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HISTORY AND ART OF CARPET MANUFACTURING IN INDIA

Author- Nisha Gupta

Student, Amity University, Noida, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

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Co-Author- Dr. Madhumita Saha

Faculty, History Department, Amity University Noida

ABSTRACT

Carpets are the textile floor coverings that are woven using a thick fabric. A carpet is not only used as a daily object to keep a place warm or just a decorative piece in a room. Carpets have a long history, how it came to our Indian subcontinent what is its significance. This paper is an attempt to acquire the knowledge regarding the history and art of carpet manufacturing in India. Carpet manufacturing is not only an economic activity, practiced by a certain number of people. It has a religious significance, social symbol or status and cultural belief. Carpet manufacturing was patronized by the Emperor Akbar of the Mughal Sultanate. In present day, India is the third largest exporter of the carpets in the world. Millions of revenue is generated with this carpet export business. As I belong to a carpet manufacturing and exporting family so, this was my personal interest to do an extensive research on carpets. This paper uses secondary sources such as books, journals, article and semi-structured and unstructured interviews with carpet weavers and exporters to meet its requirement.

Keywords: Carpet, Karkhanas, Gilim

INTRODUCTION

Carpets are textile which is spread on floors. Carpet was not only used as a day to day object for keeping the place warm but it also carried an social status, cultural belief and religious significance. Carpet manufacturing is not only an economic activity but it much more than that. Carpet manufacturing is more or less a cultural activity, in which a lot of colour, preference, type of material used various kinds of patterns and designs are involved. It also showcases the embroidery and other aspect of tapestry along with social richness, aesthetic and cultural sophistication. In earlier times owning a carpet not only worked as a decorative item but it also showcased your social status.

The carpets are also called as *dari*, *shatranji*, *galicha*, or *qalin* – *qalin* is a Farsi word used in medieval India. Carpets became popular in India around 16th century. Carpet weaving can be traced in India before the arrival of Islamic Civilisation in India. But it was the Mughal Sultanate who patronised the art of carpet manufacturing.

Rationale and Objective of the Paper:

This paper aims to understand the theoretical aspect of carpet weaving and its art. Carpets are known to people, they like using it, they are fascinated by its colour, patterns, and material used but they fail to understand its manufacturing journey.

- To understand its manufacturing and artistic process.
- To know about its historical significance.

Methodology Used:

- Research methodology
- A personal observation
- A semi- structured interviews with weavers and exporters.

HISTORY OF CARPET MANUFACTURING

Regular use of carpets are mentioned in various historical texts around 14th century. It was mainly used in the cities like Delhi, Daulatabad, Lahore and Multan. Carpet manufacturing industries are called *Karkhanas* during Sultanate period. It became the nodal centre of carpet making and manufacturing for which certain number of quotas were fixed. According to Afif Bahnassi, there are two types of royal *Karkhanas* – *Ratibi* (those *Karkhanas* which had fixed annual grant from the state) and another one was *Ghair Ratibi* (those establishments which did not have any fixed grants). *Farrash-khanah* was a carpet weaving establishment which was under the *Ghair Ratibi* category. Afif also says that by the orders of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351-88), this department had to produce a worth of 200000 *tankas* carpet every year.

Arrival of *Mughals* in India gave the carpet weaving a new momentum and popularity. We see the carpets adorned platforms in the Mystic house in Agra where Emperor Humayun's accession was commemorated in year 1532, those carpets was identifies as a Persian carpets. To fill-up the carpet scarcity, Emperor Akbar following the Persian model re-established the (*Farrash-khanah*) in about year 1580. There were many workshops established around different parts of northern and western India such as Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, Allahabad, Jaunpur, Nerwal, Ahmadabad, Gujarat and some other places of carpet manufacturing.

The author of *Ain-i-Akbari*, Abul Fazal talks about how the Emperor Akbar promoted the wonderful verities and charming texture of carpets and asked workers to produce as many masterpieces as possible. All kinds of carpet weavers settled in India and merchants helped in flourishing the trade. These weavers were found in all major towns of northern India especially in Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Lahore. It is said that in the imperial workshop single *gilim* are made 20 *gaz* 7 *tassujes* long and 6 *gaz* 11.5 *tassujes* broad

(approximately 55 feet 6 inches by 17 feet 9 inches) at the cost of 1810 rupees, those who are skilled in the business have valued at 2715 rupees.

