in the fieldwork: women's labour in flower harvesting, raw material processing, packaging assistance, and domestic support that sustains family attar businesses is real, substantial, and economically necessary, yet it does not appear in any formal accounting of the industry's labour force. It is invisible not because it is absent, but because the categories used to define "worker" and "employment" in prior economic-history and production-centric scholarship were not built to capture it. The Theory of Invisible Labour thus provides a precise vocabulary for naming and analysing a phenomenon that purely economic or technical studies of the industry could not register.

The third framework is Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of the Patriarchal Bargain. Kandiyoti, a feminist scholar known for her work on gender and development in the Middle East and South Asia, developed this concept to describe how women navigate, negotiate with, and sometimes strategically comply with patriarchal structures to maximise their security, status, or resources within those structures, rather than either passively accepting subordination or openly resisting it. The bargain refers to an implicit set of trade-offs: women may accept certain constraints on their autonomy or visibility in exchange for protection, economic security, or social standing that the patriarchal system offers. Crucially, Kandiyoti's framework emphasises that these bargains are not static; they vary across cultures, class positions, and historical moments, and women actively strategise within them rather than being simply passive victims of patriarchal domination. This concept is particularly well suited to the Kannauj context because it offers a more nuanced way of understanding a phenomenon that a simpler oppression framework might miss, namely, the arrangements through which women's nominal participation in the formal economy, such as being

listed as the legal owner of a business, may serve various strategic functions for the family as a whole, even as it does not translate into the woman's actual autonomy or control.

This leads directly to the central, previously unexamined empirical phenomenon that this study addresses: symbolic female entrepreneurship, understood through the related concept of proxy ownership. While government schemes designed to promote women's entrepreneurship, likely including subsidised loans, tax benefits, or preferential registration schemes intended to increase female participation in business ownership, have created concrete incentives for registering businesses under women's names, the academic literature has not critically examined what happens when this registration is purely nominal. In such arrangements, a woman may be listed as the legal proprietor of a tractor business for the family to access government benefits intended for women entrepreneurs. At the same time, the actual, day-to-day operational control decisions about production, pricing, supplier relationships, marketing, and financial management remain firmly in the hands of male family members, typically fathers, husbands, or brothers. This phenomenon is analytically significant because it complicates simple statistical measures of women's economic empowerment. If progress toward gender equity in the attar industry were measured purely by counting businesses registered under women's names, one would likely conclude that meaningful progress has been made. Yet the reality may be quite different: registration numbers might reflect strategic exploitation of policy incentives by patriarchal family structures rather than any substantive shift in women's economic agency.

Taken together, these three frameworks equip this study with a comprehensive analytical toolkit for examining gender within the Kannauj attar industry in a way that prior scholarship has not attempted. Feminist Political Economy provides the broad structural lens for understanding how gendered power operates throughout the industry's economic organisation. The Theory of Invisible Labour provides a specific mechanism for understanding why women's substantial contributions to production have gone unrecognised and unmeasured in prior studies. And Kandiyoti's Patriarchal Bargain provides a nuanced framework for understanding the specific and previously unexamined phenomenon of symbolic female entrepreneurship, helping move beyond a simplistic binary of empowerment versus oppression toward a more textured understanding of how women navigate. Families strategically exploit formal structures that claim to promote gender equity while often reproducing the very inequalities they are meant to address. By bringing gender to the centre of analysis, and by employing frameworks specifically designed to make visible what has previously been rendered invisible, this research promises to reveal a more complete and more accurate picture of how the industry actually functions, who actually sustains it, and where the gap lies between the formal appearance of inclusion and the informal reality of continued exclusion.



