

WOVEN LEGACIES: THE SHAWL AND CARPET INDUSTRY OF KASHMIR IN TRANSITION, PRE-AND POST-PARTITION

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INTRODUCTION:

The shawl and carpet industries of Kashmir stand as enduring symbols of rich cultural heritage and artisanal excellence of Kashmir. Rooted in centuries old traditions and shaped by the influences of Central Asia, Persia, and the Indian subcontinent, these industries have played a pivotal role in defining Kashmir's socio-economic identity. Renowned globally for their exquisite craftsmanship, Kashmiri shawls and carpets once thrived as key exports, finding markets across Europe, Central Asia, and beyond. Tracing their trajectory from their zenith during the pre-colonial period to the challenges they faced in the aftermath of colonial exploitation, global competition, and political transitions, including the Partition of India in 1947, this article seeks to uncover the factors that influenced the rise, decline, and partial revival of the shawl and carpet industries by analyzing historical records and economic data.

SHAWL INDUSTRY

The Shawl industry of Kashmir stands as an iconic and historically significant facet of the region's rich cultural heritage and thriving economy. Renowned for their exquisite craftsmanship and exceptional quality, Kashmiri shawls have been captivating people worldwide for centuries. This enduring legacy of textile artistry dates back to a pivotal period in Kashmir's history. The art of shawl weaving flourished during the rule of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, who reigned from 1423 to 1474. During his reign, this visionary leader implemented a series of systematic measures to organize and elevate the shawl industry to unprecedented heights. His contributions to the industry were multifaceted. One of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin's key initiatives involved substantial improvements to traditional looms, thereby enhancing the efficiency and precision of the weaving process. However, his visionary approach extended far beyond local enhancements. It is documented that he went a step further and invited experts from Turkistan to Kashmir. These experts were given not only a warm welcome but also provided with the necessary facilities. Their primary mission was to impart their invaluable knowledge and expertise to the people of Kashmir. These experts

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played a pivotal role in training the local artisans, transferring the intricate art of weaving and the distinctive designs that were prevalent in Persia at that time (Ahad, 1987, p.10).

The influence of Central Asian experts in Kashmir's weaving industry was multifaceted. These experts, known for their mastery in textile arts, brought with them a wealth of knowledge, techniques, and designs that were prevalent in Central Asia. Furthermore, Kashmir's geographical proximity to Central Asia and its strategic position along the historic Silk Route made it an important transit point for trade between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. The Silk Route, a network of ancient trade routes, facilitated the exchange of goods, culture, and ideas between regions. Kashmir's position along this route allowed for the easy flow of raw materials, ideas, and finished textiles, further enriching the local weaving tradition. (Warikoo, 1989, p.55).

Shawl industry continued to flourish During the Mughal, Afghan and the Sikh rule in Kashmir. It is indeed remarkable that during the first quarter of the 19th century, the shawl industry in Kashmir was a thriving economic force, providing gainful employment to a substantial workforce of one hundred and twenty thousand individuals. (Moorcraft and Trebeck, 1841, p.194). This significant number of people engaged in the shawl industry underscores the industry's central role in the region's economy and society during that period. The demand for Kashmiri shawls in the international markets, was a driving force behind this substantial workforce. The shawls' reputation for exceptional craftsmanship, exquisite designs, and superior quality made them highly sought-after commodities, attracting a global clientele. They were in high demand and found their way into the hands of merchants and buyers from a diverse array of regions. Among the notable destinations for Kashmiri shawls were Turkey, Armenia, Persia (modern-day Iran), Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Chinese Turkestan (present-day Xinjiang). These regions were not only prominent buyers of Kashmiri shawls but also played a crucial role in the trade and distribution of these exquisite textiles. Additionally, the popularity of Kashmiri shawls extended to the Indian subcontinent, where they were treasured as luxury items by the local aristocracy and elite. European markets were also captivated by the allure of Kashmiri shawls, and these textiles were sought after by the fashionable elite and royalty in Europe (Carpiniski, 1963, p.120).

