



Science

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH –
GRANTHAALAYAH**
A knowledge Repository



“CARPET WEAVING TRADITION OF INDIA”

Pranshi Jain *¹

*¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, M.I.T.S Gwalior, India

Abstract

Traditional knowledge is the knowledge base of a particular society or a community which has been generated from one generation to the other over a period of time through the process of learning and sharing. It takes several generations to refine or improve the knowledge base with expertise which they gained through experiences. Ultimately, it becomes the integral part of cultural identity of their community.

The art of carpet weaving is one of the traditional knowledges which has represented the continuity of the age- old Indian heritage and also the socio-cultural tradition of weaving communities and thus has given Indian carpets a renowned place in the world.

The magnificence of Indian carpet weaving and the intricate patterns that have emerged from it have substantially increased India’s carpet exports and placed it prominently on the international carpet map and thus has made it the largest exporter of handmade carpets in the world.

Handloom sector being one of the major sectors which helps the country in maintaining the GDP at present is suffering from high competition to power looms due to the very nature of handmade sector being unorganized and dispersed.

Therefore, this paper would give the review of carpet tradition in India, its evolution, its present scenario and thus addressing the need to safeguard the knowledge/ skill related with the craft as it is on the verge of losing its identity.

Keywords: Carpet; Weaving; Tradition.

Cite This Article: Pranshi Jain. (2019). “CARPET WEAVING TRADITION OF INDIA.” *International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah*, 7(11SE), 40-47. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3585026>.

1. Introduction

1.1. Evolution of Carpet in India

India has been greatly blessed by having a many layered, culturally diverse, rich heritage of craft skills imbibed through the ebb and flow of historical events that rest upon societal practices and religious beliefs. Changes and enrichment have taken place from TRADE movements such as those on the SILK ROUTE which brought demands and resources from the Middle East and

Central Asia to the Far East up to China. The Indian carpets are renowned the world over for their exquisite designs, subtle elegance, attractive colours and workmanship.

The Indian carpets recorded history seems to begin in the 16th century which entails that when Babur came to India and was disappointed by lack of luxuries here. He missed the luxuries of Persia, which included the Persian carpet. The art of carpet weaving flourished during the reign of Akbar in around 1580 A.D. He set up the royal workshops in his own palace in Agra. He also established carpet weavings centers at Agra, Delhi and Lahore to facilitate production of Persian styled carpets, which were inspired by designs of Kirman, Kashan, Esfahan, Heart and so on. Thus the Indian Pile carpets began to take shape.

Mughals not only used the Persian technique of carpet weaving, but were also influenced by traditional designs and motifs from Persia.

Mughal carpets were as obscure as their miniatures and usually depicted court life, animals and floral decorations. Mughal carpets were brightly coloured and the hand knotted silk carpets had 4224 knots per square inch.

However, most famous type of Indian carpets was the pile carpet, which came to India in the reign of Akbar. The art grew and flourished here and it was modified as per the royal tastes and mixed with the Indian arts.

The Persian carpets were thus re-created in Indian forms. These carpets spread to the whole subcontinent with each area having its own specialties

Since the beginning, wool or silks have been the essential material of the knotted carpets. The wool may have a diversity of origins according to the type of carpet being made. Silk knots are also used in Kashmir region.

The patterns of Indian carpets varied from vines and floral patterns, animal and bird figures and geometric and calligraphic patterns.

1.1.1. Akbar's Reign

Rugs from Akbar's reign (1556-1605) used cotton warp and wool pile and a variety of color scheme had multiple shades of blues, greens, and other colors on a red and peach base. The patterns were a reworked copy of Persian style but later modified to Indian tastes.

1.1.2. Jahangir's Reign

Indian carpets during Jahangir's reign (1605-27) were more superior. Materials like silk and pashmina were used that permitted greater number of knots to be included in the art works.

Patterns of these Indian carpets resembled miniature paintings.

Subtle gradations and shadings with yarns were themselves artistic. The patterns of these carpets were a reflection of manuscript paintings. The history of Indian Carpets show technically refined

1.1.3. *Shahjahan's Reign*

During Shahjahan's reign (1628-58) the art of Indian carpets had reached new heights. Warps and wefts of fine silk yarns incorporated as many as 2,000 knots per square inch.

Silk or pashmina piles gave the carpets a velvety like texture. Yarn shading was as stylish as in Jahangir's reign.

Carpets with purely floral pattern were also abundantly woven during this reign. Prominent among the flowers are Narcissus and Irises which have been arranged in near perfect, elegant symmetry. In their presentation they remind us of the decoration of revetment panels of the imperial buildings of Shah Jahan.

