



UNIT - 4

Hand-Woven Textiles

Objectives

- To introduce the technique of handloom weaving in India.
- To create awareness about the different handlooms used for weaving.
- To initiate identification of regional variations practiced by various weaving communities.
- To understand the origin of technique and design with reference to colours, motifs, layouts of different hand-woven textiles.
- To learn about the evolution of hand-woven textiles over a period of time.

Learning Outcomes

After completing the unit, the students shall be able to –

- Appreciate the finer nuances of handloom weaving.
- Classify the regional weaves of India.
- Identify the different handlooms used in India.
- Identify a specific hand-woven textile of India on the basis of technique, raw material, colours, motifs and layout.
- Identify the influencing factors for development and evolution of a specific hand-woven textile.

Unit overview

This unit will introduce the technique of handloom weaving in India. In this chapter the hand-woven textile are classified on the basis of region they are produced and variation that are brought in them. The designs are discussed with reference to colour, motif & layout.



Chapter 5: Hand-woven Textiles

The richness and diversity of India's woven textiles are talked about for the last two thousand years in the global market. Foreigners, local travelers and writers have described the textures, quality and the designs of Indian fabrics in great detail.

Various kinds of looms are used in different regions in India. Apart from simple pit looms, frame looms and complex 'jala' looms, back-strap looms are also popular in North Eastern states. Supplementary weft or warp or sometimes both of these are used to create interesting patterns to ornament the fabric.

Amongst the earliest woolen textiles are the 'Kani' shawls of Kashmir, woven with Pashmina goat fleece. Their sophisticated and sensitive designs were in high demand. These shawls were much sought after in Europe and by Indian royalty for its intricate twill tapestry weave.

Varanasi had an ancient tradition of weaving fine cotton fabrics, but is now world famous for the rich silks known as 'Kinkhab' and 'Tancoi'. 'Kinkhab' was a heavy gold or silver brocaded fabric, often used for robes or furnishing. The famous lightweight patterned fabrics 'Jamdani' was woven in Dhaka in Bengal, now in Bangladesh. These fabrics were so delicate and fine that they would be invisible on wet grass. Since 19th century, Varanasi weavers are also catering to local Tibetan market by providing satin woven 'gyasar' for the Buddhist monasteries. The silk and 'zari' work brocade of lighter material were known as 'pothans' or 'bafta'. The 'amroo' and 'himroo' were the brocades without any metal 'zari' work.

Gujarat was considered the main centre for silk and brocade weaving in India. Surat, Jamnagar and Ahmedabad were the other important weaving centres for brocades.

In the Deccan, the 'Paithani' weavers in Maharashtra used interlock tapestry technique to pattern the elaborate ornamentation. Down south, Arni and Dharmavaram produced rich coloured silk saris. Heavy Kanjeevaram saris are still an integral part of every Indian girl's trousseau. They are made in silk and have motifs inspired by the temple architecture and sculptures of the region.

Murshidabad in Bengal acquired fame for its unique 'Baluchari' saris. These saris were elaborately brocaded with floss silk in strikingly pictorial 'pallu'. These panels depicted courtly activities of Bengal Nawabs and landlords.

In most parts of India, weaving is done by men whereas in north eastern states only women weavers are seen doing intricate designs. The girls weave 'gamocha', a shoulder cloth, to give as a gift to elders in Assam. These are white in colour with red extra weft weave which makes stylized forms of birds, animals and geometric motifs. The traditional golden yellow Muga silk 'Mekhala Chaddor' is woven at Sualkuchi, Raha and Palasbiri. Tribal women in other north eastern states such as Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh weave beautiful fabrics on back-strap loom for the use of their family members.

Cotton weaving was done in almost all regions in India. Large number of towns and villages produced plain, checked and figured muslin. The most important centres were Dhaka in Bengal,



Kota in Rajasthan, Chanderi and Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh, Venkatagiri and Madurai in South India.

The fabrics were used as *dhotis*, saris, *dupattas*, *pagaris*, *lungis*, *chadars* and shirtings, as well as for furnishings such as quilts, bedspreads, rugs, *khes* and upholstery.

In addition to handlooms, the mill and the power loom sector has also contributed to the booming textile industry. But the tradition of handloom cloth manufacturing in India is still flourishing and is still very much appreciated by the younger generation and the visitors to the subcontinent.

