

A HERITAGE SPANNING DECADES; CARPETS OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Art has been inseparable from man since the beginning of time, facilitating him to communicate with others and express his sentiments. Arts and crafts usually and unconsciously express their age and are a vital source of information about past cultures and civilizations. Pakistan is among the world's largest producers and exporters of oriental hand knotted carpets. In the few last decades Pakistani carpets have reached the farthest corners of the world. The name of Pakistan is well-known in all those lands where hand-knotted carpets are used and loved (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets).

Introduction

Art has been inseparable from man since the beginning of time, facilitating him to communicate with others and express his sentiments. Arts and crafts usually and unconsciously express their age and are a vital source of information about past cultures and civilizations.

The best oriental pile carpet is those of Persia, particularly those made in Khorasan, Kirman, Ferhan and Kurdistan. Turkey also produces good quality pile carpets chiefly at Ushak in Asia Minor near Smyrna. The designs from these and other famous carpet producing areas in Central Asia are copied and produced almost all over Pakistan.

The carpet making art of Pakistan, which form the basis of our cottage industry, are an invaluable heritage that has survived from generation to generation by mere variable instruction. This research has explored the fundamental 'motifs' or unit of designs that is employed in our carpet manufacturing of Pakistan. The origin and history of the motifs, the medium in which they are employed have received attention.(Yousaf, 1990).

Carpet making is basically a Muslim heritage and it was one of the first craft to come to this area in

Islam. Historian believed that carpet making was introduced to the region now constituting Pakistan as far back as the 11th century with the coming of the first Muslim conquerors, the Ghaznavids and the Ghauris. Historical records are available of the Mughal's important weavers and formally introducing the art of the sub-continent. Lahore Multan Hyderabad in Pakistan and Agra, Mirzapur and Jaipur in India became famous for their carpets. But the profession remained basically Muslim. It was Muslim king who patronized it and it was Muslim weavers who wove knots into designs and earned name and fame beyond their own country (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets).

Pakistan is among the world's largest producers and exporters of oriental hand knotted carpets. In the few last decades Pakistani carpets have reached the farthest corners of the world. The name of Pakistan is well-known in all those lands where hand-knotted carpets are used and loved. (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets).

Nature in all its bounty has been a watershed of inspiration and tutelage for man's creative efforts. In pursuits of artistic inspirations, the folk people developed a unique design consciousness. Folk Pakistan comprises the vast majority of rural a pastoral people who inhabit the country side. A

small percentage of these comprise the nomads scattered in pockets all over the country, with concentrations in the hills of Baluchistan and the Thar Desert. The simple lifestyles, celebrations, music, rituals, customs and crafts of these people contributed to the development of distinct, regional folk cultures. Each sub-culture gave birth to a variety of folk crafts, employing age old designs and processes which have remained unchanged over the years. The earliest motifs were reproduction of the shapes of flora and fauna, the sun, moon, and stars, the restless waves on the sea shore, the silhouette of the majestic mountains, the variety of living beings, such as fish, the deer, the elephant, the bull, the peacock and the butterfly. Some of the motifs still existed in later period as a pictorial in carpet making, but the evolutionary process of mankind, geographic, historical, socio-economic and religious influence further lent to geometric and other floral style of designs to these motifs (Yousaf, 1990).

He, the author of *Ain-i-Akbari*, has written in detail about Lahore as it developed in Mughal period. In those days very fine carpets were woven, some of them having archived as many as 2000 knots to the square inch and the wool used was so fine that it could pass for silk.

They are the dreams are made of – enchanting colors woven into patterns of captivating beauty-flowers, tendrils, mythical animals, and geometric designs that transport one to the world of fairy tales. (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets). Pakistan as a political entity is 10 years old, but the areas forming Pakistan have historically been the centers of carpet making in the south Asian sub-continent. The ancient city of Lahore is a permanent example. Lahore is a major centre of manufacturing today, and it occupied the same position four hundred years ago when Mughal emperor Akbar bought some carpet maker from Iran (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets).