Shawls continued to be a good source of income during the initial years of the Dogra rule. A large quantity was exported from Kashmir worth lakhs of rupees. During a specific period, Kashmir's shawl industry was a significant contributor to its exports, with shawls worth Rs. 31 lakhs being exported annually. The destination of these exports was primarily Europe and the eastern markets. This trade had interesting nuances, with a major portion of the shawls making their way to Europe. In the European market, a substantial 80 percent

of the exported shawls went to France, underscoring the popularity of Kashmiri shawls in the fashion-conscious French market. Another 10 percent found their way to the United States, while 5 percent reached Italy. Smaller portions, such as 2 percent, were sent to Russia, and 1 percent each was destined for Germany and Great Britain. What's particularly noteworthy is the manner in which these shawls were distributed in the European market. Around two-thirds of the shawls were purchased directly in Kashmir by French agents. These agents played a pivotal role in selecting and exporting the finest Kashmiri shawls to France, where they were highly valued for their quality and craftsmanship. The remaining portion of the shawls was exported via native bankers and auctioned in London. Interestingly, most of the buyers in these London auctions were also French, underscoring the strong French demand for Kashmiri shawls (Bates, 1873, p.59)

During its zenith between the years 1846 and 1872, the Kashmiri shawl industry played a pivotal role in providing livelihoods to a substantial workforce. It employed approximately 30,000 to 40,000 weavers, underscoring the industry's significant contribution to the regional economy and the social fabric of Kashmir during that era (Dhar, 1999, p.48). The period around 1860 marked a significant turning point for the Kashmiri shawl industry. The quality of the shawls began to decline, which had far-reaching consequences for the industry. Several factors contributed to this decline, and it was during this time that the Kashmiri shawls faced substantial challenges. One crucial factor in the decline of Kashmiri shawls was their inability to compete with the superior quality of shawls produced in other regions, notably Lyons in France and Paisley in Scotland. These competing products offered unique designs and craftsmanship that surpassed the Kashmiri shawls, making them more attractive to consumers.

The Franco-Prussian War of 1872 played a pivotal role in further diminishing the Kashmiri shawl industry. This conflict disrupted trade and cut off the remaining French imports of Kashmiri shawls. The loss of the French market, a significant consumer of these textiles, had a severe impact on the industry's fortunes. (Carpiniski, 1963, p.126). The aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War had significant repercussions on the Kashmiri shawl industry, particularly in its key market, France. This conflict damaged the French market for Kashmiri goods, disrupting the trade of these exquisite textiles. Simultaneously, the industry had to contend with the influx of imitations from various sources, which had a twofold impact on the Kashmiri shawls. First, the influx of imitations posed a significant challenge to the status and desirability of Kashmir shawls. These imitations, often of lower quality and craftsmanship, competed directly with the genuine Kashmiri products. As a result, the authentic Kashmiri shawls began to lose their exclusive appeal and allure in the market. Second, these imitations, which were often produced more affordably, led to a

pricing issue for genuine Kashmiri shawls. As the market was flooded with cheaper alternatives, the authentic Kashmiri shawls found it increasingly difficult to compete on price, particularly in England and Western Europe. The situation in Kashmir was exacerbated by the famine that struck the region between 1877 and 1879, pushing many shawl-makers to the brink of starvation. In search of better prospects and livelihoods, a significant number of artisans and workers from the shawl industry chose to emigrate to the neighboring region of Punjab (Suzanne Daly, 2002, p.251).

By the end of the 19th century, the once-thriving Kashmiri shawl industry had undergone a significant transformation. The export of shawls had dwindled to a mere fraction of its former glory. In 1893-94, the total export of shawls amounted to a modest Rs. 22,850, representing a stark contrast to the industry's historical prominence and global reach (Lawrence, 1891, p. 375). There were various reasons responsible for this decline apart from the French defeat in the war like the vicious taxation on part of the State, competition with other markets and cheap mill made manufactures, change in fashion etc (Ganju, 1945, p.53). The production of imitations of Kashmiri shawls, particularly in Paisley, marked a critical turning point in the history of the Kashmiri shawl industry. For Kashmir, this development represented a substantial challenge, and as noted by Bamzai (2007, p. 240), it was considered the "last blow" to the shawl industry.