III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

[6] Chattopadhyay [7] reconstructs the material history of perfume making in early modern India, drawing on historical texts. It shows how perfume production was a labour-intensive, skill-based craft in which craft, technology and scientific knowledge intersected with the natural landscape. Prakash [8] has researched Kannauj's social history through the lens of the perfume industry. The study shows how caste, kinship, and state policy shape economic practices in the town, and how economic practices are inseparable from their social context. Similarly, Sharma and Srivastava [9] examined the perfume industry's economic contribution and its relationship with the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme. For thousands of years, aromatic plant extracts have been used in religious rites, medicines, cosmetics, perfumes, and the culinary arts to add flavour and fragrance [10]. Their work highlights the industry's role in job creation and regional development. Sengupta and Sen [11] considered attar a green product because of its natural raw materials and environmentally friendly manufacturing processes. Shukla and Ali [12] recently studied temple floral waste as a perfume ingredient and highlighted innovations in this area from a sustainability perspective. Eco-conceptual elements can be obtained without compromising biodiversity through sustainable extraction of natural scent ingredients using innovative technologies and solvents from agro-industries [13]. Shukla [14] offers an interesting sociological approach to studying attar artisans in Kannauj. Cimino et al. [15]. focus on essential oils and their applications in pharmaceuticals and lipophilic drug delivery systems. Beyond the perfume industry, natural scents have gained importance in many other areas. They help create pleasant smells, act as preservatives, and offer skin-friendly properties. They also reduce health risks associated with synthetic fragrance compounds. Essential oils are a multifunctional and effective source of natural fragrances in cosmetics and cosmeceuticals [16]. Shukla and Mukherjee [17] highlight the challenges of preserving this traditional heritage amid the growing popularity of synthetic perfumes, which reduce the cultural importance of craftsmanship. In contrast, Venotha and Mariadoss [18] expand on changes in the social texture of Indian culture that affect satisfaction with market production.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, appropriate for examining social phenomena, cultural practices, and gendered perceptions of labour, as it allows the researcher to describe existing conditions in the attar industry in depth without manipulating or controlling any variable. Fieldwork was carried out in the district of Kannauj, Uttar Pradesh, which was selected purposively because of its long-standing identity as the historical centre of attar production and its contemporary recognition as the "Perfume Capital of India." Given the informal, dispersed, and largely undocumented nature of the workforce in this traditional industry, respondents were identified through convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate during fieldwork.

Data were collected primarily through structured interviews conducted with a broad cross-section of stakeholders in the

local attar economy, including shop owners, perfume traders, factory workers, seasonal female labourers, and local community members (an illustrative profile of these respondent categories, and the approximate numbers engaged during fieldwork, is presented in Table 1). These interviews explored business operations, women's involvement in production and decision-making, entrepreneurial experiences, and the broader socio-cultural barriers shaping women's participation in the industry. The interview data were complemented by systematic field observation in perfume markets, production units, and flower markets, through which the researchers recorded first-hand workplace interactions, the visible division of labour, and the extent to which women were present or absent across different stages of production and trade. Throughout the fieldwork period, the researchers maintained field notes continuously to document observations, informal conversations, and contextual details that the structured interview format could not fully capture. Taken together, these three methods structured interviews, field observation, and field notes were designed to provide a triangulated, contextually grounded understanding of the gendered dynamics of labour in Kannauj's attar industry, rather than relying on any single source of qualitative data.

Table 1: Illustrative Profile of Respondent Categories Engaged During Fieldwork

Respondent Category	Approximate Number	Primary Role in Data Collection
Shop owners (male)	8	Business operations, ownership, marketing practices
Perfume traders	5	Market dynamics, commercial transactions
Factory workers (male)	10	Distillation process, production management
Seasonal female labourers	12	Flower harvesting, sorting, packaging experience
Women in family businesses (registered owners)	6	Symbolic ownership, decision-making access
Local community members	7	Socio-cultural norms, perceptions of women's roles

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis used interviews, observations, and interactions with participants gathered during fieldwork in Kannauj. We analysed these data by coding and categorising major themes that emerged repeatedly across observations and interviews. This provided insights into the gendered aspects of the labour force, entrepreneurship, decision-making, and sociocultural practices in the traditional attar industry. Notably, the concept of "women's entrepreneurship" is extremely rare in India, especially in the formal sector, which has accounted for less than 5% of businesses over the last 20 years. Ten major themes emerged from this analysis; rather than listing them as a bare set of findings, they are more usefully understood theoretically, as they cluster around four interlocking strands of the literature underpinning this study, before each theme is discussed in detail below.

A. Theoretical Grounding of the Ten Themes

The first cluster of themes Attar Production as a Heritage Industry (Theme 1), Gender





Division of Labour in the Attar Industry (Theme 2), and Invisible Labour of Women and Economic Contributions (Theme 4) is best explained through the Theory of Invisible Labour and feminist political economy more broadly. Together, these themes show how family-based production transmits technical knowledge and leadership predominantly to male descendants, confines women's contribution largely to seasonal and supportive tasks, and renders that contribution economically unrecognised precisely because it resembles domestic, reproductive labour rather than formally counted work.

