
LESSON 14 KASHMIRI EMBROIDERY

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14. KASHMIR EMBROIDERY

In the previous lesson we had learnt about different kinds of embroideries prevalent in different regions of India. We also learnt that embroidery has been a traditional art practiced in India over a period of centuries. In this lesson we will study about Kashmir embroidery in some detail.

14.0 Objectives

After going through this lesson you will:

- Gain an understanding about the materials, colours and motifs used in Kashmir embroidery.
- Gain a basic understanding about different kinds of Kashmir shawls and various utility articles on which embroidery is done.

14.1 Introduction

Kashmir is a valley surrounded by nature. Its natural beauty is unsurpassed. Apart from its natural beauty, Kashmir has made a noble contribution to the development of the cultural tradition of India. It becomes a great centre of Buddhist learning. Srinagar (capital of Kashmir) known as the city of beauty and knowledge was founded under the great Emperor Ashoka during the 3rd century B.C. It is laid out along the river Jhelum which is crossed by seven wooden bridges.

Kashida is the general term used to signify Kashmiri embroidery. It originally started with the 'darn' stitch used by *raffugars* or darners to finish a shawl. It is a simple running stitch which gives a woven effect (of a design) on a shawl (Fig. 14.1). Kashmiri embroidery is remarkable more for the skilled execution of a simple stitch rather than the elaborate quality of the stitch itself. The close link between nature, history and the crafts of Kashmir is reflected in the characteristics and development of embroidery. Kashmir embroidery draws inspiration from the gentle colours of the landscape and from its varied natural beauty. The designs are all taken from nature like sprays of flowers (rose, lily, and iris), almond, and birds of many kinds, flowering shrubs and floral motifs of Persian style (Fig. 14.2).

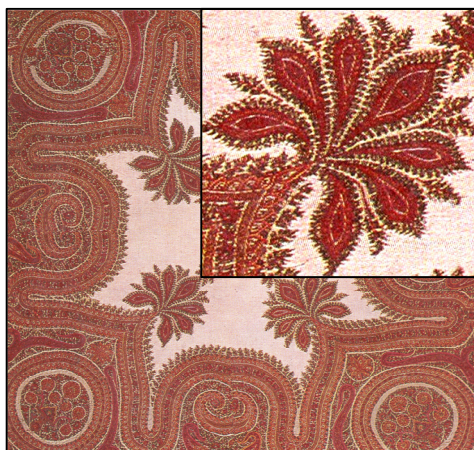


Fig. 14.1 Kashida shawl
Inset: Detailed kashidkari



Fig. 14.2 Floral motif of Persian style

14.2 Historical Background

The advent of Islam brought yet another rich stream into the culture of Kashmir. Sultan Zain-Ul-Abdin of Persia who ruled Kashmir from 1420 A.D. introduced several Industries in Kashmir like Embroidery, silk and paper making etc. He bought skilled craftsmen from central Asia and the local inhabitants were trained in a number of handicrafts, e.g. wood carvings, embroidery on *namdass*, *gabbas* and costume jewellery, leather embroidery and other crafts (Figs. 14.3, 14.4).



Fig. 14.3 Kashmiri traditional cap
Inset: Detailed embroidery



Fig. 14.4 Kurta with Kashmiri motif
Inset: Detailed embroidery

14.3 Technical Details

Kashmir embroidery is done on different base materials, like wool, cotton, and silk. It also includes different kinds of threads. The precious wool is obtained from the animals found at high altitudes in different parts of the state, such as the Ibex from Eastern Ladhak, the Goat of Angora from Tibet and Camel of Bokhara.

Kashida is very fine variety of embroidery done exclusively by hand. It includes ari work, needle work, sozni work and Jamavar. Kashida is done on cream coloured cotton, woollen or silk background and is very delicate with designs resembling nature, such as sprays of flowering shrubs, birds, cypress trees and cones. The stitches are also of different types, like darning stitch, satin stitch and herring bone. This art of embroidery is handed down from father to son.

The craftsmen are inspired to work by the picturesque beauty of their natural surroundings. Climatic conditions are such and the surroundings are so peaceful that the workers can easily sit in peace and work. Also the place is cool and the workers find it easy to work with wool.