With the beginning of the 20th century, the shawl industry started to show some signs of revival probably due to the Bengal partition movement. There was great demand of raffle shawls and coarse woollens in India particularly in Northern parts. This period of revival proved to be short and the second opportunity came during the First World War (1914-1918). Though production at both times increased but there was no proper planning and as a result, with war coming to an end, exports started to decrease and imports flooded Kashmir market again (Ganju, 1945, pp.53-71). Economic challenges, posed by the onset of an economic depression further exacerbated the industry's troubles, affecting the quality of shawl production (Census of India, 1931, Vol. XXIV, p. 216). This period saw no remarkable developments in the shawl industry, which continued to deteriorate as observed by contemporaries like Ernest F. Neve (1931) and P.S. Nazarof (1935). Thus the "shawl industry, the goose that had laid golden eggs for Kashmir since Zain-ul-Abidin's time, and survived decades of bullying and ill-treatment" died (Keenan, 201). This ceasing, disappearing and dying was all about the Kani shawls, which were made with wooden needles. They were replaced by the embroidered Amlikar type. Although this switchover started in the mid-19th century, but it could not revive for many decades after that. (Kumar, 2022). The shawl industry then shifted to weaving of plain pashmina for Amlikar shawls, Dussa (pashmina blanket) and shahtosh or ring shawl (Bamzai, 2007, p. 250)

The partition was a great setback to the handicraft industry of Kashmir and we see there was considerable decline in the number of factories. The annual production of cottage crafts and art industries declined from 1.63 crores in 1947 to 23.10 lakhs in 1950 (Kapoor, 1967, p. 546) Although shawl industry had almost died decades before but after the partition, measures were taken by the government for the revival of this industry and gradually the production of shawls began to increase. One interesting thing that is to be noted is that now the production was largely confined to Pashmina and Rafal types of shawls (Dhar, 1999, p.140). Both types were accounting for nearly 95% of the embroidery work (Techno-Economic Survey, 1969, p. 80) The production of such shawls increased year after year which is depicted in the following table;

Table 1: Production and Employment in Shawl Industry (1974-1989)

Year	Value of Production (in crores of Rs.)	No. of Persons employed (in lakhs)
1974-75	6.53	0.27
1979-80	8.90	0.35
1983-84	13.15	0.42
1988-89	19.40	0.48

Source: Digest of Statistics, J&K Govt., 1991-92, 141

The data reveals a consistent increase in the value of shawl production over the years, indicating the industry's growth. Additionally, the number of people employed in the industry also increased gradually during this period. This suggests that the shawl industry in Kashmir expanded both in terms of production and employment opportunities, signifying its economic importance and potential for development during the specified years.

CARPET INDUSTRY

Kashmir had historical contacts with Persia and ancient trade routes passed through it. The influence of Persia on the arts and crafts of Kashmir has always been strong. The carpet industry in Kashmir has its origin from Persia with the result that carpets produced in Kashmir are mostly of the Persian type. Many Historians and scholars have credited Sultan Zain ul Abidin for the introduction of carpets in the valley (Sufi, 1979, p. 236) The industry flourished during this period but continued with sluggish growth towards the beginning of the Sikh rule. In this context R. K. Bhan (1938, p. 1) writes that the carpet industry flourished for some time but disappeared at one time and not a single artisan was left behind. The industry appeared again during the Afghans and continued to exist in spite of many political changes. New type of beautiful textures and superb designs were incorporated by the craftsmen during the Sikh period. Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1819-42) never had the opportunity to witness the breathtaking beauty of the Kashmir Valley in person. However,

when a magnificent carpet, masterfully crafted to depict the valley's natural splendor, was presented to him, it left such a profound impression on him that he wrapped himself in the carpet and joyfully declared that his longing to see Kashmir had been fulfilled (Bamzai, 1973, p. 53).

