

Beauty as Livelihood: Makeup Artistry and New Forms of Women's Entrepreneurship among Muslims in Kolkata

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Abstract

The most visible of these is makeup artistry in Kolkata, which has moved away from the traditional salon to being a field in freelance work, training, personal branding and micro-entrepreneurship. This change is representative of the broader rise in skill-based and self-employed labor for women, using professional knowledge as a way to leverage economic and social opportunities (Bourdieu 1986; Kabeer 1999). The article focuses on this transformation in the context of several Muslim women professionals who draw upon aesthetic competence as a resource towards particular forms of livelihood, reputation and entrepreneurial self-identity through their public-facing careers. Simran Parveen and Sabiha Lodi are two cases where individual service goes on to become business in itself involving professional training and mentorship for others (The Telegraph, 2022; WeddingWire India, n.d.). Taking a qualitative secondary-data and case-study approach, the article focuses on Simran Parveen and Sabiha Lodi, followed by a brief mapping of Shaista Siddique, Mariam Javed, From Lectures to Lashes and a broader cohort consisting of makeup/hair/mehendi professionals. The study employs Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital, followed by Kabeer's (1999) resources–agency–achievements framework, Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality, and Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargain concept. Together, these perspectives contribute to explaining the relevance of professional skills, social network, gender identity and family expectations in women entrepreneurship stories. So beauty work should not be seen simply as feminine consumption. It refers to technical expertise, aesthetic and emotional labor, digital visibility, client management, mobility and constant reinvestment (Hochschild, 1983; Bourdieu, 1986). Entrepreneurship does not solve gender inequalities or economic insecurity per se (Kabeer, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1988) as well. From a sociological perspective, this occupational sector is of significance, as women can turn strengths that are well known to their cultures into marketable expertise and professional identities; economic opportunities and sometimes training spaces for other women.

Keywords: Makeup Artistry, Muslim Women, Entrepreneurship, Aesthetic Labor, Digital Labor, Empowerment, Kolkata

1. INTRODUCTION

This bridal makeup appointment may seem like just a couple of hours of makeup application, but the effort behind it is so much more intricate. The artist sanitizes and sterilizes tools, examines skin and face type, plans hair and wardrobe, time travels under pressure for a unique job where an often nervous client must rest assured that the outcome will be materialized in a way that will withstand photo lens' scrutiny, lighting sparkling and even the abuse of an hours long social event. Once the client packs their bags, however, the work is not done: pictures are chosen, reels are cut, queries fielded, rates negotiated and further bookings scheduled. Thus, makeup artistry involves technical skill, aesthetic judgment, emotional labor, entrepreneurship and digital self-presentation.

From a socio-historical perspective, this transition matters because appearance-associated work has been mocked as an extension of femininity instead of being treated like skilled labor. Makeup artists nowadays are challenging that demarcation. They are your artisans, service workers, content creators, marketers, trainers and business owners. Since this occupational shift is obvious in the original manuscript, you should locate where and how it relates to the beauty economy of Kolkata within a wider spectrum of moving from informal skill to professional livelihood. It also highlights the institutional recognition of occupations related to beauty through skill training structures and the larger growth of India's hair and beauty sector.

However, the analysis for admitted Muslim women needs to be done very carefully. Neither the term "Muslim woman" nor the word "entrepreneur" represents one social experience. The resources to each professional vary according to class, education, marital status, family support, locality, mobility and access to the digital technologies that are carried out most of their work. This article does not find successful artists as representative of all Muslim women, but rather explores how these visible professional careers reveal the changing forms of work, agency and respectability within Kolkata's urban beauty economy.

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The article has three objectives:

- i. To examine makeup artistry and allied beauty services as emerging livelihoods,
- ii. To analyze how aesthetic skill, training, networks and digital visibility are converted into cultural, social, symbolic and economic capital; and
- iii. To interpret the opportunities and limitations of beauty entrepreneurship through sociological theories of empowerment, intersectionality and gender negotiation.

The study has a qualitative secondary-data case-study methodological design. It is based on publicly available academic publications, official skills and related materials, industry reports including media references and other public career insight data. Simran Parveen and Sabiha Lodi get longer treatment since there exists significant public record on their respective careers. Other artists are referenced strictly at a level that can be corroborated with publicly-available professional information. It does not include unverified assertions about income, religion, family life, education or private affairs. This nuance is important: the fact that someone is online gives them a public persona, not a license to speculate about their personal life.