Fig. 14.5 Ari work with inset displaying details



Fig. 14.6 Needle work with inset displaying details



Fig. 14.7 Sozni work with inset displaying details



Fig. 14.8 Jamawar shawl with intricate embroidery in the inset

For a preliminary understanding, the process of embroidery can be divided into four distinct steps:

- i) *Selection of material* - The most important and typically Kashmiri base materials are *pashminas*, *shahtoosh* and *namdas*. The other fabrics used are wool, silk, cotton and gabbar. The yarns used for embroidery are staple, cotton wool, and silk.
- ii) *Selection of design* - Selection and transfer of designs is done by *naqqash*.
- iii) *Transfer of design* - *Naqqash* selects and transfers the designs on to the cloth so that embroidery can be done. It is done in two ways: (1) through blocks, and (2) through perforations on paper along the of the design.
- iv) *Actual embroidery*.

Self - Check Questions

1. What is the general term used to signify Kashmiri embroidery?
2. Fill in the blanks:

Kashida is very fine variety of _____ done exclusively by hand. It includes _____ work, _____ work, _____ work and _____.

14.3.1 Common Motifs

What may be called the symbol of Kashmiri craftsmanship is the badam (almond)-Fig. 14.9a. This form in its thousands of variations is seen on almost every product that is embroidered in Kashmir. The Sarav (cypress)-Fig. 14.9b, is yet another commonly seen motif, quite similar to the badam in its long tapering shape. A more recent innovation is the 5 pointed leaf of the Chinar tree (Fig. 14.9c), commonly found in Kashmir. Another dominant motif in Kashmiri embroidery is the Boteha (flower)-Fig. 14.9d, which has persisted all along in different forms, evolving from a simple, freely spaced floral arrangement to a sweeping and complex scroll by the middle of the 19th. century. There are numerous other Motifs based on the flora of Kashmir. Geometric Patterns and Calligraphic forms are also embroidered (Fig. 14.10). Human and animal forms were not usually embroidered until recently. However, with increasing demands for new designs, themes like Shikargah (hunting ground) or Jungle Tarah (jungle scenes) are becoming common. These scenes are mostly based on such fauna of Kashmir as bulbuls, ducks, partridges, horses, jungle cats and many more. These are recreated in the same partly abstracted way as are flowers, fruits and leaves.

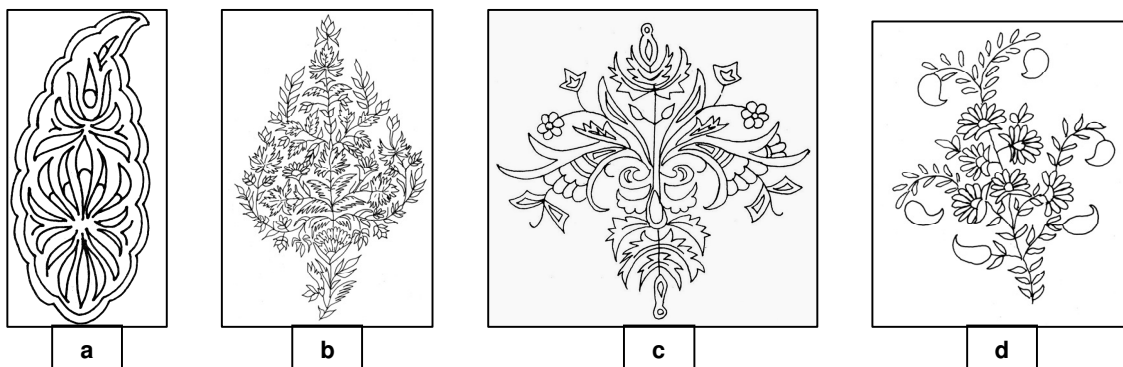


Fig. 14.9 Common motifs used in Kashmir embroidery



Fig. 14.10 Shawl displaying map of Srinagar (Inset: Detailed work)

14.3.2 Colours

The concept of colour in Kashmir embroidery is dictated by the term Sofyana Rang. There is a traditional preference for pastel and light shades on a white background. Fine embroidered work is done in shades discreetly blending with the background.