- Categorisation of weaving styles on the basis of end product:

- a) Saris
 - (i) Banaras Brocades
 - (ii) Baluchari, Jamdani
 - (iii) Paithani
 - (iv) Kanjeevaram
 - (v) Chanderi, Maheshwari
- b) Shawls
 - (i) Kashmir shawl
 - (ii) Kullu & Kinnaur
 - (iii) Wraps of North-east
- c) Floor coverings
 - (i) Carpets
 - (ii) Durries & Rugs

5.1 Saris

5.1.1 Banaras Brocades

Region: Banarasi brocade saris are from Varanasi/Banaras, a small town in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The holy city of Banaras, on the banks of river Ganga, is considered to be the oldest city in the world. The brocaded fabrics from Banaras are considered to be one of the finest saris in India and are known for their gold and silver brocade or 'zari'. These saris are made of finely woven silk, decorated with intricate design.

Technique: The designs are produced by warp and weft threads of different colours and materials, suitably woven. Extra warp/weft or both are woven into the fabric. Pattern is woven with or without attachments like jacquard or dobby attachment or by jala weaving. It can be silk on silk, cotton on cotton, silk on cotton, zari on silk. The brocade designs are made with extra yarns other than the ground threads. These extra or supplementary yarns are usually inserted in weft wise direction in



Banaras brocades. When these extra yarns are picked from selvedge to the other end, the yarns appear on the face of the fabric in the design portion and as floats on the back of the fabric in the remaining portion.

A very special technique often seen in Banaras is the 'Minakari'. In this technique a motif is woven with an additional colour which stands out and resembles the enamelling in jewellery. The additional coloured yarns are slightly untwisted and hence appear raised.

Motifs: The most commonly used motifs are:

- Chrysanthemum *buta*
- *Keri* (paisley) *buta* (Pic. 5.1)
- *Ganga jamuni* style (half gold and half silver *zari*)
- *Ari jhari* (diagonal stripes)
- *Latifa buta*

The designs are extremely fine and delicate. They have a strong Mughal influence. Motifs like intertwining floral and foliage (*Jaal*), paisley in a creeper (*Kalka bel*) and hunting scene (*shikargah* pattern) are often seen.

End Use: These textiles were popular items of export to European countries. Traditionally, banarasi brocades were used during Mughal period as fabrics for royal coats, *achkans* and *jamans*. Courts and palaces were adorned with brocade curtains, fabric fans, bolsters and foot stools, upholstered with brocades. Brocade saris, *dupattas* and dress fabric were worn by women on special occasions, mainly on weddings and festivities.



Pic. 5.1: Paisely motifs in Banaras Brocade



Contemporary Scenario

In recent times, Banarasi brocades are being widely used to make dresses/*kurtis* for women, bags and other accessories. Lately home furnishings in brocades are also made to give a look of grandeur to the room. Even now, it's a must to have a Brocade sari in trousseau for every Indian bride.

5.1.2 Baluchari Saris

Region: Baluchari saris are beautiful ornate saris mainly produced in Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Baluchari sari is distinctly different from other saris of India, as it commemorates the Nawab and his wife by depicting them on the *pallu* of the sari.

Technique: Making of the motifs for *pallu* and other part of Baluchari sari is an intricate process. Earlier, Baluchari saris were made on *jala* looms which were gradually replaced by the modern jacquard technique. Traditionally the motifs were woven on handlooms, using softly twisted extra weft yarns which used to give a plump, embroidered effect. *Zari* is not used for extra weft ornamentation. Now a days, jacquard attachment is used for weaving patterns on the sari. The design is drawn on a graph paper; it is coloured and punched on the jacquard cards. After punching, these cards are put in order and fixed in the jacquard machine on top of the loom.