With the beginning of the Dogra rule, the production was launched on a commercial scale for export markets and exhibitions. A remarkable carpet crafted in Kashmir, featuring an intricate design with 700 knots per square inch and a silk warp made for Maharaja Gulab Singh, was proudly showcased at the Great London Exhibition of 1851. (Ganju, 1945, p. 132). The industry got a fresh impetus when Europeans entered into the field of manufacture (Bhan, 1938, p. 1). They invested and paid better wages and helped in creating a vast market for carpets in India and outside India as well. The carpet industry gave employment to a considerable number of the shawl-weavers, is attested by the city census of 1891 which states that there were 5,148 shawl weavers, but of these some 800 to 900 were employed in the manufacture of carpets (Lawrence, 1891, p. 375).

The industry flourished during the first quarter of the 20th century and during this period Kashmir used to produce high class carpets, which were mainly exported to American markets. But with wall street collapse of 1929, crisis appeared in the carpet industry of Kashmir as well. It is evident by the following table as well;

Table 2: No. of Persons Employed in Carpet Industry (1929-1934)

Year	No. of Persons Employed
1929	6690
1930	1200
1932	1800
1934	1872

Source: M. Ganju, Textile Industries in Kashmir, 132

The data illustrates the employment trends in Kashmir's carpet industry from 1929 to 1934, reflecting significant economic fluctuations during this period. The most striking observation is the sharp decline in employment from 6,690 workers in 1929 to just 1,200 workers in 1930, representing a dramatic drop of approximately 82%. This decline coincides with the onset of the Great Depression (1929-1939), a global economic crisis that severely disrupted international trade and demand for luxury goods like carpets. The heavy reliance of the Kashmiri carpet industry on foreign markets made it particularly vulnerable to such economic downturns.

After the initial shock, employment in the carpet industry began to recover slowly, rising to 1,800 workers in 1932 and further to 1,872 workers in 1934. This gradual recovery,

however, did not restore employment levels to their pre-Depression heights. The slow pace of recovery highlights the persistent challenges faced by the industry, including reduced international demand, competition from machine-made carpets, and possibly the lack of sufficient government intervention or local market diversification during this time.

The manufacturers felt the period from 1919-1930 as a boom period, from 1930-35 as the period of depression and from 1935-37 as period of slow recovery (Bhan, 1938, p. 10)

The following table also will give us an idea about the effects of the depression on the carpet industry in terms number of looms, production and total value during 1930-36;

Table 3: Impact of the Great Depression on the Kashmir Carpet Industry (1930-1936): Looms, Production, and Total Value

Year	No. of Looms	Production (Sq. ft)	Total Value (Crores)
1930	825	894000	2640000
1931	100	120000	300000
1932	100	120000	300000
1933	250	300000	750000
1934	250	300000	750000
1935	300	360000	1080000
1936	315	378000	1134000

Source: R. K. Bhan, Report on the Economic Survey of Carpet Industry in Kashmir, 23

The data depicts that the initial years of the Depression (1930-1932) had a severe impact, with both looms and production dropping dramatically. Recovery began in 1933, with a gradual increase in looms, production, and total value, although the industry didn't return to its 1930 levels. The industry showed signs of stabilization by 1936, though still operating at lower capacity compared to pre-Depression figures. Timely action was taken by the State government as well by granting subsidy on the export of carpets from 1932 onwards. The quantity of carpet exports per year from 1932-33 to 1937-38 was 46,785, 1,53,106, 1,90,827, 2,09,042, 68,544 and 2,30,413 sq. ft. respectively (Ganju, 1945, p. 132-33). In 1939-40, with the outbreak of hostilities in the Europe, the carpet industry suffered a setback as the demand for carpets showed signs of decline. With the result the number of persons employed in the industry decreases from an average of 2000 to about 500 (AAR, J&K Govt., 1939-40, p. 6). The situation started to turn ugly afterwards and we see the downward trend of this industry started largely because of the competition from within India as outside India as well (Ganju, 1945, p.140). Furthermore, owing to the shipping difficulties the carpet industry did not prosper, although it continued to produce goods (AR,

J&K Govt., 1943-44, p. 47). Besides the British carpet manufacturers settled in the valley were forced by the circumstances to dispose off their factories and leave Kashmir. In 1945, Mr. K. C. Hadow sold his factory to Messer's "The Kashmir Fine Art Dealers Ltd.", a firm based in Calcutta. Thus, Kashmir lost a pioneer in the field of carpet manufacturing. Messer's Mitchell and Co. was sold to an Amritsar based firm M/s East India company.

