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Cultural Heritage of Floor Coverings produced in Kashmir: Kaleen, Namdahs and Wagoo

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Abstract

India's cultural heritage has played an essential role in the textile trade over centuries. In particular, the diverse floor coverings of Kashmir form an integral part of the handicraft industry of the region whereby the varieties produced differ from each other in their design, their mode of production and the raw material used. The artisans of the community execute a specific task in the sequential production process creating and following a chain of activities to enable production. This paper explores the traditions of floor coverings in Kashmir, their cultural specificity, the nature and structure of artisanal communities of the region and their unique approaches to design and production, in order to demonstrate deep linkages between aspects of culture, community and their craft-practices.

Keywords: floor coverings, craft traditions, heritage, artisans, material culture, craft production, Kashmir, India

Introduction

The variety of floor coverings produced in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) is a manifestation of the cultural heritage of the textile arts, that has a long and rich history. India's cultural heritage has played an essential role in the textile trade over centuries by trading various types of textiles in exchange for a variety of commodities ranging from spices to edibles and luxuries (Riello & Roy, 2009:1; Kumari,1968:128-130). The proficiency of the technical aspects of production, the ability of the Indian craftsmen to cater and respond to region-specific design and colour preferences of virtually any market led to a "widespread appetite for Indian textiles" which affected global patterns of material culture (Gittinger,

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1982:16-17; Lemire, 2009: 365-367). Furthermore, for centuries textile practices across the country were outcomes of artisanal activities by craft communities espousing unique region-specific cultural attributes. The resultant commodity was traded across the world on land and sea routes, to as far as Indonesia and Japan in the east and Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt and West Africa in the west (Reillo &Roy, 2009:6). The Indian trade was recognised as the backbone of the medieval international economy, particularly the Islamic world where, by the beginning of the twelfth-century trade was mainly in the hands of great Muslim merchant families (Goitein & Friedman, 2008: xxi, xxv). Economic historians conjecture that India's GDP was the largest in the world until around 1500s (Wood, 2015:10). Following this period, the Indian textile arts including carpets continued to be key commodities in the International trade during the Mughal and European mercantile and political expansion in India from circa 1500 to 1800 resulting in continued commercial activity in India amidst European commercial rivalries (Foster, Vol. III, 1899: xiv). The imperial expansion was motivated by an increase of trade and circulation of goods (Barringer & Flynn 2008:3; xiv). Consequently, this resulted in the concurrent entry of the European merchants through the sea route after Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea route to India in c.1498 CE, and the entry of the Mughals in c 1526 CE by land route, both of which influenced Indian manufacturing (Seth, 2018:7).

In Kashmir, as suggested by accounts from the *Nilamata purana*, the age of the *purana*[1] witnessed a variety of well-known art and craft practices that played a significant role in the socio-economic growth of the region. Its economic prosperity depended on agriculture and trade, the Pir Panchal route "*lavanasarani*" or salt-road was used for importing salt while some of the items of export comprised of saffron, fibre, animal pelts, fabrics made of wool and ranku deers' hair, woollen blankets and

[1] The Nilamata may have been composed in the 6th or 7th century AD. (Kumari, 1968:15)

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other smooth textile pieces not manufactured from cotton. The improved cultural life of its people however was attributed to artists and craftsmen of the region (Kumari, 1968:128-130). The social organization followed a system of *Varnasramadharma,* a code of conduct for the four *varnas* whereby the *Brahmanas* were responsible for preserving the intellectual and spiritual culture, the Kshatriyas entrusted with protection of the people, the *Vaisyas* engaged in *vrtti* denoting agriculture, cattle rearing and trade whilst the *Sudras* categorized as *Karmajivis* and *Silpis,* low paid workers and artisans[2] respectively, commanded respect enough in society to exchange gifts with the higher *varnas,* ply trades of the *Vaisyas* and participate in the coronation ceremony of the king (Kumari, 1968:86). Hence the *Sudras* were not considered debased. The ability of indigenous Kashmiri artisanal communities to continuously respond to evolving demands, lifestyles and aesthetics of patrons, through their artistic creations and innovations reflected the richness of their own cultural practices (Chattopadhyay, 1985; Hendley, 1888). Emphasizing the importance of patronage on craft practices Hendley (1888) observes that "…most of the arts are indigenous in no one spot, but that they have simply followed the most liberal patronage…" this is evident when shifting patterns in patronage under the Mughals resulted in Persian craftsmen coming to Kashmir to practice their craft skills alongside the *Kashmiri* artisanal communities (Wulff, 1966). The worldwide demand and renowned status of *Kashmiri* textiles and handicrafts thus attracted global attention for centuries. Notwithstanding the socio-economic significance of the industry, the crafts are however currently witnessing a decline in patronage in addition to competition from cheaper synthetic products. Foreseeing such a situation in 1919, Gandhi had highlighted this concern in his weekly paper "*Young India"* (May, 1919). Gandhi observed that the lack of appreciation and knowledge of indigenous arts and crafts

[2] weavers, carpenters,

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undervalued quality and good workmanship resulting in progressively deteriorating public taste driven by the demand for cheap machine-made goods in the name of market superiority, misconceptions in his view, misled by the "so-called economists" (as cited by McGowan, 2009). Degraded taste and resultant decline in quality and demand of artisanal products has thus led to the gradual erosion of the traditional knowledge systems and practices valuable for sustainable development of the artisanal communities. This paper therefore, traces the cultural heritage of the variety of floor coverings produced in Kashmir and the nature of external influences. Through this paper, the author aims to highlight the diverse art and craft practices in Kashmir that emphasize the long-standing traditions and unique approaches adopted by artisanal communities in design, production and maintenance of their traditional craft practices.