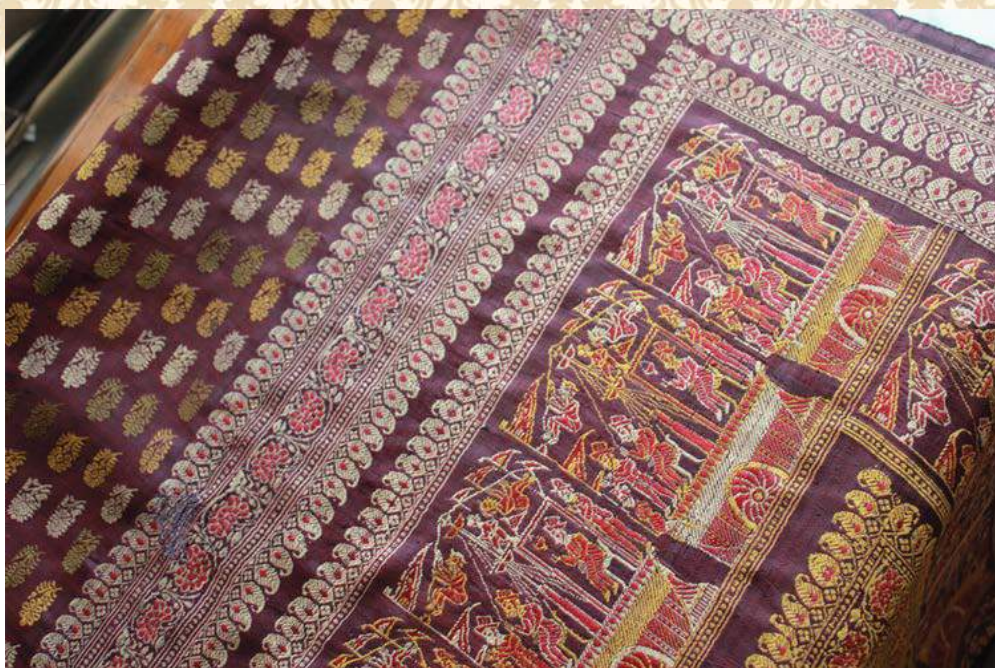
Motifs: The *pallu* of the Baluchari sari is special as it is divided into niches bordering a square or rectangular space in the center. In each of the niches, a human figure is depicted, normally a king smoking a *hookah* or a queen with a fan or smelling a flower. A row of three, five or seven ornate paisley (*kalkas*) are seen in the centre of the *pallu*, around which niches with human figures are woven (Pic. 5.2 & 5.3).

The Baluchari saris are often reckoned with the patterning of sun, moon, stars, mythical scenes and motifs of natural objects. The field of the saris are embellished with small butis. Colours like maroon, blue, red and dull dark terracotta were used as the base colour. Ornamentation of *butidar* Baluchari saris is done with extra weft motifs in off-white, white, yellow and dull orange coloured yarn.

These saris were mostly worn by women from upper class and *zamindar* households in Bengal during festive occasions and weddings.

In recent times, scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata are depicted on Baluchari saris as motifs. Colours have become brighter and polychromatic. *Zari* yarns are also used for ornamentation.





Pic. 5.2: Detail of Baluchari Sari



Pic. 5.3: Detail of part of Baluchari Sari Pallu



5.1.3 Jamdani Saris

Region: The Jamdani saris are from West Bengal. These are sheer, delicate saris woven in Phulia, Nadia and Shantipur villages. These are made in combination of cotton with cotton, cotton with silk and silk with silk.

Technique: The technique of interlocking the extra weft yarns for creating motifs in the fabric is used in Jamdani saris. These are woven on traditional handlooms.

Motifs: Floral geometric creepers, paisleys and leaves are the most common motifs in the Jamdani saris (Pic. 5.4).



Pic. 5.4: Jamdani sari

5.1.4 Paithani Saris

Region: Paithani saris are woven in Paithan and Yevla villages of Aurangabad in Maharashtra. Paithani saris are heavy silk saris which are preferred for wedding trousseau and festive wear.

Technique: The intricate motifs are woven by interlock twill tapestry weaving technique on traditional handlooms.



Motifs: Bright jewel tones such as emerald green, ruby red and yellow coloured silk yarns were used, however midnight blue coloured saris were most preferred. The interlocking technique created geometric angular forms out of patterns which were floral, paisleys, parrots, peacocks and lotus flowers. The *pallu* used to have a broad band of zari. At present the *pallu* band is ornamented with lotuses and peacocks woven in very bright colours. Another motif seen on Paithani saris is the bird (*munia*) motif (Pic. 5.5).

Paithani is coveted in India as a precious heirloom passing on from generation to generation. Exquisite silk from Paithani was exported to many countries and was traded in return for gold and precious stones.