3. BEAUTY WORK AS AN EMERGING OCCUPATIONAL FIELD

The spread of beauty services should be read in the context of changes in women's work and the digitalization of small enterprise right across society. Substantial growth is reported in the Indian hair and beauty market (India Brand Equity Foundation) whereas, Periodic Labor Force Survey based government reporting shows an increasing share of self-employment among employed women. While these macro-level signals do not show how many Muslim women in Kolkata have become makeup artists, they also do not demonstrate that all self-employment is empowering. At the same time they do set the structural context in which freelance micro-enterprise service work has been more apparent (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2026; Press Information Bureau, 2025).

The advent of digital platforms has changed the occupational landscape for beauty work. Now you can have a portfolio that would be recommended by word of mouth, that now turns into something shown to a potential client endless amounts of times. This platform can promote your services, teach clients and fans techniques you use in a sample format, document the transformations of your clients and provide an announcement for any master-class you might moderate, while allowing you to continue with that familiar personal brand. This means that visibility itself thus becomes an entrepreneurial resource. But this creates new inequalities: for professional cosmetics, lighting, photography, smartphones and repeated training there is a need to invest; platform algorithms and seasonal demand make visibility and income unstable. Thus, digital entrepreneurship can broaden opportunity but also produce new forms of precarity.

4. SIMRAN PARVEEN: FROM AESTHETIC SKILL TO ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPITAL

Simran Parveen gives an excellent example of the professionalization of aesthetic labor. One of the initial profiles done about her, published by The Telegraph India in 2022, described her as a Kolkata-based makeup artist who travelled across cities and catered to over 2,000 clients back then. This kind of mobility has importance beyond numbers. Having clients all over the geographic area broadens the social network that reputation flows through: each client, photographer, stylist and wedding professional can link into a web of work. By this, it becomes the method used for achieving economic prosperity and accumulating social capital (The Telegraph India., 2022).

The theory of capital by Bourdieu (1986) explains the process. Knowledge of skin preparation, complexion, color, and facial structure (along with knowledge about how products behave and can be styled) constitutes embodied cultural capital because it is learned by doing and incorporated into the worker's field. Automating this expertise only turns into economic value when it is possible to produce it in the form of paid services. An economic capital (professional products, equipment, studio infrastructure and travel), social capital (repeat clients, referrals and industry relationships) as well as symbolic capital gradually building a big name giving you credibility and prestige.

This is what the personal brand law was built around. This means that an entrepreneur is not only selling an unspecified service in regards to beauty work, but rather a recognizable aesthetic signature. Expectations of quality become bound to the artist name, portfolio, and public reputation. This is crucial in bridal work, where the service has an emotional component to it, is much photographed and cannot be redone if you generate less than stellar results. Trust therefore has market value. Public documentation of past performance decreases uncertainty for potential clients and turns reputation into an economic asset.

Simran's path is an example of how service work can transform into knowledge sharing. Her studio and training activity, as public professional directories describe it, seems to represent a shift in her work away from client bookings toward teaching aspiring artists. From a sociological perspective, this is a pivotal transition. A service booking pays for the artist labor a single time: training repackages everything that has

been learned over years into an item that can be sold again to new people. The professional thus becomes not just a practitioner but also a creator and distributor of professional knowledge.

The resources–agency–achievements framework advanced by Kabeer (1999) provides an additional dimension. Technical knowledge, connections, digital footprint and consolidated physical structures can be interpreted as assets. Having the ability to choose your clients, travel for work, and design a studio space, teaches and also shapes our professional identity: agency. Moreover, recognition, livelihood generation and building opportunities for other women to learn are milestones. Here empowerment is not derived from income. It is about the ability to create significant professional choices and turning competence into an enduring social identity.

Simran's success should also not be over-romanticized as proof that digital entrepreneurship is just as accessible to all women. Money, time and technological competence are required to release good products, good content, travel and present yourself as a professional. Her case is analytically useful because it shows both what aesthetic entrepreneurship can accomplish and the resources necessary for it to thrive. The arc of her career is basically skill → service → reputation → personal branding → studio business → knowledge transfer / training. Here is a case study of how an indigenous enterprise can be transposed into a contemporary business sector.