Kashmir: Setting the Context

The Kashmir Region or valley is a vast ancient lake basin 140 km long and 32 km wide (Sufi, 2015: 10). It is one of the distinctly different natural divisions of J&K, an Indian Union Territory situated in the northernmost region of India. It's an average elevation of 5,300 feet above sea level and the surrounding mountains rising to 16,000 feet ensures a pleasant weather for most of the year. The rich and fertile soil resulting from the numerous water bodies of the region yields a variety of fruits, vegetables and the saffron. The lush greenery of the valley, its terraced rice fields, fruit orchards, waterways, Chinar tree-lined avenues and an eclectic variety of flora collectively contribute to the beauty of Kashmir which has been extolled by visitors comparing it to Switzerland[3] and Greece[4]; and described variously as "paradise on earth"[5], "garden

[3] Younghusband (1911:2)
[4] Sufi (2015:2)
[5] Jahangir

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of perpetual spring"[6] and "the land of roses"[7]. Its beauty is reflected in its different craft practices inspiring not only its craftspeople over the ages but also the Mughal emperor Jahangir to exclaim, "…the beauty of the valley was beyond all descriptio*n*". In addition, Srinagar, the "city of the sun",[8] is located around several lakes and is the administrative capital of the region in summer. A network of bridges (*Kadal*) connects the city divided into two by the Jhelum River. Its beauty has made it a popular destination for tourists while its handicrafts have attracted international traders. Tourism and handicrafts have largely driven the economy. It presently comprises ten districts namely Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama, Shopian, Srinagar, Ganderbal, Budgam, Baramulla, Bandipora and Kupwara districts (J&K Development Report, 2014:6). The Indian Union Territory of J&K is divided into the Provinces of Kashmir and Jammu for administrative purposes, which is headed by a Divisional Commissioner. In the past when Hinduism was the predominant religion of the people and Sanskrit the court language, Kashmir was popularly recognised as a centre for learning, Buddhism and subsequently Islam, flourished and coexisted. Presently the people are predominantly followers of Islam.

The Jammu Region lies south and west of the Pir Panjal range that separates Kashmir Valley from the plains of the subcontinent. It comprises of ten districts namely Jammu, Samba, Udhampur, Reasi, Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Kathua, Rajouri and Poonch. The Jammu region is the administrative capital in winter and is also referred to as the "city of temples" (Draft report, 2032:1). The people are predominantly followers of Hinduism; however, people of other faiths such as Islam, Christianity, Jainism and Buddhism co-exist.

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6 *Ain-i-Akbari* (Blochman, 1873: 348)

7 Younghusband (1909:28)

8 Pirie & Pirie, (1909: 22)

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The Ladakh Region presently a Union Territory, constituted the eastern-most part of the erstwhile Indian State of J&K comprising two districts namely Leh and Kargil. Ladakh is one of the highest places on earth with the average altitude being above 12,000 feet and covers about 117,000 sq. km including the Karakoram Range and the upper Indus River valley. A breathtakingly beautiful part of the state is its landscape often termed as "moonscape". Despite that, it doesn't get much rain due to its location on the leeward side of the mountain. People live a traditional life, herding sheep and yak and growing barley near the riverbeds in summer. This region is the producer of *pashm* the most exquisite and softest wool that is utilised in the weaving of *pashmina* shawls (J&K Development Report 2014:8). The population comprises of Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus. Thus, people of multiracial ethnicities and cultures inhabit the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh rendering it a multi-lingual; multi-religious and multi-racial region each demonstrating its own distinct cultural ethos and craft practices. Due to its location and topography the region witnesses' extreme variants of climate from alpine in the cold arid desert areas of Ladakh, temperate climate in the Kashmir valley and the humid subtropical climate in Jammu. The erstwhile State, J&K shares its boundary with the northeast by the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang (China), with the east by the Tibet Autonomous Region (China), with the south by the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, with the southwest by Pakistan, and with the northwest by the Pakistani-administered portion of Kashmir (Akhtar, R. & Kirk, W 2018). It was the 10th largest state in the country as it spread over about 220000 sq. km with a population of about 12 million, making it the 19th most populated region in India (Draft report, 2032). Additionally, the majority of the people are employed in the craft sector with the floor covering industry employing the largest number; the identity of the artisans and the location of their dwellings is

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determined by the practiced craft. The Indus, Chenab, Jhelum, and Ravi are considered as the most important rivers in the region.