Pic. 5.5: Paithani sari

5.1.5 Kanjeevaram Saris

Region: Kanjeevaram saris hail from the town of Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. It is considered to be one of the most expensive saris in the world and thus used for all special occasions.

Technique: The sari is woven in pure mulberry silk and gold zari on hand operated pit-looms. The colours most commonly used are mustard, deep green, maroon, aubergine, etc.



Motifs: The motif imagery is drawn from the nature and forms of temple architecture. Some examples are peacock, parrot, rosary beads, bird's eye, *kalash*, mythical creatures, temple designs, scenes from Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagwad Gita etc. (Pic. 5.6)



Pic. 5.6: Close view of a Kanjeevaram sari

5.1.6 Chanderi Saris

Region: Chanderi, near Gwalior, in Madhya Pradesh is renowned for its woven saris appropriate for summer wear. The craft is practised by muslim Ansari weavers.

Technique: The sari is woven in a blend of cotton and degummed silk. It is diaphanous and is woven in pastel colours with small buties and a narrow gold border. The pallu generally has fine lines in zari yarn. The motifs are very simple. Some examples are gold coin (*asharfi*), mango, brick (*eent*) and rosary beads (*rudraksha*) in the form of small *buties* (Pic. 5.7).

5.1.7 Maheshwari Saris

Region: Maheshwar is a small town near Indore, Madhya Pradesh famous for delicate summer wear woven saris.

Technique: The sari is woven with cotton weft and silk warp which is dyed on loom. It can be plain, tone on tone with a striped or checked border. It has three decorative bands/ borders of zari on the pallu. The colours are very varied but the most popular are the native *haldi-kumkum* combination (yellow and red) and *sabz* (vegetable) colours.

Motifs: The motifs are inspired from the architectural carvings of the Maheshwar's Ahilya Fort. The architectural carvings done on the fort walls such as *Kangura* (chevron) and *Chatai* (mat) have inspired the patterns for borders of Maheshwari Saris (Pic. 5.8).





Pic. 5.7: Chanderi sari



Pic. 5.8: Maheshwari sari



5.2 Shawls

5.2.1 Kashmir Shawls

Kashmir also known as the paradise on earth is famous across the world for not only its natural beauty but also for the handicrafts made by the artisans. Among the handicraft products, the kashmiri shawls have remained as one of the most cherished acquisitions in the world since centuries. The English word 'Shawl' is derived from Persian word 'Shal', meaning a woven woollen fabric, which is draped across the shoulder to provide protection against the cold.

Origin: The Kashmir shawl industry developed over 300 years, through four different periods of political rule in India, viz the Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs and Dogras. As recorded in 'Jaina Rajatarangini', king Zain-ul-Abidin(1420-1470 A.D) was considered as the founder and chief patron of Kashmir shawls. He taught this art of shawl making to the people of Kashmir by getting experts from Turkistan. Since then, this art is being transferred from generation to generation in order to preserve the rich heritage.

During the reign of great Mughal Emperor Akbar, miniature paintings and portraits show the emperor wearing robes and gowns made of Kani shawl, giving evidence towards his being the great admirer of the art. He encouraged the weavers to try new motifs, and also started the fashion of the twin shawl, where two identical shawls were sewn back to back, hiding the rough edges of tapestry weave, and giving the impression of a single, reversible shawl.

Region: Three districts of Kashmir valley, viz Srinagar, Ganderbal and Budgaon are famous for pashmina shawl making. Other areas include Kanihama, Batpora, and Manzhama villages on the outskirts of Srinagar where majority of people are associated with weaving of Kani Shawl.

Raw Material: Shawl is prepared from material like woollen fleece, Pashmina, Shatoosh and Angora wool etc. Pashmina considered as the king of fibres derived its name from Persian word, Pashm meaning soft gold. It is famous for its softness, warmth, fineness and desirable aesthetic value. It is obtained from the soft, downy underbelly fleece of a mountain goat called Capra hircus which the animal sheds on the high altitudes during summers. Fleece is sometimes imported from nomadic Khirgiz tribes and also from Yarkand and Khotan.