In medieval India carpet weaving centers were royal patronage. They enjoyed the great support during the reign of Akbar and Shahjahan. Different types of carpets such as *Gilim* (woollen carpet), *Jajam* (cotton carpet), *Baluchies* (cotton carpets), *Shatrinjis* (striped cotton carpet) and silk carpets were woven in India at that time.

According to Eugenia Vanina, vertical and rather bulky looms were used by the weavers and the weaving process was complicated and time consuming. Carpet weaving was not a cottage industry at that time. The rugs and mats which were commonly used in Indian households were woven on simpler and productive loom known as *ghori* that is mare.

The carpets of late 16th and 17th century, which were manufactured for Mughal or Rajput courts involved such a elaborate patterns and demonstrated such carefully drawn corners, which was always challenging for the wavers, that knot by knot cartoons and weaving instruction was known as *Ta'lims* in which, sequence and number of wraps were specified for knotting was carefully used.

In the 18th century various others carpet weaving towns and cities came into existence, such as Bhadohi, Mirzapur, Amritsar, Panipat and other more. Carpet patterns which were very much popular during the reign of Mughal emperor Shahjahan continued to be popular under the reign of Aurangzeb.

Carpets were also given as gifts and were sold as a useful and profitable commodity in the market. It was considered as a good gift to present to the royal authorities, elite class people, state diplomats and other significant people of the high class society. Market of carpet thrived mainly in 17th century in European countries. They showed very keen interest in Indian carpets, which used various colours, patterns, designs and material.

ART OF CARPET MANUFACTURING

Handmade carpets are expensive compared to machine made carpets. Handicraft sector is the one of the largest exporting sector of the India and it is also the largest employer of the skilled artist's and craft person across the country.

The carpet manufacturing process starts from selecting the material such as wool, cotton, jute, viscose and all other kinds of natural and synthetic fibers. Then these collected raw materials are checked for any kind of impurities. Wool is the main material which is used for the carpet manufacturing. When unprocessed wool arrives at the factory, then by hand all the clumps are removed which is stuck to the raw material and it is washed to remove the dirt and the sticky oily material called Suint. This washing method of the wool is called scouring. Then by using the charkha machine this raw material (silk and wool) is turned into yarn.

After the spinning of the yarn then it is washed thoroughly. Washing removes all the dust particles and unwanted substance. The thickness of the yarn depends on the quality of the carpet and generally a 3 ply yarn is used.

Then in the next step, this yarn is sent for dyeing. The handmade carpet is woven using vegetable wet dyeing or pot dyeing method and it is called natural dyeing method. For dyeing the yarn, the dyeing solution is heated near boiling point and then the material is dipped into the solution for few minutes. And if the darker colour is required then it is dipped for the longer duration. But now this method is not widely used. It has been replaced by the machine dyeing which takes place in the closed chambers. After dyeing, the yarn is opened or reeled it is the process that involves the opening the bigger and loose yarn and it is tied or wrapped into a tight bunch of smaller bundles.

When we talk about patterns and designs of carpets then we divide it into three categories; curvilinear, geometric and figural patterns. These are the frequent patterns which are commonly used. The size, material, patterns and colours used tell us about the origin of the carpet. The pattern tells us the most about the weaving journey of the carpet. All around the cities and workshops the more importance is given to the old and traditional patterns, which is hand drawn on the paper.

After the weaving, then these carpets were raw washed to remove the dust and the stains which might be on carpets. Then these carpets were sheared, this is the process in which these raw washed carpets were levelled into the same height. Then these carpets were embossed, in this borders of the carpets are cut which gives the detailing to the motifs. An embossing gives the background to the carpets. And sometimes the embossed motifs can be of different fibers also.

After an embossing then the side binding is done which gives carpets the additional strength. It is done by using the thick thread which is often doubled. Seinging is the process in which the back side of the carpet is burned, which gives carpet a neat and clean look. Then after that the carpet is washed for the final time which provides the luster to the carpet. Then it is dried, in traditional method these carpets were dried under the sun but in today's time mass manufactures use drying chamber in which the temperature and moisture can be controlled. After drying then these carpets are stretched to makes its side straight because otherwise some carpets have curved edges. An in the end clipping is done which gives minute detailing to the carpets.

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