In the beginning only reproduction of Persian original pieces were made, but over a period of time Lahore weavers developed their own distinctive style, modifying the Persian designs and motifs and adding local colors and flavor to

them. Local motifs and floral designs were also developed and used in carpets along with the traditional Persian ones. The depiction of elephants or carnations clearly showed local inspiration.

Carpet and its design Analogy

All the hand knotted oriental carpets are so designed as to have a field and a border. The border encloses the field may be thin or border and may consist of several bands of intricate patterns and symbols such as a scroll or twisting vine. The field designs are basically of two types. One is *Mori* in which the pattern is geometrical in shape and is repeated from one end to another and the second is *Sootri*. It is in some of the popular designs are life of life and hunting scenes in the overall pattern (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets).

Sometime there is central medallion which is a set of intricate flowery designs in the four corners. One of the commonest *Sootri* design is the trace reign in which the rectangular field contains an arch at one end. This design represents niche in the mosque. Every country has its own distinctive designs based on traditional and architecture. It is on this basis that carpets are distinguished from one another. The *Mori* carpets, which draw their names from the city of Merv in the Central Asian region, are the hallmark of the Pakistan carpet industry (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets).

Pakistani designs

What Pakistan is making today is the Mughal style and school off carpets as well as with the influence of Persian Bokhara and Afghani carpets as well. It is no doubt that the style is borrowed by Persia but now it is typically and intrinsically Pakistani. Pakistani hand knotted carpets have still intricate arabesques of branches, leaves and stylized and simplified flowers, and medallions in the centre; or rhythmic patterns of geometrical stapes; or series of rosettes between two curved leaves and many other flowers; and tasteful and graceful arrangements of leaves buds and floral motifs, as found in the carpets of the past, but their characteristics is definitely indigenous. The

color of Mori carpets with the repetitive geometrical designs are generally a few (5 or 6) but in the Sootri style with floral motifs they can be as many as 18 or 20 or even more..

Mori Design

Pakistan concentrated on Mori design carpets in the beginning to fill the vacuum created by a sharp decline in carpet production in the Soviet Union. The term Mori is used to describe designs with geometrical shapes-squares, rectangle and diagonals, etc. the original Mori repeatedly uses a motif known as Morri dabbi . but with time Pakistani designer added new motifs and details. Subsequently, however, Pakistan drew more and more on its long cultural heritage and produced carpet pieces which rightly reflected different facets of the culture and folkway of the country. The Pakistan carpet industry is now making non-traditional types of carpets as well. Today one can find any kind of influenced carpet, but having new styles of arabesques or motifs as opposed on the traditional bright colors. Carpets like *Takhti-Suleman* and *Omar Khayyam* are also found on Pakistani carpets. (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets) The prayer rug displaying the design of the famous tile panel from *Thatta* in Sindh province of Pakistan represents an attempt to make the carpet reflect the culture that developed within the country. Some of the latest designs reveal a conscious effort to liberate the Pakistani carpet from traditional mores.(Pakistan hand-knotted carpets)

Life of a Carpet

Oriental carpets are unbelievably long lasting and are good value in all over the World. A thing of beauty and luxury, carpets like any other works of art appreciate in value with the passage of time. The old carpets are considered priceless work of art and command fabulous prices on the international market. With wages and cotton wool prices going up and the purchasing powers of the dollar under considerable pressure, carpets are bound to appreciate greatly in value in coming years (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets). Pakistani manufacturers, make carpets in all sizes- from the smallest 1 x 1 to 9 x 12 and the 12 x 18 feet bigger. Pakistani carpets are not only good to

look but are also strong and durable. The comparative ease with which they can be restored and repaired prolonged the life of a Pakistani carpet.

Pakistani carpets today

The Pakistani oriental carpet industry has transverse a long distance in the last few decades. Located for the most parts in the countryside, the industry is basically cottage in character and employs over a million weavers, dyer, washers, clippers, and other associated with the trade. This industry fight is making unemployment and poverty in rural and backwaters where few opening for gainful occupation are available. In many backward and underdeveloped sources of livelihood for people, many young people who are not acquire to study because of lack of resources become productive members of society by learning the art of carpet making.