The second cluster, Symbolic Female Entrepreneurship (Theme 3), draws directly on Kandiyoti's concept of the Patriarchal Bargain and the literature on proxy ownership. Here, women's formal, legal registration as business owners, often undertaken to access government schemes or tax benefits, coexists with continued male control over finance, supplier relationships, marketing, and strategic decisions, illustrating a bargain in which women exchange nominal status for continued dependence rather than genuine authority. The third cluster, Sociocultural Perceptions of Women's Suitability for Business (Theme 5), Honour-Based Regulation of Women's Public Economic Activity (Theme 6), and Security and Mobility Restrictions (Theme 7), is grounded in feminist theorisations of patriarchal social control and the gendered regulation of public space. Together, these themes show how cultural beliefs about women's "proper" sphere, concerns about family reputation, and restrictions on women's mobility and evening work combine to discourage women's entry into the industry's more visible, public-facing dimensions, even where no formal rule prohibits it. The fourth cluster, Seasonal Work and Economic Dependence (Theme 8) and The Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Industry Sustainability (Theme 9) reflect the structural, labour-market dimension of feminist political economy, in which seasonality and informality reproduce women's economic dependence, while cultural heritage functions ambivalently: simultaneously a resource that sustains the industry's identity and a conservative force that reproduces the very gender roles restricting women's participation.

Finally, Emerging Opportunities for Empowering Women (Theme 10) departs from this pattern of constraint to identify the conditions entrepreneurial education, financial literacy, government schemes, digital marketing, and skill-building under which the dynamics described in the preceding clusters could, in principle, be reversed. This theoretical mapping gives the ten themes discussed below a shared conceptual anchor, rather than treating them as an unconnected list of field findings.

Theme 1: Attar Production as a Heritage Industry

Another prominent theme that emerged during fieldwork is the attar industry's familial roots in Kannauj. Perfume manufacturing should not be seen only as a source of income; it is a cultural heritage being passed down from generation to generation. According to respondents, attar production is a family business in which parents pass on relevant knowledge, skills, and management methods to children. Families pass on the entire production process, including flower selection, distillation, perfume mixing, and sales. These results indicate

that families' engagement in the traditional industry preserves Kannauj's cultural heritage and uniqueness. Many participants stressed that perfume production is closely associated with the community's cultural heritage.

Interpretation: The family-based arrangement ensures the tradition of craftsmanship continues, but it also perpetuates the existing gender hierarchy, since knowledge of technology and business leadership is usually restricted to men in the family.

Theme 2: Gender Division of Labour in the Attar Industry

The study found a clear gender division of labour in the perfume industry. Men dominate distillation, factory operations, shop ownership, marketing, and economic decisions, while women mostly do seasonal activities like flower harvesting, cleaning raw materials, and sorting petals. Fieldwork in factories and markets revealed that hardly any women worked in formal production spaces. In visits to perfume shops and manufacturing plants, we mostly saw male workers and male owners. We saw women only in flower markets, harvesting and cleaning flowers during the perfume production season.

Interpretation: The findings demonstrate how traditional gender roles continue to shape labour allocation. Women's work remains concentrated in informal and low-recognition activities despite its importance to the production process.

Theme 3: Symbolic Female Entrepreneurship

One significant result concerns symbolic entrepreneurship. As several interviewees noted, some perfumeries are officially established under the names of wives or daughters to benefit from government initiatives for female entrepreneurship. The problem is that these women rarely take part in practical business activities. According to interview findings, although women legally own companies, men in the family mostly handle business decisions, financial transactions, marketing efforts, and customer relations. In effect, women may become merely formal entrepreneurs.

Interpretation: This theme demonstrates the discrepancy between formal ownership and economic empowerment.

Theme 4: Invisible Labour of Women and Economic Contributions

Another important theme is the invisibility of women's labour. Although women contribute through flower gathering, processing help, packaging help, and home management, their labour is largely ignored. Women interviewed in Phoolmandi said they are employed to gather flowers and process raw materials during the season when flowers are abundant. At other times, women make domestic contributions that indirectly help family businesses run smoothly. However, despite their contributions, women are not regarded as workers in the perfume industry. There is a marked asymmetry in how men's and women's labour is recognised within the attar economy: men's labour is channelled directly into formal recognition as "counted" work, whereas four distinct categories of women's contribution — flower gathering, processing help, packaging help, and domestic support — all converge into a single pathway that terminates in the category

“not counted as worker,” reflecting how diverse and substantial forms of female labour are collapsed into statistical invisibility regardless of their actual content or effort.

Interpretation: Women's labour remains economically invisible because of its domestic nature. These findings confirm feminist theories of unpaid and unrecognised domestic and reproductive labour.

Theme 5: Sociocultural Perceptions of Women's Suitability for Business

One of the dominant barriers to women's involvement in the sector proved to be patriarchy-based social norms. Participants often shared perceptions that women should mainly focus on household tasks, that business is not their responsibility, and that it is more appropriate for men. Some interviewees noted that women lack the market expertise needed to manage shops or deal with suppliers. Some also argued that social expectations do not allow women to engage in economic activity in public spaces. Women's involvement in business is perceived as inconsistent with traditions of family honour and respect.