5. SABIHA LODI: PROFESSIONALIZATION THROUGH SKILL TRANSMISSION

A second but related route represented by Sabiha Lodi. According to public sources, she is a bridal makeup artist and hairstylist based in Kolkata. According to a report in The Telegraph India, she was first employed as a makeup artist for M.A.C. before establishing an academy that provided from-the-ground-up training in makeup, along with master-classes and fashion or editorial training. WeddingWire India also portray her as a bridal expert and promoter for professional make up services. Thus, only sociologically meaningful is her career because she became self-employed but mere self-employment does not make an education (The Telegraph India, 2022; WeddingWire India Provides Background Information about Maternity Leave in Omeka Exhibits)

Her past work may be seen as a professional socialization site. An established cosmetics background allows you to gain knowledge on products, standardized practices, customer service and a sense of discipline within the industry. These competencies can be considered as embodied cultural capital in Bourdieusian terms while an association with a well-known (often professional) setting may provide some symbolic legitimacy. When that accumulated expertise is moved into a stand-alone enterprise, then cultural and symbolic resources earn economic capital via services and training (Bourdieu, 1986).

The academy model is significant because it can shift the scale of beauty labor. Bridal work is usually time-limited: one artist provides a service for one client in a single booking. It would allow the same practitioner to codify expertise into demonstrations, curricula and masterclasses that can be replicated across classes of learners. Knowledge becomes a productive asset. In other words, the artist shifts from selling just her own labor time to paving an occupational channel for others to enter into the world.

This transition also aids beauty work's formalization. Competing skills for which we once relied on learning informally from family/community, watching others do it or trial and error are being organized through formal courses, in technical jargon/terminology and standards that require some sort of demonstration. Cosmetology and other beauty-related occupations are identified in formal skill development via the National Skill Training Institute for Women, Kolkata thus supporting the recognition of beauty services as a potential profession instead of solely a domestic achievement (National Skill

Training Institute for Women, Kolkata, n.d.). Lodi's trajectory of being an academy fits this wider institutional change.

The framework developed by Kabeer (1999) is useful in delineating entrepreneurship from empowerment. These resources consist of technical training, hands-on experience, networks and market access. Agency is built into the shift from worker to independent, individual type-work an, organization of work and making a platform for teaching. Such outcomes include recognition in professional fields, income generation and an ability to provide transferrable skills. What is sociologically significant to grasp is not that business ownership liberates women, but when a woman possesses control of appropriate expertise and the conditions under which it may be disseminated, these circumstances will enlarge the options she has for action.

This is also why Sabiha's career contests the inclination to frame beauty as a seeming inverse of intellect or utility: culturally, beauty can be associated with femininity and thus made less sage or more frivolous. Training involves the formalization of tacit knowledge: an expert must tell the machine how to treat techniques, the sequences involved, product selection, hygiene protocols and aesthetic judgment differentiated across clients. If expertise can be taught, tested and marketed its status as a profession becomes virtually unassailable. This trajectory may then be encoded not as experience past → skill in an area of expertise → self-sufficiency → brandable content / personal practice → university life → commercialized knowledge. In this way, the case shows how aesthetic labor can gain recognition and institutionalization.

6. EXPANDING THE CLUSTER: SHAISTA SIDDIQUE, MARIAM JAVED, FROM LECTURES TO LASHES AND OTHER ARTISTS

The wider cluster is more usefully treated as a chart mapping professional visibility than as the sequence of un-footnoted lives. While working as a makeup artist Shaista Siddique is part of this burgeoning profession, claims about her education, income, family upbringing or work history remained largely unsubstantiated by enough independent public evidence. In doing so, her example is economically useful at the level of current and publicly visible profiles: that is, to articulate individual artistry as a public link to the more personalized form of beauty enterprise supporting itself in presence in which identity, portfolio and reputation are now becoming synonymous.

Like Mariam Javed, can also be situated within the same logic of personal beauty brands. Instead of attributing private characteristics to her, a feature sociologically relevant is the public construction of an identifiable professional presence. This type of name-based entrepreneurship is different from the older anonymous salon model, because accountability and aesthetic style has become attached to the actual practitioner. In this respect, it can stabilize trust and awareness, but also create a permanent obligation for the entrepreneur to be visible, responsive and digitally active.

The professional tagline “From Lectures to Lashes” is especially evocative because it juxtaposes education and creative beauty work within the same frame. The name can be read as a cultural statement, in as much as we locate ourselves at the crossroads between plural professional identities (which is not something I am going to assume from the founder's biography now). This leads us to a useful distinction Bourdieu makes between institutionalized and embodied cultural capital: the hierarchy of formal learning over aesthetic expertise need not be so. Digital entrepreneurship can help to build an environment where communication, organization, education and artistic skills mutually reinforce one another.