Because of their unique and colorful combinations Pakistan carpets are in a class by themselves. Their excellent craftsmanship, perfect finish and unique shine make them a matchless product in the world of oriental carpets. Weavers in Pakistan are quick to adjust to the changing trends in colors and designs to cater to the consumer taste. Pakistan carpets are made in both decor and lighter shades and all the designs and sizes to meet the various needs of interior décor. Pakistan carpets are available in a large variety of knotting density. *Sootri* 16/18, the pride product of Pakistan, has taken the world of carpets by storm. Pakistan occupies leading positions in the export of carpets of over 500 knots density.(Pakistan hand-knotted carpets). Pakistan carpets have some characteristics not found in the carpets of other countries. They are not only much superior in quality but are also competitively priced. Some of the unique qualities of Pakistan carpets are briefly discussed below.

Wool

Pakistan wool, especially Kashmir quality obtained from sheep and goats reared in the mountains in the north of the country which is part of the manufacture of oriental carpets.

Pakistan wool is strong, resilient and has a unique sheen. Because of the superior wool used, Pakistan carpet acquires a quality unparalleled anywhere in the world. The best variety of wool comes from Baluchistan and Cholistan.

Craftsmanship

Pakistan carpets have earned world renown for their exquisite craftsmanship. Among the best in the world, Pakistani weavers have perfected the art of weaving over hundreds of years, with the basic technique passed on from father to son generation after generation. The master weavers who supervise manufacturing exercise strict quality control and remove the smallest flaw detect anywhere. Pakistani weavers use the *Sehna* knot which is supposed to be stronger than the *Ghiordes* knot.

Designs

Although based largely on traditional motifs, Pakistani carpets have introduced many innovative designs and pleasing combinations of the old and new one. Since the art of architecture in Pakistan have seen historical background as West and Central Asian countries the basic designs are the same but there is no local motifs. Pakistani manufacturers continuously create new attractive designs in keeping with market trends.

Color

The fastness of the colors used in Pakistani carpets is proverbial. Colors in Pakistani carpets are fast and hard to fade. They in fact take on a deeper, richer tone as time passes. Pakistani carpets are famous for their harmonious color combinations. At any showroom or exhibition Pakistani carpets stand out for their eye catching color harmony.

There are symbolic meaning attached to the colors of oriental carpets with regional variation. Rose or Pink stands for divine wisdom, while green signifies immortality. Gold, Purple and Yellow are power colors. Indigo blue stands for solitude. White donates peace but is also the pan-Eastern color of mourning. Red is the color of joy and life and Brown is for fertility. In response to modern demands, numerous shades have been developed based on the basic colors.

With their exquisite craftsmanship, enchanting patterns and mystical beauty, Pakistani carpets have enchanting and fascinating viewers and owners the world over years. They are dream come true-complicated twisting of flowers, mystical animals and symbols, gardens, *gul* motifs, *Kum* motifs, hunting scenes brought to life through intricate patterns to colored woolen yarn. The heritage of traditional patterns has been passed down through many generations, yet each carpet is an individual piece of art as craftsmen working at their looms for endless months and years create their own distinctive masterpiece of matchless beauty. The mystery and magic of these Pakistani carpets lies in the way they are made. The commodity is entirely made by hands-knots after knot tied over months and sometimes years of painstaking labor. Bits and pieces of yarn of various colors are tied to wrap o process which creates both pile and design. Most of the carpet design have traditional set handed to us from the influence of the past carpet craft, but distinguish of Pakistani carpet from the run of the mill machine-made variety is the inimitable style, warmth and beauty and, above all, the individuality that the touch of human hand lends it (Pakistan hand-knotted carpets).

The tradition of textile weaving has survived in the shapes of folk culture in various parts of Pakistan. The textile design characteristics of our folk culture, point to all floral and geometric patterns that are basic to carpet designing. This clearly shows that the art of carpet-making and designing existed here from very old times.

