



Threaded Histories: A Comparative Study of Kashida and Persian Embroidery as cultural Narratives

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Abstract: Embroidery, as a textile tradition, transcends mere ornamentation—it embodies history, identity, and human expression. This paper presents a comparative exploration of Kashida embroidery from the Kashmir Valley of India and Persian embroidery from Iran, investigating how these two intricate traditions reflect the ethos of their respective cultures. Through an interdisciplinary methodology involving visual analysis, historical context, and artisan narratives, the research reveals how motifs, materials, and stitching techniques are shaped by geography, religion, gender roles, and socio-political influences. The study finds that while both traditions share Indo-Persian artistic heritage, they have evolved uniquely—Kashida emphasizing nature and regional simplicity, and Persian embroidery reflecting structured opulence and spiritual symbolism. This research underscores the living legacy of embroidery and its potential in contemporary cultural preservation and economic empowerment.

Keywords: Embroidery, Traditional, Cultural, Kashida

Index Terms - Component, formatting, style, styling, insert.

I. INTRODUCTION

Embroidery is more than decorative needlework; it is a language of vibrant festivals, fantastic art, craft, ethnic traditions, emotions and mysteries. Passed down from generation to generation, it keeps the communities together, narrates stories, and reflects the values of a people. Among the various methods and techniques that have grown from long time and from different continents, Kashida embroidery from Kashmir and Persian embroidery from Iran hold an especial place in the word of traditional embroidery.

These two traditional embroideries are rooted in different places but connected by centuries of trade and cultural exchange, which gives an example of how fabric can serve as a canvas for civilizational memory. This research provide us with the proper comparative study of these embroidery forms— by analysing their motifs, techniques, and social contexts—while centring the lived experiences of the artisans who keep these crafts alive.

Kashida embroidery is the art form which comes from the valleys of Heaven Kash- mir. This place is rich in various art forms, culture, tourist attractions etc. but one of its real beauties is Kashida embroidery. The word Kashida means “elongated” or “free- flowing” in Persian, and as the word describes these embroidery motifs is elongated in style.

Origin of Kashida embroidery

In the 15th century, the sultan-Zain-ul-Abidin introduced the art of kashidakari to do this embroidery he invited the embroiderer from Turkistan and Persia to introduce this new style of embroidery technique.

This art work gained its popularity in the late medieval period, during the Mughal rule but it is said that this embroidery is practiced from the long time by the inhabitants of Srinagar themselves. Traditionally this embroidery is practiced by the menfolk of Kashmir at their native home place. This embroidery requires the great needlework skills to create the beautiful intricate patterns with the help of the single needle thread which results in flat and composed appearance. This embroidery is mainly done on the products like shawl, saree and for making tapestries.

Traditional Motifs used in this embroidery are birds like magpie, kingfisher, flowers, butterflies, leaves, almonds, cherries, grapes, pomegranate, plums and paisley. The basic material required to do this traditional embroidery are:-

1. Clothes- cotton, wool or silk.
2. Embroidery threads- wool, silk or cotton depending on the product to be embroidered.

Stitches used are darning stitch, Stem stitch, Satin stitch and chain stitch. Special stitches Zalakdozi(chain stitch), vata chikn (button hole), Doria (openwork), Talaibar (Gold work)

Types of kashida embroidery

1. Sozni or Sozankar – Fine and delicate embroidery, mostly done on Pashmina shawls.
2. Chikandozi – Medium fine needlework
3. Rezkar – Embroidery in multi-coloured threads and broad stitches
4. Watchikan – Raised flower and floral designs in golden thread on Raffal shawls
5. Jalakdozi – Hookwork embroidery done in staple yarn
6. Jamwara Patterns – the pattern, which covers the entire shawl.
7. Jalidar designs – Arabesques or net-like designs.
8. Khatraash – Lines, either diagonal or vertical
9. Dordar Khurd – Broad border of embroidery on 2 ends of the shawl, with a minimum width of 3 inches.
10. Bootidar – shawls with small motifs or booties
11. Chaarbadam – four paisley forms

Origin of Persian embroidery

The Persian embroidery has been practiced from ancient times as early as 4th century B.C. in the medieval times this embroidery was really acceptable worldwide during the middle age this embroidery was practiced by the women at home due to various up and downs in the ruling period of Persians this embroidery has lost lots of its beautiful antique pieces. The traces of this embroidery can be seen from the 16th and 17th centuries when Shah Abbas Ist Persian ruler ruled the kingdom and used to send gifts to Europe and the nearby area. According to Marco Polo, this embroidery requires the skill of fine needlework, which the women and girls of Persia practiced. The material used by them was

1. Fabric: Silk, wool, cotton, velvet, organza, and chiffon
2. Threads: Silk, Wool, Cotton, and Metallic Thread
3. Other material: gold and silver thread used in combination with sequence and beads

Types of Persian embroidery

1. Zar-Dozi
2. Sermeh Embroidery
3. Pateh
4. Chain Stitch
5. Sozni
6. Kanikar
7. Other stitches: Satin stitch, stem stitch, and various other stitches are also used.

Motifs used for this embroidery were floral motifs, birds, animals, beast, tree and variety of geometric patterns

2 Methodology

To investigate the rich layers of Kashida and Persian embroidery, the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining:

- Historical Research: Tracing the origins and evolution through documented sources, museum collections, and royal court records.
- Visual Analysis: Detailed study of embroidery pieces from archives, exhibitions, and artisan workshops.
- Field Narratives (where available): Interviews and observations of contemporary artisans practicing traditional methods.
- Cultural Semiotics: Interpreting the motifs and materials through the lens of Cultural and religious symbolism.