Ancient Centre for Learning*:* J&K is presently the northernmost region of the Republic of India. Prior to its accession to India in 1948 by Maharaja Hari Singh who was the last ruler of the Dogra dynasty, it was one of the largest princely states in Independent possession of Maharaja Gulab Singh. It was in possession by the Maharaja and his male heirs through a treaty of transfer (March 16, 1846) with the British government for a sum of rupees 75 lakh at the time of British rule in India. It included the Swat valley and the Gilgit region (both now occupied by Pakistan), which was larger than the present boundary. Before Gulab Singh, during the Mughal reign, the Sarkar of Kashmir was part of the Subah of Kabul, which included Pakli, Bimbar, Swat, Bajaur, Kandahar and Zabulistan, the capital of which was formerly Ghaznah and later known as Kabul (Jarrett, H.S. 1891:347). The earliest history of Kashmir, a region ruled by numerous kings has been chronicled by Kalhana in his "*Rajatarangini*" which begins by suggesting the spiritual importance of Kashmir- the land that is believed to be an incarnation of Parvati, the consort of lord Shiva (Stein, 2017:72). While Kalahan traces the origin of Kashmir to the abode of gods, attributing to Asoka, a pious Buddhist, the foundation of Srinagari, the old capital in close vicinity of the new one (Stein, 2017:75) Pal traces Sanskrit as the language of ancient Kashmir from $5^{th}/6^{th}$ century BCE (Pal, 2008:18).

Further, the history of Kashmir is divided into two broad periods, the earliest was dominated by Sanskrit culture where Sanskrit was the court language while both *Prakrit* and *Kashmiri* was in use by the common people. Following the early period was the latter period from the first half of the 14^{th} century that was based on Islamic culture, an outcome of the establishment of an Islamic Sultanate and end of the

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Brahmanical/Buddhist period (Pal, 2008:17-18). In 1846, when the British handed over the region to the Dogra Maharajah of Jammu, Kashmiris had largely adopted Islam. The various rulers together contributed to the cultural fabric of the region, out of which some contributed by welcoming the stream of settlers and visitors whilst some contributed through intolerance of existing cultures. The scholars and travellers visited Kashmir from all over the world- Persia, China, Tibet, Central Asia, and the Indian sub-continent to the south for trade, literary and religious activity encouraging religious tolerance, free exchange of ideas and acculturation, that helped it in earning the reputation of a great centre for learning (Pal, 2008:18; Banerji, 1965:17). Thus, *Kashmiri-ness* or *Kashmiriyat* was originally defined by ideals of nationality, religious tolerance, intercommunity life, international life, and interreligious life where Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam co-existed and flourished (Khan, 2012:22). A noteworthy contribution such as the fourth Buddhist council was held in Kashmir during the time of Kanishka[9] where some important Buddhist treatises were composed and Buddhist scholars of great eminence flourished. As a result, Kashmir, a stronghold of Buddhism since as early as the 3rd century BC played a significant part in spreading the religion to lands outside India up to central Asia and China. As described, Buddhism had a powerful hold over the Kashmiris throughout Hindu rule (Banerji, 1965:17); the *devanagri* alphabet of India was introduced into Tibet from Kashmir in the first half of the 7th century of the era (Jarrett 1891: 351). Also, architectural contributions were discovered at Harwan (Buddhist Monastery where the Council was held), Martand (Sun temple), Avantipur (Avantivarman 9th century) and Srinagar among other sites.

Moreover, as a centre of trade, the traditional crafts produced were highly valued, white and coloured cloth, ornaments, glass and earthenware along with amber, salt

9 Kanishka was the Indo-Scythian Kusan ruler of Turkish descent, a pious Buddhist.

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and asafoetida were exchanged for quantities of gold, copper, lead, musk, tails of the kutas cow, honey, chuck (acid formed by boiling orange juice and lemon together), pomegranate seeds, ginger, long pepper, *majith* root, borax, zedoary, wax, woollen stuff, wooden ware, hawks, falcons, black falcons, merlins and other articles from the Northern mountains in the reign of Ibrahim s/o Nazuk Shah (Jarrett, H.S. 1891:196).

Centre of Conflict: In recent years however, Kashmir has been a centre of conflict dealing with continued political disturbance generated by insurgency and counter insurgency that majorly influenced the traditional practices of material culture and output in the region. Meanwhile, some scholars and politicians continue to critique the inheritance of Indian and Pakistani hegemonies in order to reconstruct the history and cultural identity of the Kashmiri people (Khan, 2012:4). Additionally, amidst the political turmoil, the region is experiencing a decline in production and practice of the age-old craft traditions. The eroding prestige due to low incomes, a result of decline in visitors and tourists to Kashmir has led to waning patronage and paucity in demand. However, the political situation notwithstanding, J&K still boasts a plethora of living craft traditions, the legacy of a rich craft heritage not yet obliterated by the continued political turmoil. The next section presents a discussion on the categories of floor coverings produced in Kashmir and the identity it provides to the artisans of the local community.