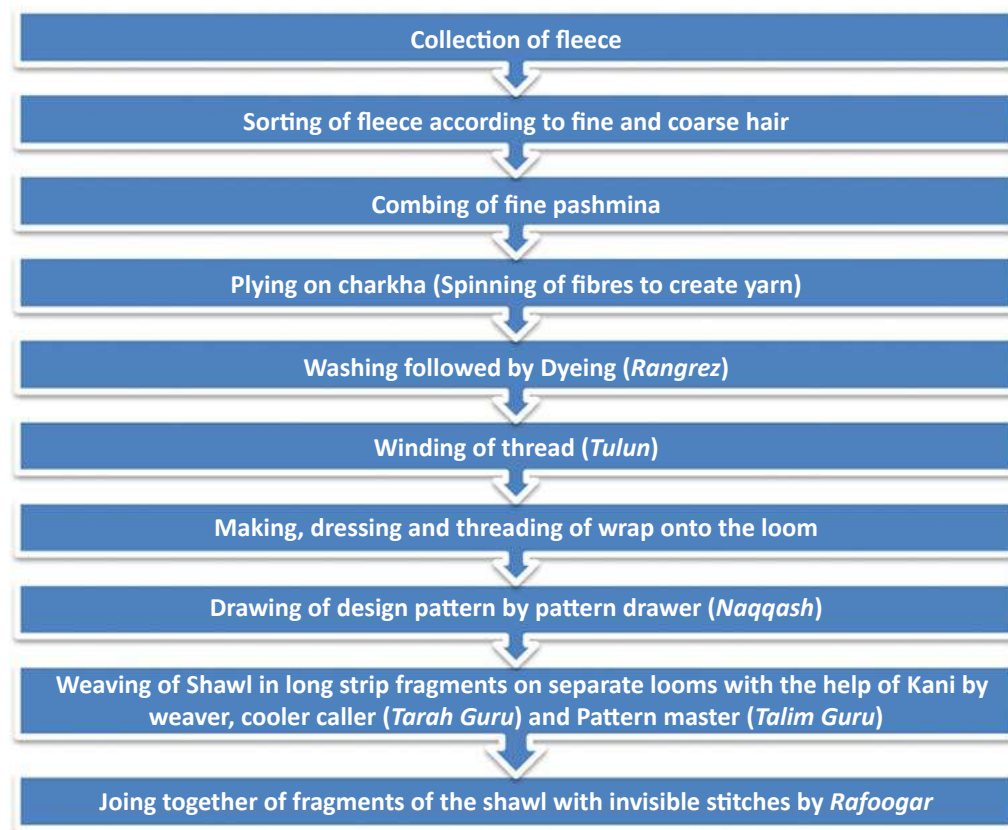
Technique: On the basis of production techniques, the Kashmir shawl can be categorized into two main types - the loom woven or Kani shawls and the needle embroidered or sozni shawls.

Wooden spools instead of shuttle known as Kani or 'Tujis' in kashmiri language meaning eyeless are used for weaving a Kani shawl on the loom. The Tujis interlock the respective color threads through disconnected weft technique as they complete each weft of the shawl with twill tapestry weave to create an intricate pattern. Weaving process is meticulously regulated by a coded pattern, known as the talim drawn by the naqqash for guidance of the weaver.



Artisans require tremendous skill, patience and unbelievable amount of concentration to create a marvellous piece of Kani shawl. Its a laborious and time consuming process with usage of nearly 1500 colours in a design, which makes it difficult for the artisan to weave beyond an inch a day. Two craftsmen working together on a loom takes one and a half to two years to complete an all-over Kani shawl. In some cases, the period of weaving even stretches to five long years, depending entirely on the intricacy of designs (Pic. 5.9).

Division of labour



Pic. 5.9: Process of Kashmir 'Kani' shawl weaving

The shawl is also widely known as *Jamawar* and *Shah Pasand* as the king and nobility preferred buying it and got *Jama* or gowns made out of it.

Layouts: The body of the shawl is termed as *matan* while the borders are termed as *hashiya*.

- **Doshala:** Shawls in pair sewn back to back, i.e. the under surfaces of the shawl were never seen.



- **Char bagan:** Four pieces of different colors are neatly joined together with invisible stitches. Generally the central field of the shawl is embellished with a medallion of flowers in embroidery.
- **Dorukha:** The pattern is woven and embroidered in such a manner that it appears same on both the sides of the shawl.
- **Chand dar:** Moon shawl has round large pattern woven or embroidered in the centre.