1.1.4. *Aurangzeb's Reign*

Under the reign of Aurangzeb, the rule of orthodoxy created an uneasy religious tension, under which the patronage of the arts declined. Carpets merely confined to a utilitarian object with rigid compositions and hack yard patterns.

AKBAR'S REIGN	JAHANGIR'S REIGN	SHAH JAHAN'S REIGN
		
<p>Carpet with floral pattern, period of Shah Jahan, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)</p>	<p>Carpet with floral pattern, period of Shah Jahan, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)</p>	<p>Carpet with floral pattern, period of Shah Jahan, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)</p>

During the 18th century the Indian pile carpet reached Europe Its appearance at London Exhibition of 1851 put it for the first time n the global map and gave it a prominent place in the western world. Not only did it attract attention here but traders traced it back to its place of origin.

Soon a few carpet manufacturing firms opened their factories at Srinagar, Amritsar, Mirzapur, Agra, Kashmir, Masulipatnam and few towns of Hyderabad. In these company British use to call the weavers from the near by areas and assign them the work of carpet production.

Small centers included several town in the united provinces, chiefly, Jewar, Shahjahpur, Jhansi, Gwalior, Walajahpet and Banglore in south and patna and few villages in the east.²

Another type of carpets which became famous in this period was JAIL CARPET. The British introduced the carpet weaving in the prisons to provide the long term prisoners a dependable vocation for earning their livelihood. Later this became an established feature and more and more prisons came to introduce carpet weaving. This introduction of carpets in jail also helped in meeting the overseas demand.

This in a way marks the beginning of carpet production on modern lines in India.

2. Types of Carpets Manufactured in India

2.1. Indian Carpet Types

- Traditional Carpets: Woollen , silk, Gabbeh woollen Hand knotted carpet and Handmade woollen durries
- Contemporary Carpets: Staple, Tufted and machine knotted carpet

Traditional Carpets

1) Hand knotted carpets: (Woollen, Silk)

Hand knotted Carpets are produced with hand knotting technique. The art of weaving carpets has percolated through generations and the Indian craftsmen have been creating the greatest of specimen since the medieval period. (Fig. 1a)

Woollen Carpet

The Indian woollen carpets are inspired by the classical Persian tradition of motifs to the most modern design. This was the technique which was brought by Akbar in 16th century from Persia which got refined with time. This type of carpets are produced in different material like during the Akbar's reign hand knotted carpet was manufactured in wool where in the reign of Jahangir and Shahjahan they were manufacture in silk and wool.

Superior hand-knotting technique, variety of designs, colours and a good number of knots per square inch have made them superior among the type of carpets. These are the carpets which are largely exported.

Silk Carpets

Hand knotted pure silk carpets are renowned for suppleness and softness and fine workmanship in the world. The material composition is 80% silk yarn and 20% cotton yarn with knottage 400 knots and above per square inch.

These carpets are produced in Kashmir which display a fine workmanship and intricate designs of a kind. (Fig. 1b)

The designs vary from intricate motifs and patterns inspired from nature to hunting scenes, bird and animal motifs or thematic designs

The prominent areas, which produce woollen carpets, are Bhadohi, Mirzapur, Khamaria, Ghosia, Varanasi and Agra in Uttar Pradesh, Amritsar and Pathankot in Punjab and Jaipur in Rajasthan and Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh.

GABBEH Woollen Carpets

Hand-knotted Gabbeh Woollen Carpets portray a unique tradition of Tribal Design.

The continuity of superb artistic tradition of Tribal's has made these carpets a product of living and thriving art. (Fig. 1c)

The raw material composition of these carpets is generally 75% wool and 25% cotton and are mainly produced in Bhadohi Mirzapur region in Uttar Pradesh.

Handmade Woollen Dhurries Woollen dhurries are one of the least expensive yet very elegant handwoven flat floor coverings.

Dhurries are just perfect to use anywhere in a room, in a formal setting, or casually in a balcony echoing its democratic antecedents. Their varieties of colours are fast selling and have made them one of the popular floor coverings in the world.

Woollen dhurries are mainly produced in Bhadhohi, Mirzapur, Agra, Jaipur, Panipat and Bangalore. (Fig.1 d)

2) Contemporary Carpets:

Tufted Woollen Carpets

Hand Tufted carpets are the widely popular carpets which are used nowadays. In India, this technique came after the India achieved independence. This was the innovation technique which was introduced in this industry for making the production faster. (Fig. 1e)

These Carpets are produced with the help of tufting guns. The design of these carpets are less intricate and detailed in comparison to the knotted carpet.