Carpet Traditions

Rugs, *kaleens*, *jajams* and mats are an integral part of Indian households that are used as floor coverings and furniture for sitting, eating and sleeping. While there is a record of the introduction of pile carpets in India, the antiquity of non-pile carpets is unknown. Thus, the earliest accepted references to floor coverings in India are the felted "*namdis"* also known as *namdas, numdahs or namdahs*, that feature amongst

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the enumerated household articles listed in wooden documents unearthed in Eastern Turkestan during excavations by Auriel Stein that referred to commercial transactions of Indian merchandise during the reign of King Jitroghavarsham (Chatopadhyaya, 1966: 1). Further, while Hand-knotted carpet weaving in the world dates back to over 2000 years as is evident from the discovery of the 'Pazyryk' rug (Rudenko, 1970; Rubinson, 1990) introduction of pile weaving in India is widely accepted to be of Persian origin attributed to the advent of the Mughals[10] 1526-1857, (Gans-Ruedin, 1984, Jarrett, 1891).

The importance and global popularity of Indian textile crafts highlighted the prevalence of exquisite workmanship in the region thus prompting the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) to acquire the theoretical and practical knowledge of the whole trade, bestowing special care and imperial patronage to the intelligent 'workmen'[11] enabling further perfection in the crafts of hair weaving and silk spinning (Blochman, Vol I, 1873;88). Emperor Akbar's appreciation for fine material and its availability led to his own abundant use of *Kashmiri tus* shawls, reinforced by the attention he gave to his wardrobe and the wardrobe of his courtiers that incorporated the use of a variety of handcrafted textiles (Blochman Vol I, 1873; 87-96). He established imperial workshops, *karkhanas* across his empire in Lahore[12], Agra[13], Fatehpur[14], Ahmedabad and Gujarat, motivated and encouraged by the accessibility of skilful masters and workmen from Iran, Turan and India who turned out many masterpieces of workmanship thereby astonishing experienced travellers by

10 Babur established the Mughal empire in India in 1526 (Schuster, 2008).

11 In this context would imply craftsmen.

12 Imperial capital of Humayun, 1540-1554, following defeat by Sher Shah Sur; Akbar, 1584-1596. (Sinopli, 1994: 294).

13 Imperial capital of Babur 1526-1530; Akbar 1560-1571, 1598-1605; Jahangir 1605-1627; Shah Jahan 1628-1648. (Sinopli, 1994: 294).

14 Imperial capital of Akbar 1571-1585. (Sinopli, 1994: 294).

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their quality (Blochman, 1873; 87-88). The first imperial carpet manufacturing *karkhanas* thus established the basic elements of Mughal design (Ellis, 1988:211; Walker, 1997: ix). In the 17th century, during the reign of Jehangir (1605-1627) while the Persian style dominated court aesthetics, it was during the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58) on the contrary, that design acquired an Indian character quite different from the Persian prototypes thereby leading to an emergence of the distinctive Mughal style also referred as the flower style in Indian art (Thompson, 1988:152; Walker, 1997: ix; Koch, 2018: 25). The decoration with realistic flowering plants and lattice designs were either arranged in rows or shown against a plain background, perhaps inspired by the large variety of fine smelling[15] and beautiful flowers[16] growing in abundance everywhere in the country, dominating not only carpet designs but all aspects of Mughal art (Walker, 1997: ix). Abul Fazl, in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, refers to the *jajams*, *satranjis*, silk like woven mats and the "wonderful varieties and charming textures of carpets" produced in India under royal patronage in imperial workshops. Referring to the finest Indian carpets as "resplendent", Pope[17] observes that "…Royal looms in India undertook on occasion to compete with Persia…their best work …, for close weaving, luxurious texture, harmony and intensity of colour and perfect drawing quite unsurpassable..." (Pope, 1965:2258). Similarly, Fazl's appreciation of the quality of Indian carpets produced is reflected in his observation of Mughal emperors no longer missing Iranian and Turkish carpets as all kinds of carpet weavers settled in India were driving a flourishing trade. In addition, he mentions the *farrash khanah* as a separate department responsible for storing and caring for a

15 See Ain-Akbari, Ain 30, 73-77, for an elaborate description on the variety of flowers growing in the country and recipes for perfumes. Flowers were used in large quantities in court halls for their fragrance; extracted oils were used for the hair and skin. (Blochman, 1873; 73-77).

16 *Ibid*

17 An expert on Iranian Art, scholar and professor, in his *Survey of Persian Art (1965)* he mentions Persian carpets exported to various countries in the world, as a coveted commodity of luxury attempts at imitation in France and other countries were unsuccessful. Indian carpets alone provided competition.

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variety of imperial tents, awnings and coverings for floors and enclosures. Fazl's detailed description of the *farrash khanah* further emphasizes the importance of floor coverings, which were also important components of imperial equipage for hunting, parties and journeys. As it was considered "the ornament of royalty" and "insignia of a ruler", special attention was bestowed on the department by the Mughal emperors (Blochmann, 1873: 45-48; 53-55). The maintenance of a *farrash khanah* by the powerful Kachhwaha Maharajas and the extensive collection of floor coverings existing in their inventories that dates from the 16th through the 20th century resembled the textiles of the Imperial Mughal court (Kane, 2012:1). Some of these floor coverings are part of private and museum collections and showcased at exhibitions such as "*Flowers underfoot*…" and during private viewings as part of *Hali* tours. This suggests Rajput rulers were key royal patrons of "the decorative arts" quite like the Imperial Mughal patrons (Jain, 2016:11). The extensive use of carpets as floor coverings is further corroborated by Berniers (1916), accounts of carpet making and centres of production during the Mughal period. His reference to cotton mats that were three to four inches in thickness spread under the carpet, the use of hand painted and embroidered textiles as canopies and wall panels by the Mughals in Imperial tents alludes to the existence of floor coverings other than pile carpets in India (Bernier, 1916:362). Twigg's (1907: v-vi) monograph, "The Art and Practice of Carpet Making in the Bombay Presidency" also documents the evidence of Carpet-making in India referring to the pile carpets as *galichas* and flat weave cotton mats as *durries or satranjis.* Further, extolling the workmanship of the weavers, Twigg compares the quality of Indian pile carpets favourably to the Turkish and Persian. Moreover, Chattopadhyaya (1966), and Gans-Ruedin (1984), among the few authors to have written about Indian floor coverings, have compiled a collection of Indian Carpets in their books *Indian Carpets and Floor coverings* and *Indian Carpets* respectively.