Want wider cluster like Styledbyresh, Brush-n-Blush, Makeupbyif, Glammed-by-Huma and Nida Makeup Artist or Kashish Ahsan MUA or Makeup & Hair by Aqsa Shamim or Makeup Mystery by Safa Hair by Ariba and Hair by Dania Anis Hair or Shazia Mehendi Artist and Flawless Faces by Saika, these describe specialization within a networked wedding economy! All the public-facing names are suffixed with “makeup by,” “hair by” styling, faces and mehendi, prioritizing the identity of the individual practitioner or boutique as focal to the service. Together they illustrate how digital portfolios afford small beauty workers a medium to demonstrate niche skills, build brand recognition and engage with the broader network of photographers, clothing designers, wedding planners and customers.

Read together, these shorter cases are analytically important not only because they provide evidence of sameness, but also more importantly, and more specifically revealing an occupational grammar: booking, portfolio, studio, course, client, collaboration in styling and the brand. This vocabulary signals a move from beauty as private feminine practice to beauty as organized service work. It also shows the rise of aesthetic micro-entrepreneurships in which labor becomes opaque buying products, replying to queries, editing content or maintaining equipment as well travelling and booking cancellations while the end image is what the public sees.

7. INTERSECTIONALITY, GENDER NEGOTIATION AND PRECARITY

The intersectionality of Crenshaw (1989) is in a key position here, as it allows this occupational field to be expressed without treating the experiences of Muslim women in a single social category. Entrepreneurial access is determined at once by gender, class, education, locality and family relations with mobility and digital connectivity. One lady has the funding to buy luxury products and undergo a professional training programme, while another gains her kit bit-by-bit over many months from small additional earnings. Some may have years of family backing; others may be crunching the numbers on hourly rates and travel. As a result, when we see public success stories, they should be treated as illustrations of what is possible and not reductively the disappearance of structural inequality.

Celebratory narratives about entrepreneurship, then, are further complicated by a sense of the patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1988). Beauty work that can be done in flexible or home-based time may generate income while meeting expectations that women should continue to carry out domestic labor obligations. Flexibility is thus both enabling and disciplining, it provides a space for entering paid work but also upholds the presumption of professional labor bending around unpaid care. We conclude that entrepreneurship is more profitably understood as the contestation of a social space rather than an automatic refuge from gendered structures.

There is also an emotional and precarious aspect of aesthetic labor. Clients buy more than just a technical application but also security, care and trust during fraught circumstances. Meanwhile freelancers deal with seasonal over demand, cancellations, travel fatigue, expensive product replacements, battling to up-skill again and banking on platform visibility. Therefore, the rhetoric of "entrepreneurship" should not hide insecurity. An effective online identity could easily go along with sporadic cash flow, high operating overhead and no benefits from their company.

8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Kolkata cases reveal three connected transformations. First, aesthetic expertise was increasingly professionalized through training, specialization and recognizable standards. Second, personal branding reorganizes small enterprises by making the entrepreneur's name, portfolio and digital identity central to market trust. Third, the boundaries of socially recognizable women's work are expanding, allowing creative, freelance and educational roles to coexist within the same career.

Bourdieu explains how skills, networks and reputation become convertible forms of capital; Kabeer directs attention to whether resources enlarge agency and produce meaningful achievements; Crenshaw warns against treating Muslim women as homogeneous; and Kandiyoti shows that agency may be negotiated within, rather than simply outside, existing gender relations. Together, these perspectives prevent two simplistic conclusions: that beauty work is merely superficial consumption, or that entrepreneurship automatically equals emancipation.

Simran Parveen and Sabiha Lodi demonstrate especially visible pathways through which aesthetic competence can become livelihood, reputation, enterprise and knowledge transmission. Shaista Siddique, Mariam Javed, From Lectures to Lashes and the broader digital cluster extend the picture by illustrating the proliferation of personalized and specialized beauty identities. What appears publicly as a finished bridal look is therefore the endpoint of a much larger labor process involving training, investment, emotional management, digital production and entrepreneurial risk.

The sociological importance of makeup artistry lies in this transformation of beauty from something merely consumed into something professionally produced. For a growing number of women, aesthetic expertise can function as cultural capital, client networks as social capital, reputation as symbolic capital and paid services as economic capital. Yet future research must move beyond digital mapping toward interviews with artists and trainees to examine income variability, family negotiations, religious identity, mobility, discrimination, work–life balance and long-term career sustainability. Beauty entrepreneurship is thus neither trivial nor uniformly liberating: it is creative, relational, demanding, precarious and potentially transformative.

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