Motifs: The motifs are inspired from beauty of nature. Some examples are mango or *kairi*, almond or *badam*, chinar leaf, apple blossom, tulip, lily flower, cherries, plum; birds like parrot, wood pecker, magpie etc.

No wild animals are depicted but hunting scenes known as '*Shikargah*' are depicted in shawls for trade and commercial purposes.

Colors: Pashmina fleece colours range from beige, grey and brown to black. However, the fabric adapts itself beautifully to dyeing and colouring. Rich colours are most commonly seen on *kani* shawls like yellow (*zard*), white (*sufed*), black (*mushki*), blue (*ferozi*), purple (*uda*), crimson (*gulnar*) and scarlet (*kirmiz*).

End Use: The shawl or shoulder mantle has been in existence in India in a variety of forms since ancient times. It was worn and used as a warm protective garment against biting cold. Unrivalled for its light weight, in earlier times people folded these shawls into four folds and draped them. Now days they are generally worn as stoles without folds or are merely thrown over the shoulder.

Decline: As the Mughal kingdom began to collapse and Kashmir came under the Afghan rule, the shawl trade also began to focus increasingly on the west, while the Indian market went into decline.

During the regime of Afghan governor Haji Das Khan(1776-83), heavy taxes were imposed on the shawl weaving industry that forced the artisans out of their profession. The artisans and weavers were in miserable conditions and started shifting to nearby areas like Amritsar in Punjab, where time and again attempts were made to establish a successful shawl industry but all in vein. This gave rise to embroidered shawls known as *amlakar*, where the tax was paid just for plain woven shawl which was later embellished with embroidery by the artisans.

Contemporary Scenario: The world-famous Kashmiri '*Kani*' shawl has been given a 'Geographical Indicator' (GI) status, which will not only provide legal protection but also help in prevention of shawls made in other regions of the world from carrying the '*Kani*' shawl tag. The Kashmir Government has also sanctioned Rs 40.4 million to set up a laboratory to test the genuineness of a *Kani* shawl. The GI tag will also help the *Kani* shawl to regain its rightful place in domestic and global markets.

The Government has also allocated financial assistance to help the *kani* shawl weavers to purchase new looms or renovate and modernize their old handlooms.



5.2.2 Kullu & Kinnaur Shawls

Kullu and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh are also known for good quality woollen shawls. The traditional colours used for the base of the shawls are red, maroon, black, brown and off-white. Bright colours are inserted in extra weft on borders of the shawl. Geometric motifs inspired from nature are made into beautiful colourful borders (Pic. 5.10).



Pic. 5.10: Close view of a Kinnaur shawl

Kinnauri shawls are known for their labour intensive skilful weaving. These shawls are heavily embellished with motifs and are treasured by the women of Himachal Pradesh. These are draped by the women in two peculiar ways. Heavy silver jewellery is then worn along with it to give it a festive look.

5.2.3 Wraps of North-east

North Eastern India comprises of both tribal and non-tribal population. The seven North East Indian states are popularly known as seven sisters, comprising of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya.

Textile weaving is done by women in each of these states. There are more than 38 tribes in North East of India, and each of them have their own distinctive design, colour combination and a different design for special occasions. The design and colour, which varies not only between the tribes but also sometimes between clans of the same tribe and between different villages, records the wearer's position in society. Shawls and wraps were originally made of cotton and the use of wool came much later. The colors used were mainly black, dark blue, red and yellow.



The textile weaving is exclusively a female occupation in this part of the country. For domestic consumption a back strap portable loom is used by the female weavers (Pic. 5.11).



Pic. 5.11: Back strap loom

Fabrics from Assam include the hand-woven fabrics of cotton, muga, pat (mulberry silk) and eri (wild silk). Muga has a natural golden texture, it is mildly warm and particularly suited for winters. Textiles include bedspreads, furnishing material, *mekhala-chaddars*, *rihas* (traditional garments used by the women), *gamosas*, shawls and saris. The patterns generally involve animals, human figures, flowers, birds and diamonds. The designs in Assam are symbolic of the different tribes and ethnic groups of the region.