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While tracing the story of the Indian carpet, Gans-Ruedin cites authors such as Sir G.Watts (1908), Pinto (1540), Tenreiro (1560), Lincchoten (1598) and Pyrard (1608) who mention Indian carpets in their works, implying that pile carpets were known and produced in India. Pyrard's work is cited as referring to the Portuguese' ladies of Goa seated on precious *alcatifs*[18] (Gans-Ruedin, 1984: 16), demonstrating that carpet weaving was not only prevalent and practiced in India in the 16th century but also the quality of weaving was exquisite as the *alcatifs* were described as precious. Walker (1997: ix), however observes uniqueness of Indian carpets were exhibited in the choice of materials used in production, whereby pashmina wool pile was used in the highest grade of Indian carpets as opposed to other carpet-making societies, where silk pile was considered as the most luxurious. Further, Thompson (1988:152) also marvels at the "technical and artistic perfection" of Indian carpets, observing that the "best of these carpets have a silk foundation and a woollen pile made from the fleece of the mountain goat of Tibet and Ladakh[19] with properties of wool but exhibiting visual and tactile character of silk. This thus reiterates the attention to handling and care taken in the selection and procurement of material by the craftsmen in the production of the most exquisite carpets for the discerning patron and consumer. The sumptuous effect of carpets therefore made during the reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, is believed to have never been surpassed (Thompson, 1988:152). As products of *Imperial Karkhanas,* "the Royal workshops produced the most technically accomplished, sumptuous and visually prodigious carpets ever made in response to the demands of a customer with limitless funds and an appetite for the best that money could buy" (Thompson, 1988:152). Thus, when the Indian pile carpets were displayed at the London Exhibition of 1851, it was the first time they were put on the global

18 *Katif* being the Arabic word for pile carpet

19 *Pashm* is the wool used for weaving the Kashmiri shawls. In India it is produced by two goat breeds *Changthangi* domesticated in Ladakh and *Chegu* in Lahaul-Spitti and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarkashi, Chamoli and Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand (Shakyawar, D.B et al, 2013:207)

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map, popularising Indian carpets and the fine craftsmanship of the weavers that were only known to a few privileged people until then. As a result, an increase in demand for Indian carpets was observed followed by the setting up of a few English carpet-manufacturing companies in Srinagar, Amritsar, Mirzapur (Chattopadhyaya, 1966:12-13; Twigg, 1907:3). However, it was the exhibition "Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1997 which while commemorating 50 years of India's Independence, highlighted the admirable workmanship of Indian carpets, that showcased the best surviving examples for the first time, including a number of pashmina samples giving Indian carpets the scholarly attention and identity it deserved (Walker, 1997).

Kashmiri Weaving Traditions

In Kashmir, weaving of shawls, *chaddors, pattus* and *kanis* were originally a result of a sustainable system that existed in the valley due to the harsh climatic conditions of the region until the exploitation of the "craft" was initiated for commercial gains by successive governments and merchants (Rizvi, 1990:47). The "*param narams*[20]*"* as the pashmina shawls were called were the fabric of imperial preference, weaving of which was much encouraged by the nobility and was preferred by craftsmen over weaving of carpets, notwithstanding the introduction of carpet weaving in Kashmir first by *Badshah* Zain-ul-Abidin in the 15th century and then again by Shah Jehangir in the 17th century, with the support of Ahmed Beg Khan[21] and the merchant Akhun Rehnuma. In the 19th century, however, with the advent of the jacquard looms in Europe the *Kashmiri* shawl faced competition. The jacquard looms began replicating