Fig. 14.11 Pastel shades in Kashmir embroidery

14.4 Utility items

Kashmir has been famous for woollen shawls for centuries. They are of two types: the loom woven known as 'Kani' shawls (Jamawar) and the needle embroidery known as 'Sozni' Shawls. The other embroidered utility items produced are bed spreads, dewan covers, cushion covers, screens, hand bags, table cloth, table mats, Namda and Gabba.

14.4.1 Pashmina Shawls (Sozni)

Pashmina wool is derived from the under belly of the Himalayan Pashmina goat living at the height of 14,000 feet above sea level. The finest of the wool is Shahtush. Pashmina shawls are very warm, soft and light weight. The embroidery done on Pashmina shawl (Fig. 14.12) is with wool. The embroidery is very fine and in subdued colours. Usually men are engaged in doing this work and invariably assisted by bots of tender age.

14.4.2 Dau-shalos

Akasi work is done through the darn stitch so that the design is the same on both the sides but sometimes

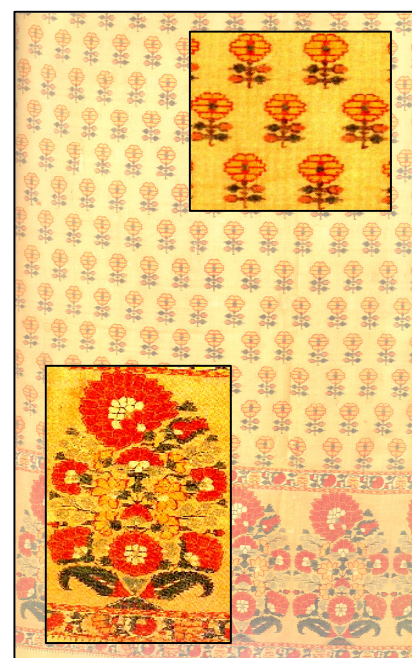


Fig. 14.12 Pashmina shawl
Inset: Detailed embroidery

the offset of colours is different. No animal or human figure shapes are used in this kind of embroidery (Fig. 14.13).



14.4.3 Jamawar Shawls (Kani) with Akasi work; Insets showing intricate embroidery

In the Jamawar or Kani shawls (Fig. 14.14) both weaver and embroiderer (Rafoogar) combine to create together a shawl of great beauty. The embroiderer could repair a damaged shawl and its woven designs with his needle; one could not make out where the difference lay between the weave and the embroidery. Emperor Akbar was a great lover of art and in his reign great encouragement was given to this craft of making Shawls.

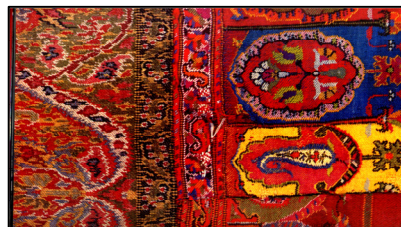


Fig. 14.14 Jamawar or Kani shawl.
Intricate work displayed on sides.

Jamawar weaving is an old craft practiced by skilled craftsmen whose minds were not only creative but at peace to observe nature and absorb its total beauty in their work. The work is very intricate, and only about half an inch width border is embroidered. There is woven Paisley in a Forty-eight inch width of material. These shawls can be worn from both the sides. The head weaver recites the weft repeats for his associates to follow; very often two weavers sit on a loom to speed up the work. The woven work is given a fine, delicate embroidered outline. The colours are bright mostly

red, brown and black on coloured background. The main motifs used are floral and Paisleys. Jamawar is very expensive due to its labour and intricate pattern. It was mainly done for royalties and nobles.

Self-check Questions

3. What is the general term used for the concept of colour in Kashmir embroidery?
 4. Which great king was the biggest admirer of Kashmir shawls?
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14.4.4 Namdas

The Namda is a non-woven felted fabric. It makes an excellent and inexpensive dewan and floor covering and is also used as a mattress in colder areas of the state where it absorbs the cold of the ground.

It is felted thick fabric made by the process of pressing raw wool and cotton together. The ground is off white in colour on which bright coloured wool is used for embroidery in chain stitch. The Namda initially, it did not have ornamentation and was probably only functional. However, gradually they started getting ornamented with Embroidery motifs which were based on flowers, leaves, birds and animals. These Namdas were oval or round in shape. Also they were less expensive than pile-carpets of Kashmir.