This approach allows the research to be both scholarly and grounded in the lived reality of the crafts

3 Historical Background

3.1 The origin of Kashida Embroidery

3.1.1 Embroidered Echoes from the Valley

Kashida embroidery, indigenous to Kashmir, is believed to have developed under the reign of Zain-ul-Abidin in the 15th century, with strong artistic influence from Persian aesthetics brought through Mughal patronage. Kashida became a visual expression of the Kashmiri way of life, often inspired by the breathtaking landscapes of the valley. Wool and pashmina shawls became the main canvas for these threads of beauty, which were traditionally crafted by men from specific artisan communities.



3.1.2 Persian embroider: Art in the realm of empire

Persian embroidery has ancient roots, dating back to the Achaemenid era, but it reached its zenith during the Safavid dynasty (16th to 18th centuries), when art and architecture flourished in tandem. It was during this period that embroidery became a noble craft, often practiced by women in elite households and used in court garments, religious settings, and dowries. Persian embroidery, especially in regions like Isfahan, Kashan, and Yazd, was rich in narrative content—infused with philosophical and spiritual meaning, often echoing Islamic, Zoroastrian, and pre-Islamic motifs.

4 Motifs: Nature, Symbolism, and Storytelling

4.1 Kashida's Motifs: Nature as Muse

Kashida motifs are intimately tied to Kashmir's natural bounty. The chinar leaf, the lotus, the almond blossom, and a variety of birds—especially the bulbul and the kingfisher—are frequently featured. The paisley (buta), though of Persian origin, is reinterpreted in Kashida with local flair. These motifs are not merely decorative—they represent cultural pride, seasonal rhythms, and ecological harmony. Each stitch is a whispered memory of the valley's lush gardens, snow-laden trees, and tranquil lakes.

4.2 Persian Motifs: Paradise in Pattern

Persian embroidery motifs are rooted in metaphysical symbolism. The cypress tree stands for eternity, the pomegranate for fertility and abundance. Arabesques, spirals, and calligraphic scripts frequently appear, echoing the Persian notion of Bagh-e-Eram (Garden of Eden). In Islamic tradition, the use of figural representation is often avoided, so flora, geometry, and poetic inscriptions carry the weight of storytelling. Many designs are symmetrical, embodying the Persian pursuit of balance and divine order.

| Aspects | Kashida Embroidery | Persian Embroidery |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Base Fabrics | Wool, Cotton, Silk, Pashmina | Silk, Linen, Cotton |
| Thread Used | Wool, Silk (Natural dyes) | Gold, Silver, Silk, Cotton |
| Stitching Style | Chain Stitch, Satin Stitch, Stem stitch slanted Darning | Satin stitch, Chain stitch, couching, Zardozi |
| Color Palette | Earthy tones: Green, Blue, Ochre, Rust | Jewel tones: Ruby, Emerald, Lapis, Gold |
| Surface Coverage | Minimal; emphasizes negative space | Dense; near-complete coverage with layered textures |
| Technique & Approach | Employs single-stitch techniques guided by traced outlines, allowing spontaneity in design expression | Precision-oriented; structured and often geometric, sometimes integrated with techniques like Zardozi (gold thread embroidery) |

Table 1 Comparative Study

5. Gender, Artisanship, and Cultural Role

Embroidery in both regions historically carried gendered dimensions. In Kashmir, Kashida was largely practiced by men, especially in professional workshops (karkhanas), though women have increasingly adopted the craft in modern contexts. Persian embroidery was often a domestic skill taught among women, used in household textiles, ceremonial cloths, and bridal trousseaux.

Today, both embroidery styles serve as a source of livelihood and cultural identity for women. Organizations and cooperatives have enabled women artisans, especially in rural areas, to earn independently, thus intertwining embroidery with empowerment.

6. Contemporary Relevance and Global Presence

Kashida has found a place in contemporary fashion through designers who reinterpret traditional motifs in modern silhouettes. Pashmina shawls with Kashida work are global symbols of luxury. However, political instability in Kashmir poses challenges to artisan livelihoods and craft continuity.

Persian embroidery, while at risk of being overshadowed by mechanized production, is still showcased in luxury textiles, museum exhibits, and boutique fashion. In both countries, digital platforms and cultural tourism have revitalized interest among younger generations.

7. Comparative Reflection

Kashida and Persian embroidery, though historically connected, diverge in execution and philosophy. Kashida embodies the fluidity of nature and is reflective of a region shaped by natural beauty and political fragility. Persian embroidery is more structured and ornate, reflecting a civilization that prized geometry, spirituality, and courtly grandeur. Yet both traditions, at their core, express the same human need—to preserve, to beautify, and to remember.

8. Conclusion

Embroidery is not merely a craft—it is a cultural pulse. The threads of Kashida and Persian embroidery bind us to ancient narratives, spiritual symbols, and human resilience. As globalization reshapes cultural expressions, it becomes imperative to protect these heritage crafts not just as aesthetic commodities but as living traditions. Empowering artisans, investing in craft education, and integrating traditional embroidery into sustainable fashion can ensure that these embroidered legacies continue to inspire and thrive.

10. Acknowledgements - IRB permission number / if there is none, please declare this in the Acknowledgement

This study did not require institutional Review Board (IRB) or ethics committee approval as it did not involve human participant's sensitive personal data or clinical procedures. The author gratefully acknowledges the publicly available cultural resources and literature that informed the analysis.

11. Reference

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12. Declaration

*Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable. The study did not involve any human participants or animal subjects and therefore did not require ethical approval

*Consent for publication

Not applicable.

*Availability of data and material

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study. All the source referenced are publicly available and cited appropriately within the manuscript.

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*Authors' contributions

The author conceived the study conducted the research, analyzed the findings and wrote the manuscript