Types of Carpet made in Pakistan

Bokhara

The term Bokhara is used for 'Tekke faced' motif. *Tekke* was a tribe from the area of Bokhara in Central Asia. The *Tekke* motif is designed in rows with the surroundings of geometric patterns. Bokhara carpets are among the most popular types of carpets made in Pakistan and all over the world for its rich colors and soft pile. Material uses for making Bokhara carpets are Pakistani wool and NZ worsted also called 'Afghan yarn', on a cotton base. It is a 10 ply wool type. Pakistani Bokhara is usually made in single knot

and made in different qualities and in different colors as per demand of the customer. Although the typical Bokhara carpets are of typical red base

colored carpets along with the combination of greens and gold. The motif on Bokhara carpets is also replaced by a motif called Butterfly Bokhara.



Figure 1, *Tekke* motif



Figure 2, Geometric Border



Figure 3 Finest Pakistani Bokhara, 242 knots per sq inches

Caucasian

Caucasian carpet is originated from the area of caucus region which is the disputed area of land spanning from Black Sea to Caspian Sea. Caucasian carpet is woven in 100% NZ wool with

cotton base are among the most famous in Pakistan. This hand knotted carpet, with geometric pattern and the subtle and bright color scheme in the design fields attracts the eye.



Figure 4 Caucasian hand knotted carpet with 126 knots per sq inch.Persian

Carpet is the most treasured possession bringing by the Persians, who invaded Indo-Pak from the Northwest. With the time passed and the mingling of cultures gave new variations to the carpet designs and themes, with delicate patterns, unique color schemes. This craft, in Pakistan is less expensive as compared with other countries. Pakistan adopted these unique Persian influenced carpets as the masterpiece of Mughal's era. Persian carpets have delicate patterning and vivid color palate of reds, greens, blues and beige

with floral and scrolling motifs, usually having a medallion. This Persian craft is further having different types of stylized carpet like Kashan, Kiman, Isfhan, Tabiz etc. In Pakistan they also have not changed the names but variations occur with time. These names of carpets were the cities in Persia. Pakistan Persian carpets are made with 100% NZ worsted wool pile, with silk too. They are double knotted pile carpets. Some of the Pakistan Persian carpets are made with Senneh

knot, which give the carpet high intricacy and details in the patterns.



Figure 5, Persian carpet border.



Figure 6 Persian hand knotted carpet with 256 knots per sq inch.

Kashan

It is a type from Persian carpet, also called Kahsan. It is a city in Persia and Pakistan is one of the famous countries who manufacture Kashan carpet as well. Pakistani Kashan identification is the highly floral medallion in the centre of the field along with curvilinear floral forms, which creates a garden-like form to the field. Kashan carpet has a very famous motive called 'Shah Abbas' which is used in Pakistani

Kashan carpets too. Like Persian Kashan's, Pakistani Kashan also use wool pile on cotton base and made fine quality double and single knotted carpets. Pakistani Kashan used pastel colors like beige, fawn, champagne, rose and pale blues. Brighter shades also used as per customers demand. Senneh knot (asymmetrical double) knot is used for weaving the Pakistan Kashan carpet with 100% NZ worsted wool with combination of silk wool.



Figure 7 Floral medallion, Kashan carpet.



Figure 8 Kashan curvilinear hand knotted pile carpet.

Isfahan

Isfahan carpet is one of the richest and finest types of Persian influenced carpet made in Pakistan. Isfahan is the city of Persian where the most demanding carpet manufacturing takes place. Pakistani Isfahan carpets are made in fine quality of silk and wool on pure silk base. Typically Isfahan has hunting and pictorial design style but tree of life, Shah Abbas motif on the

field and scrolling floral vines and large circular medallion on the background with silk base is the characteristics. Various technical changes have occurred in Pakistani Isfahan carpet making of colors and stylized motifs. The designing is based on the painting of Persian era of 16th century and till copying the Pakistani craft. Highly the material used and highly designed motifs give long lasting durability to the carpet.