A good quality fabric is used for a desired pile density and number of stitches per square inch. In India, Panipat is the main carpet producing centre of Tufted Woollen Carpets. But with the rapid industrialization, Tufted carpets are being produced by almost every carpet producing city.

Staple Carpets

Staple carpets are synthetic hand-knotted carpets, which was introduced by CEPC(Government agency) 30- 35 years ago to meet the increased demand supply. The yarn of these type of carpet is made of polyester and viscous material.

These type of carpets are famous by the name of artificial silk in the market. These finely knotted carpets (256 knots per square inch) imbibe all the aesthetic characteristics of classical and contemporary designs and colours.

The main carpet producing centre of Staple carpets are Srinagar (Jammu & Kashmir), Agra and Gwalior. (Fig. 1f)

3) Machine Knotted Carpets

The major advance in carpet manufacture occurred in the 20th century with the development of tufting and knitting to high speed methods for constructing carpet pile. yarn fabrics. The main carpet producing center of machine knotted carpets are Mirzapur- Bhadohi(U.P)



FIG. 1(a) HANDKNOTTED CARPET



FIG. 1(b) SILK CARPET



FIG. 1(c) HANDMADE WOLLEN DURRIES GABBEH WOLLEN



FIG. 1(d) GABBEH CARPET



FIG. 1(e) TUFTED CARPET



FIG. 1(f) STAPLE CARPET

Table 1.1 Carpet Weaving clusters in India

STATE	CENTRE	SPECIALITY
Andhra Pradesh	Ellore, Masulipatnam	Carpets in Black, Brown and semi black or Grey colour Hasham carpets
Arunachal Pradesh	Tawang	Woollen carpets are knotted by <i>monpas</i> . Dragon and floral motifs interwoven with geometrical shapes
Bihar	Sasaram	Origin traced back to Buddhist and Mauryan Times <i>Durrie</i> and <i>suttranji</i> Weaving in cotton and wool
Harayana	Panipat	Tufted woollen carpet Also famous for handmade durries
Kashmir	Srinagar	Double knotted carpet Silk warp and Silk weft
Punjab	Amritsar	Hand knotted woollen carpets <i>Bokhra</i> and <i>Maori</i> patterns
Madhya Pradesh	Gwalior	Hand knotted woollen and Hand knotted artificial silk carpet. Persian and Anatolian design influence
Rajasthan	Jaipur	Hand knotted woollen carpet. Traditional design- <i>Dushala</i> , <i>Mehrab</i> , <i>Shikhar</i> patterns
Tamil Nadu	Bhavani, Kumarapalayam	Multicoloured striped cotton flat weave <i>dhurrie</i> called <i>Jamkalam</i> -
Uttar Pradesh	Mirzapur, Bhadohi, Agra, Kaushambi, Allahbad, Jaunpur, Chandauli	Bhadohi- Mirzapur- Coarser variety of carpets Woollen hand knotted and tufted carpets Weave upto 100 knots per square inch Agra- 3 varieties- Persian, Turkoman, Aubussan. With woollen carpets Agra is also famous for its durries which is made from a mill soun or worsted yarn having cotton warp and weft.
Uttranchal	Dehradun, Chamoli, Bageshwar, Rudraprayag, Pithoragarh	Woollen pile carpets are knotted by Tibetan settlers- <i>Bhotia</i> Design fall in 2 categories- Stylized geometric motifs and thee floral design showing a Chinese influence
WestBengal	Darjelling	Double knotted carpet Cotton warp and Wool weft Dragon and floral motifs interwoven with geometrical shapes

3. Present Day Carpet Industry

Carpet Industry, at present is one of the prime industry that is entirely demand-driven which has made India as one of the highest exporter of this field.

Urbanization has affected the trading of carpet in India, traditional technique and traditional knowledge associated with this craft. At present this sector is suffering from the high competition of power looms due to the very nature of handloom sector being unorganised and dispersed.

With this decentralisation factors like lack of education, adequate working capital, proper infrastructure; poor exposure to new technologies, lack of market intelligence, stiff competition and poor institutional framework has also affected this industry and thus is a threat to this industry. Apart from this it is important to safeguard the people i.e. Families/ community whose generations are involved in this profession from generations, who are the flag bearer of the traditional knowledge are at present shifting towards the other economic activity to earn more wages.

Although Government of India has formed an agency called CEPC (Carpet Export Promotion Council) which makes different policies in order to promote and export the handmade carpets. Their main focus is on the commercialisation of the carpet, not on the traditional manufacturing of the carpet. Thus rather than focusing on the commercialisation, CEPC should also focus on making the policies for the survival of the Handmade carpets and skill and knowledge associated with it. Therefore it is important to formulate a set of necessary policies and strategies for the survival of this traditional industry.

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