Fig. 14.15 Namda

14.4.5 Gubbas

The basic material for a Gubba is milled blanket dyed in plain colours. They are made by milling several old blankets to make a single floor covering. They are embroidered in bold and vivid designs done with woollen or cotton threads. Gubbas have more of a Folk flavour, blankets cut and patched into geometrical pattern with limited embroidery on joining and open spaces. It is more of appliqué work. Colours are bright and attractive. They are cheaper and used for dewan coverings or floor coverings like Namdas.

14.5 Persian and Mughal Influence

The outstanding characteristic of the Kashmir embroidery is its elegance and the use of harmonious grouping of brilliant colours in the design influenced by Persian style all made in a systematic manner and Mughal designs for example the motifs based on centre line design paisley known as Turang and floral sprays and creepers found in almost all the Kashidas of Kashmir embroidery. The main motifs found in the Kashmir embroidery are water-lily, cherries, apple blossoms, wood-peckers, butterflies, cyprus cones, almond shape. The designs are mainly done as: Fig. 14.16(i) -Jaals, Fig. 14.16(ii) - All over patterns, Fig. 14.16(iii) - Border patterns and Fig. 14.16(iv) - Bootis or single motifs are also used. Though these are independent motifs, they are placed at required intervals on the shawl and are, therefore, repeated.

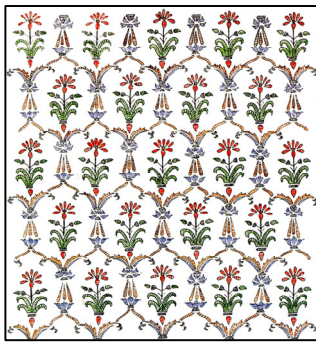


Fig. 14.16 (i) Jaal

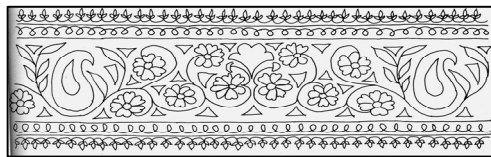


Fig. 14.16 (iii) Border Pattern



Fig. 14.16 (ii) All over pattern



Fig. 14.6(iv) Booti

Self-check Questions

Fill in the blanks:

5. Jaamawar weaving is an old _____ practiced by skilled _____ whose minds were not only _____ but at _____ to observe nature and _____ its total beauty in their work.
 6. Namda is a _____ thick fabric made by the process of pressing raw _____ and _____ together. The ground is off white in colour on which _____ coloured wool is used for _____ in chain stitch.
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14.6 Assignments

14.6.1 Class assignments

- i) Draw and sketch the various motifs of Kashmir embroidery.
- ii) Make a replica of any one Kashmir shawl.

14.6.2 Home assignments

- i) Collect pictures or photos of embroidered textiles of Kashmir that you can find from magazines, shops, and the internet, representing different styles. Paste them neatly on clear pages with labels under each photo or picture.

14.7 Summing Up

Kashmir embroidery is also known as Kashida, done so cleverly that it is very difficult to differentiate between the woven and the embroidered work.

Kashida is done on cream coloured cotton, woollen or silk background and designs are taken from the nature because of the beautiful surroundings of Kashmir. Different types of stitches used are darning stitch, satin stitch and herring bone. There is a traditional preference for pastel and light shades on a white background.

Kashmir has been famous mainly for two types of woollen shawls for centuries; they are Kani shawls and Sozni shawls. The other embroidered items are bed spreads, dewan covers, screens, hand bags, table cloth and table mats etc.

14.8 Possible Answers to Self-check Questions

1. Kashida is the general term used to signify Kashmiri embroidery.
2. Kashida is very fine variety of embroidery done exclusively by hand. It includes ari work, needle work, sozni work and Jamavar.
3. Sofyana Rang is the term used for concept of colour in Kashmiri embroidery.

2. Calligraphic Decorative handwriting
3. Discreetly Used according to one's judgement
4. Subdued Brought under control
5. Paisleys An intricate pattern of curved shapes like feathers