5.3 Floor Coverings

5.3.1 Carpets

A carpet is a textile floor covering which consists of an upper layer of 'pile' which is attached to a backing. The pile is either made from wool or a manmade fibre such as nylon or polyester and usually consists of twisted tufts which are often heat-treated to maintain their structure. Carpets can be from wall to wall or smaller in size such as area rugs.





Pic. 5.12: Close view of an Assamese Mekhala-Chaddar

The knotted pile carpet are said to have originated in the 3rd or 2nd millennium BC in West Asia, or the Armenian Highland. Carpet weaving in India can be traced to the beginning of the Mughal empire wherein under the patronage of the Mughals, Indian craftsmen adopted Persian techniques and designs. Akbar, a Mughal emperor, introduced the art of carpet weaving to India, during his reign. The Mughal emperors patronized Persian carpets for their royal courts and palaces. The carpets woven in India showed the classic Persian style of fine knotting. The Indian carpets are known for their designs with attention to detail and presentation of realistic attributes. In India, carpet industry uses wool, silk, acrylic and Jute.

Carpet Types

Woven Carpets

The carpets are made on looms similar to traditional handloom. The piles can either be cut pile or loop pile. Many coloured yarns are used in making of these carpets and this process of weaving produces intricate patterns. Woven carpets are produced in Kashmir, Mirzapur, Bhadohi, Jaipur and Agra in India.

Needle felt Carpets

These carpets are more technologically advanced as compared to woven carpets. Needle felts are produced by intermingling and felting individual fibers using barbed and forked needles and



hence forming an extremely durable carpet. These carpets are generally used in areas which are prone to friction due to high footfall.

Knotted Carpets

These carpets are made on upright or vertical looms. A knotted pile carpet is a supplementary weft cut-loop pile carpet where the structural weft threads alternate with a supplementary weft that rises at right angles to the surface of the weave. Knotting by hand is most prevalent in oriental carpets. Carpets produced in Kashmir are also hand knotted.

Hand Tufted Carpets

In such carpets there is a pile injected into a backing material, which is then bonded to a secondary backing made of a woven fabric to provide stability. This is the most common method of manufacturing of domestic carpets for floor covering purposes in the world.

Common motifs include scrolling vine networks, arabesques, palmettes, cloud bands, medallions, and overlapping geometric compartments. Animals and humans are not depicted in the persian imagery because Islam is the dominant religion in this part of the world which forbids their depiction. Persian influenced imagery of trellis, vines, medallions, paisleys etc is seen in most of the Indian carpets. The majority of these carpets are wool and silk.

5.3.2 Durries and Rugs

A durrie is a thick flat-woven rug used traditionally as a floor-covering. They come in variety of colours and patterns and have low maintenance cost as they do not get infected by Silverfish or other insects responsible for destroying carpets. Woven durries are produced in Jodhpur, Hoshiarpur, Bhatinda and Warangal in India.

Durries can be used year round, as the cotton durrie is warm in winters and cool in summers. The use of a durrie depends on the size, pattern and material. Durries are used in large political or social gatherings as well as in schools in rural areas as they are easily portable being light weight and foldable. Generally the material used for durries are cotton, wool, silk and jute.

Rugs

A rug is a pile-less, woven textile floor covering that is made from various materials like linen, wool, cotton, jute etc. Cut shuttle and chenille rugs are made for the higher end of domestic or international market. In India these rugs are made with mainly recycled material which is used as weft. Panipat, Meerut and Bijnore are big production centers of rugs.



Exercises

1. Answer the following questions in brief.
 - a) What are the different kinds of looms for weaving fabrics, seen in India?
 - b) What is the term used to describe the weaving of additional colour in a motif in Banaras brocade, which resembles enameling?
 - c) What is peculiar about design of Baluchari sari?
 - d) Name the villages in Southern India known for producing intricate handloom silk saris.
 - e) Name some of the places known for producing good quality Indian carpets.
2. Write short notes (75 – 100 words) on the following:
 - a) Designs commonly seen in Banaras brocades.
 - b) Designs and colours of Paithani Saris
 - c) Chanderi and Maheshwari Saris
 - d) Layout and designs of Kashmir Shawls
 - e) Difference between Kanikar and Amlikar Shawls
 - f) Different kinds of carpets produced in India