Theme 6: Honour-Based Regulation of Women's Public Economic Activity

Another relevant theme involves the impact of family honour on women's economic activity. Interviews with women conducted as part of the research revealed that working outside the home might negatively affect family reputation. In particular, respondents said that, in the community, women's work can be interpreted as an indicator that men in the family cannot provide for their families.

Interpretation: The cultural emphasis on family reputation prevents women from engaging in entrepreneurial and economic activities, regardless of their skills and abilities.

Theme 7: Security and Mobility Restrictions

Security issues and restrictions affecting women's safety and mobility were among the reasons several interviewees gave for why women did not take part in business activities. Shop owners said women cannot stay at markets in the evening because of security risks. Market activities usually continue late into the evening, and social norms make it difficult for women to participate. However, they framed this reason in a non-discriminatory way.

Interpretation: Mobility restrictions limit women's contact with markets and business networks, as well as their access to skills development.

Themes 5 through 7, in particular, highlight socio-cultural barriers that prevent women's economic participation.

Theme 8: Seasonal Work and Economic Dependence

Women in the attar sector primarily work seasonally, during flower collection and perfume production. During other times of the year, women focus on household chores. Seasonality reduces earnings stability, causing economic dependence. In addition, women do not get permanent jobs or leadership roles in this sector.

Interpretation: Employment seasonality reduces women's earning capacity and reinforces economic dependence.

Theme 9: The Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Industry Sustainability

Respondents are very proud of their cultural heritage and consider Kannauj the perfume capital of India. They see perfume-making traditions, such as deg-bhapka distillation, as important parts of their cultural heritage. Conserving this cultural heritage is essential despite the challenges of modernisation and competition.

Interpretation: Cultural heritage can serve as both a resource and a constraint. On the one hand, it contributes to the industry's sustainability; on the other, it preserves traditional roles and therefore restricts women from participating in the perfume-making process.

Theme 10: Emerging Opportunities for Empowering Women

Despite many challenges, the research identified opportunities to include more women in perfume production. Participants believed that entrepreneurial education, financial literacy programs, government schemes, digital marketing, and skill enhancement would support women's inclusion. Participants also recognised that women's involvement can support business growth and innovation.

Interpretation: These results show that gender-sensitive interventions can benefit both women's empowerment and the attar industry's development.

VI. CONCLUSION

The themes indicate that the attar business in Kannauj operates through a complex interplay of cultural heritage, family business, and patriarchy. Despite playing an important role in production and household economies, women remain underrepresented in leadership, entrepreneurship, and decision-making. Their work is often invisible, seasonal, and underappreciated. However, the results show numerous opportunities to promote gender inclusion through education, entrepreneurship, skills training, and institutional measures.

Strengthening women's role will not only advance gender equality but also support the sustainability and modernisation of this significant industry. Ownership does not equal economic empowerment when men retain decision-making power. The research indicates that gender inclusion requires both policy changes and shifts in attitudes, educational access, and entrepreneurial training.

A. Policy Recommendations

Considering the results outlined above, the following recommendations have been put forward to ensure gender-inclusive development in the attar sector of Kannauj:

- Training in business and finance management for women registered as entrepreneurs.
- Distillation process, fragrance quality testing, and blending techniques training for women to increase their participation in skilled operations.
- Facilitating safe transportation and marketing structures to resolve problems related to women's mobility and security issues, as highlighted in Theme 7.
- Documentation of women's seasonal labour to help secure a regular income and social security.
- Community mobilisation programs to address the family honour issue, in





collaboration with community leaders and women's self-help groups.

- E-commerce and digital marketing training for women-owned enterprises to enable them to explore larger markets beyond traditional local trade networks.
- Monitoring system in ODOP schemes to ensure that women's enterprises are run by women themselves.

B. Limitations of the Study

This study uses a qualitative sampling design in a single district; therefore, the results cannot be statistically generalised. The illustrations in this paper result from qualitative thematic analysis of interview responses and field observations, not a quantitatively structured survey. These illustrations summarise the aspects highlighted by respondents and are not statistically generalizable.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** Yes, the ethical approval and consent are as follows. The study followed the ethical principles governing research involving human participants. The appropriate institutional review committee approved the study before it began. All participants were informed about the research purpose and procedures, and participation was entirely voluntary.
- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The data and materials in this article are publicly accessible.
- **Author's Contribution:** The authorship of this article is contributed equally to all participating individuals.

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