20 Emperor Akbar changed names of certain garments for *Hindi* terms (Blochmann, 1873: 90).

21 Appointed to govern Kashmir (1615-18) by Shah Jehangir (Gans-Ruedin, 1984: 31)

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the popular shawl patterns leading to a subsequent decline in the demand for handcrafted shawls. Consequently, the shawl weavers shifted towards carpet weaving transferring their weaving skills and techniques to the production of carpets (Chattopadhyaya 1966:20; Gans-Ruedin, 1984:31-32; Saraf, 1987:89; Rizvi 1990: 57). Hence, the revival of carpet weaving in Kashmir is attributed to Mr. Chapman who visited Kashmir in 1876 to relaunch the industry. The economic growth was now dependent on the demand from the west, the new patrons (Gans-Ruedin, 1984: 31-32). Carpet manufacturing was subsequently well established under Mitchell & Co. From 1851 to early 1900 *Kashmiri* carpets were appreciated for their quality and craftsmanship winning great distinction and several prizes at exhibitions in Chicago (1893), Paris (1900) and London (1902, 1903 and 1906). As an instance, one of the finest Kashmir carpets made in Silk warp for Maharaja Gulab Singh won much praise at the London Exhibition of 1851 (Chattopadhyaya, 1966: 20). Thus, while the Persian and Turkish pile rugs were an outcome of both settled and nomadic weaving traditions, the Kashmiri pile rugs were a product of imperial *karkhanas* and subsequently British factories. The flourishing carpet industry in the mid 1870's therefore not only accommodated the out of work *kani* shawl weavers but adopted a number of the *kani* designs and the *taleem* system in production (Rizvi 1990:57). The mastery and ability of *Kashmiri* artisans to process *pashmina* wool enabled the *Kashmiri* carpet weavers and designers to make distinct and lasting contributions to the traditions of carpet weaving through the most exquisite *pashmina* pieces that represent top production of the court workshops (Walker, 1997: xv-xvii). Their skilful use of *pashmina* on silk foundations, for instance, with large knot counts (approaching and exceeding 2000 per square inch in some cases) led to the use of the material as a pile fibre. Additionally, by directly mixing or combining dyed yarns, *Kashmiri* carpet weavers were able to expand the range of colours on woven floor coverings and

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develop subtle aesthetic variations. The development of a new genre of botanical style designs inspired by 'western herbals' and developed using flowers from the Kashmir landscape was another contribution that can be ascribed to Kashmir (Ames, 2010: 19, 55, 61). The quality of workmanship of the *Kashmiri* Carpets is also evident in the collections of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, City Palace Jaipur, some pieces (ex-collections and existing) of which were displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition in 1997 "*Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era*", further reiterating the skill and workmanship of Indian weavers. *Kashmiri* carpets thus initially dependent on Persian models, began to espouse a distinct aesthetic in their beautiful rugs which were perhaps most evident in their use of the finest wool, natural dyes, soft and silky quality (Holt, 1908; 93-94; Chattopadhyaya, 1966:5). The later usage of naturally depicted floral patterns in Iranian carpet weaving is a trait which is indigenous to Indian ornamentation in all types of media including floor coverings and textiles being exported from India at the time (Walker, 1997: xv). The hand-knotted pile carpet making tradition thus dates back to over 600 years in Kashmir and was considered 'the most coveted of textile weaves' (Saraf 1987: 89-96). In addition, another variety of floor covering produced in the region namely the *wagoo* mat traces its antiquity to the Indus valley civilization (Jaitley, 1990:155).

Categories of Floor Coverings

The floor coverings of Kashmir form an integral part of the handicraft industry of the region whereby the varieties produced differ from each other in their design, their mode of production and the raw material used. The community of artisans execute a specific task in the sequential production process creating and following a chain of activities to enable creation of handicrafts. By the nature of its structure, these communities share a sense of identity determined by their locality, occupation,

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religion and kin ties, thus facilitating a collaborative work environment, translating into a "craft community". These craft communities engage in creating commodities of material culture, which is an outcome of artisanal craftsmanship (Ortiz, 2017). The cultural specificity of production moreover, lies in the knowledge and skills of the craftsperson that tends to be affiliated to a community where traditions are inherited from ancestors and passed on to the descendants thus forming a substantial part of the country's cultural heritage (Mir & Ain, 2010: 220; UNESCO). Various definitions of specific terms adopted to establish positions taken in this research are defined as provided below:

- Floorcoverings: will refer to material made from textiles, felts and other natural substances applied or fastened to, or laid upon, the level base surface of a room to provide comfort, durability, safety, and decoration (Ellis, 2012).
- Carpets: will refer to a fabric floor covering with a 'pile' on one surface consisting of the upstanding ends of very numerous pieces of wool woven in by hand to an under structure (Twigg, 1907: v).
- Rugs: refer to fabric floor covering, not larger than 8x10ft (Stone, 2013:238).
- Artisanal: will be equated only with manual skill (Sennet, 2008: 20).
- Craftsmanship: will refer to skills developed to a high degree measured in 10,000 hours of experience required to produce a master (Sennet, 2008: 20).
- Community[22]: A cluster of houses practicing a specific craft practice over generations with the help of family members.

Whilst rugs can be classified in a variety of ways, the most widely used method is "by country" or "by the region of origin" (Stone, 2013:238). Floor coverings of Kashmir

[22] A cluster of houses surrounded by farmland managed with the help of family members (Das, 1922: 7-27).