With the partition, there was great economic stress all over India as well as in the state. The carpet industry also received a great setback which is evident from the production and the number of workers employed in the factories. In 1948, the carpet industry employed about 1000 workers (AR, J&K Govt., 1948-49, pp. 89-90). There was changeover from foreign masters to local entrepreneurs, who lacked innovative techniques and management skills (Dhar, 1999, 145). Pearce Gervis, while on his visit to Kashmir, made a visit to a carpet workshop, where he was told;

Habiba, son of Shah Mohammad (owner of the workshop) told me, the majority of carpet weavers are again resting, but he is very sure that if only he could get to England or America, he could recreate the demand for lovely carpets made in his country (Gervis, 1954, pp. 144-45).

In 1950-51, besides some centralized factories, the industry was also being carried on in the homes of workers on the cottage basis (AR, J&K Govt., 1950-51). With the passage of time, steps were taken by the Government towards the industrial development of the state and in this regard, twenty carpet looms were installed at Rainawari Srinagar in 1954-55 (AR, J&K Govt., 1954-55) It was followed by transferring of Government Carpet Factory Srinagar to the control of Kashmir Arts Emporium in 1956 which produced carpets worth Rs. 40000 (Dhar, 1999, 146) With the beginning of the planning system the value of carpet exports increased plan after plan. It increased from 1.73 crores at the end of fourth five-year plan (1973-74) to 50.20 crores in 1988-89 (Digest of Statistics, J&K Govt., 1991-92, p. 142). The carpet production and employment generated through it is given in the following table;

Table 4: Carpet Production and Employment (1974-1991)

Year	Production in Crores	Employment in Lakhs
1974-75	1.38	0.04
1976-77	2.77	0.06
1980-81	19.04	0.47
1984-85	32.48	0.61
1990-91	35.00	0.62

Source: Directorate of Handicrafts, Govt. of J&K

In 1974-75, the carpet production was 1.38 crores, providing employment to 0.04 lakh (4,000) individuals. Over the next two years, there was a significant increase in carpet production. In 1976-77, production rose to 2.77 crores, employing 0.06 lakh (6,000) people. The most substantial growth in both production and employment occurred between 1980-81 and 1984-85. Production surged from 19.04 crores to 32.48 crores, and employment increased from 0.47 lakh (47,000) to 0.61 lakh (61,000). Although the production continued to grow, the employment figures remained relatively stable between 1984-85 and 1990-91. Production reached 35.00 crores, and employment was 0.62 lakh (62,000). These numbers indicate the significant expansion of the carpet industry in Kashmir, particularly during the early 1980s. The industry not only contributed to the economy but also provided a source of livelihood for a substantial workforce during this period.

CONCLUSION

The shawl industry, born from the fusion of local tradition and the influences of Central Asian experts, became an emblem of Kashmir's cultural identity and global reach. Its journey through the 19th century, marked by triumphs and tribulations, captures the industry's resilience and adaptability. However, it also reveals the profound impact of external factors, from international conflicts to changing consumer tastes, that led to its eventual decline. The decline of the Kashmiri shawl industry is a poignant testament to the ebb and flow of economic forces and consumer preferences in the world of fashion. From its pinnacle as a global luxury, it transitioned to becoming a tradition and memory of the past, with imitations and evolving market dynamics further shaping its destiny.

On the other hand, the carpet industry experienced a remarkable surge in the late 20th century, contributing significantly to both production and employment. The data presented shows a period of substantial growth, signifying the industry's economic importance in the region.

The history of Kashmir's shawl and carpet industry serves as a microcosm of the complex interplay between tradition, artistry, economics, and global influences. It reflects the resilience of the artisans who created these masterpieces and their ability to adapt in the face of change. While the shawl industry might have evolved into a memory, the enduring legacy of these textiles continues to be a source of cultural pride and a reminder of the region's artisanal excellence. Similarly, the carpet industry stands as a beacon of hope, demonstrating the potential for growth and employment in a region steeped in artistic heritage.

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