Figure 9, Tree of Life motif.



Figure 10 Isfahan hand knotted pile carpet with 256 knots per sq inch.

Tabriz

Tabriz is a city in North- Persia. Tabriz city has several carpet production centers in 16th century. The main characteristics of Pakistani Tabriz carpet is their floral designs. Mainly Tabriz made in Pakistan usually large central medallion and in its field it has small scrolls, stems, flowers, and pearl designs. Pakistani Tabriz has an intricate design that gives an elegant appearance of

lacework to the caret. The boarder has five or eight stripes around the cartouches which are separated from the foliage scrolls. Colors schemes of reds, greens, ivories, and blues, mainly in lighter shades are the main element of Tabriz carpet. The overall feel of Pakistani Tabriz gives a garden type look. Fine quality wool with cotton bade gives it more elegant and soft texture.



Figure 11 Tabriz hand knotted pile carpet

Kirman

The Kirman carpets originated from a city called Kirman in south-east Iran. Kirman carpets are famous in Pakistan for its well designed artistic styles. Kirman carpets falls in the other two types of carpet named Tabriz and Isfahan with large

flowery central medallion and curvilinear with vine scrolls all over the field. Pakistani Kirman is made with wool on cotton base usually woven in Seeneh knot. Red, blue, green and beige are the characteristics of Pakistani Kirman carpets.



Figure 12 Floral border and curvilinear scrolls.



Figure 13 Kirman hand knotted pile carpet

Tree of Life

There is different classification of Tree of Life with the passage of time the design variations changed. Pakistani Tree of Life is a mixture of

Isfahan and Kirman design. In Islam Tree of Life symbolizes the path between haven, earth and the world below.



Figure 14 Tree of life hand knotted pile carpet.

Ushak

The origin of Ushak carpet is Turkey in west central Anatolia. Ushak carpets have Persian influence of decorative designs. In 15th century the design revolution changed the overall statement and they were began to produce commercially. Pakistani Ushak produce fine quality handspun wool is used on cotton base. The designs are beautifully copied from original Ushak no variations occur in Pakistani Ushak

carpets. Floral patterns and usually woven in Senneh knot with frequently use of red and blue color. The Ushak design is typically based on floral pattern borders along with allover floral medallions motifs on central field and also having scattered spray of vine scrolls. The motif arrangement with the combination of subtle colors of Ushak made this a trend-setter in Pakistani interior design trade.



Figure 15 Ushak floral border



Figure 16 Ushak scrolls field.



Figure 17 Ushak hand knotted pile carpet, 72 knots per sq inch.

Jaldar

Jaldar is totally Pakistani originated carpet type. The design type is inspired by traditional Sarook

and Yamud. Typical Jaldar is made with silk and wool on cotton base, similar having Gul motifs all over the field. These elongated diamond-

shaped Gul motifs are often related to Bokhara patterns with repetition in rows. Pakistani Jaldar is famous for its thick wool and gleam look. The wool gives a soft, velvety and very dense texture.

Jaldar is recognized by the usage of red too red brown background color with the combination of white, black, beige and blue used in the carpet.



Figure 18 Jaldar hand knotted pile carpe, 126 knots per sq inch.

Conclusion

Pakistan produces best carpets found anywhere. The special characteristics of Pakistani carpets are they combine quality with a low price. In the past owning of a carpets was the ultimate in luxury. But thanks to the improved knotting techniques and skills developed by Pakistani weaver, even a man of average means can now afford a hand-knotted carpet. With their delicate craftsmanship, captivating patterns and magical magnificence, these Pakistani carpets have enchanting and fascinating audience and owners throughout the world over several decades. They are a dream come true-complicated parody of flora and fauna, numinous animals, birds and

symbols, gardens, motifs, hunting scenes brought to life through intricate patterns to colored woolen yarn. The heritage of traditional patterns has been passed down through many generations, yet each carpet is an individual piece of art, as craftsmen working at their looms for endless months and years create their own distinctive masterpiece of unrivaled magnificence.

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