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are varied and the diversity is evident in the mode of production, region of production and structure. However, the common feature is that they all are handcrafted artisanal products, produced by a series of processes specific to a group of artisans who live in proximity and hence, create a community. The variety of floor coverings produced in Kashmir is as follows:

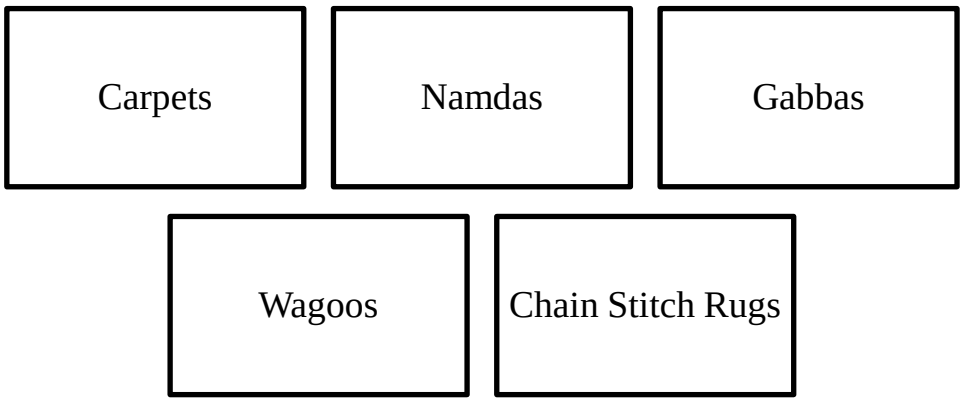

Figure 1.1. Categories of floor coverings of Kashmir

Carpets- A carpet has what is termed 'pile' on one surface. "This pile consists of the upstanding ends of numerous pieces of wool, woven by hand to an under structure of wool, cotton or silk (Ellis, 2012). Such is the ordinary *galicha* or pile carpet. The pile may be of hair or cotton and the under structure need not be of cotton, yet the article would still be a *galicha*. Its pile is its distinguishing feature" (Twigg, 1907: v). Pile carpet weaving was not the result of spontaneous growth in Kashmir; it was introduced by the Saracens and flourished under the patronage of the Emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Such exquisite carpets were produced giving Persian carpets competition for a century (Hawley, 1913:253). Essentially, Kashmir produces carpets referred as *kaleens*, which are hand knotted and produced mostly by home-

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based workers. The Kashmiri *kaleen* weaving tradition dates back to the 15th century when carpets were first introduced by Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-70 A.D) and produced under imperial patronage.

Kaleen – are silk or wool pile carpets woven in the Kashmir region of J&K. The craft was introduced in Kashmir by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin who brought weavers from Persia and Central Asia to train the local inhabitants already adept at spinning and weaving (Saraf, 1990:81). Unlike nomadic weaving traditions where the designs were woven from memory and the designer and weaver were the same person (as in the Ladakh region) carpets in Kashmir were and still are woven through a multi-step process distributing various tasks across different craftsperson's. They are woven using the *Farsi baaf,* Persian knot (PK) also known as *Senneh* or asymmetrical knot. Furthermore, the pile is created by looping the pile yarn around a pair of warp yarns, wrapped first around the front warp yarn following which it goes under the second warp yarn (back) before coming up on the face of the carpet opening on the left before being cut with a *khoor*, a hooked knife. This process of knotting is called *phourin.* When the knots are tied using four warp yarns, the knot is called the *jufti.* Also, Hand-knotted carpets are woven in a variety of sizes and qualities. The quality is usually graded by knots per square inch (KPSI), this is an important measure of quality which determines the durability and value of a carpet. However, the uniqueness lies in the method and technique of translating the designs on the woven carpets by the *kalbaaf* carpet weavers, through a coded syntax called the *taleem.* Carpet production is an outcome of a series of activities which begins after determining the quality and size of the carpet to be woven (done by the patron) then is initiated with design development by the *naqash,* followed by color coding by the *tarah guru*, syntax writing on the *kud*

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(taleem paper) by the *taleem guru*, and copying of the instructions by the *nakaal*. The *taleem* is then given to the *vasta/ ustad* along with the raw materials and advance wages. These instructions are read aloud to the weavers, *kalbaaf* by the *vasta*, reciter. The weaver, thus, wove the carpet following the instructions on the t*aleem* under the supervision of the *vasta* unaware of what the carpet will look like, until it is completely woven (Lawrence, 1909:120). The conventional processes of manufacture and technique of weaving have not changed; however, the recent introduction of technology has enabled the reduction of some steps saving time and revenue. The uniqueness of this method and process of production/manufacture of the *kaleen* is indigenous and culturally specific to Kashmir for which they have been granted a GI in 2016. Moreover, amongst the variety of floor coverings crafted in Kashmir the hand–knotted silk carpets are most widely manufactured and produced in all districts of the region. Fig. 1.2, illustrates the different communities of artisans, engaged in production of *kaleens*, the task executed determining the resultant identity of the crafts people that contribute in the production of *Kashmiri* hand-knotted carpets.

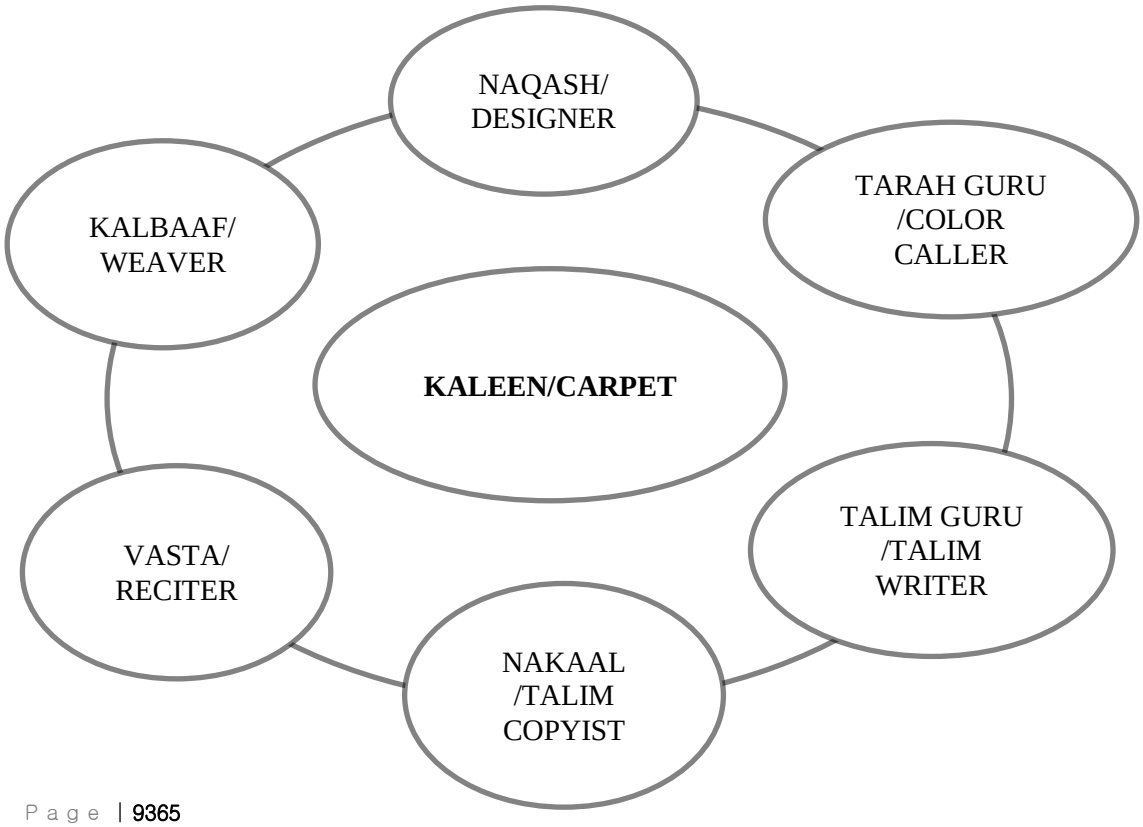

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Figure 1.2. Communities contributing to *Kaleen* production

Fig.1.3. Hand-Knotted Carpet

Source: Promil Pande, Srinagar 2018

Namdah- A *namdah [also written namda (Stone), numdah (Jaitley) or namdah* (Mir &Ain, 2010)] is an embroidered felt rug, the felt made either out of animal hair, unspun wool or wool and cotton evenly spread over a mat and then rolled and pressed underfoot to create a fabric of even consistency (Wakhlu, 1990: 73). The art of felt making is possibly the oldest textile technique known, older than the art of spinning and weaving existing alongside the custom of using animal skins or furs as garments

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(Laufer, 1930: 1; Chad, 2005:8). It was practiced and used in Asia and Europe since antiquity; its use was attributed to occasional and minor importance among the highly civilized nations of China, India, Greece and Rome. Its origin is attributed to the Asiatic nomads who considered felt as an inseparable aspect of their life and culture, associated with their religious and ceremonial practices where felt was used extensively as floor coverings, clothing, accessories, dwellings and other household goods. While felt as a fabric was familiar in India since 8th century AD, the quality was inferior to the *Yarkandi* felts which were imported from Yarkhand and embroidered in Srinagar, Kashmir (Lawrence, 1909:120; Laufer, 1930: 2-8; Jaitley 1990: 73). These embroidered coloured felts were considered the most artistic of Kashmir textiles (Lawrence, 1895:377). They are made in a variety of shapes and sizes, the plain felts are decorated with chain-stitched embroidered patterns inspired by the flora of Kashmir (Mir &Ain, 2010). These rugs were both beautiful and inexpensive (Wakhlu, 1990: 73) and continue to be produced by a series of processes executed by a number of artisans who are identified by the tasks executed by them. The *namdagurs* are identified as the felt makers. The felt base is prepared using a manual wet felting process which results in matting, pressing and fusing fibres together through friction, stimulated and lubricated by moisture using soapy water (Mir &Ain, 2010), the *naqash* designs the *namdah* and transfers the design on the felt base with the help of laundry blue/ carbon black and needle punched tracing sheets for white *namdahs* and clay paste printing for coloured *namdahs*, a group of *jaladooj* executes the embroidery while the *daubi* washes and finishes the rug. They are used as bed rugs, floor rugs and horse cloths. Further, Kashmir had a large trade in white and coloured felts richly embroidered in woollen chain stitch using coloured *pashm*, the value determined by the quality of material and size of the chain stitch. The increasing demand and popularity of *namdahs* induced carpet manufacturers to open

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special branches for managing this important new trade (Watt, 1903: 341, 393-394). Fig. 1.4 illustrates the different communities of artisans engaged in *namdah* production; the task executed by them creating the resultant identity of the contributing crafts people.

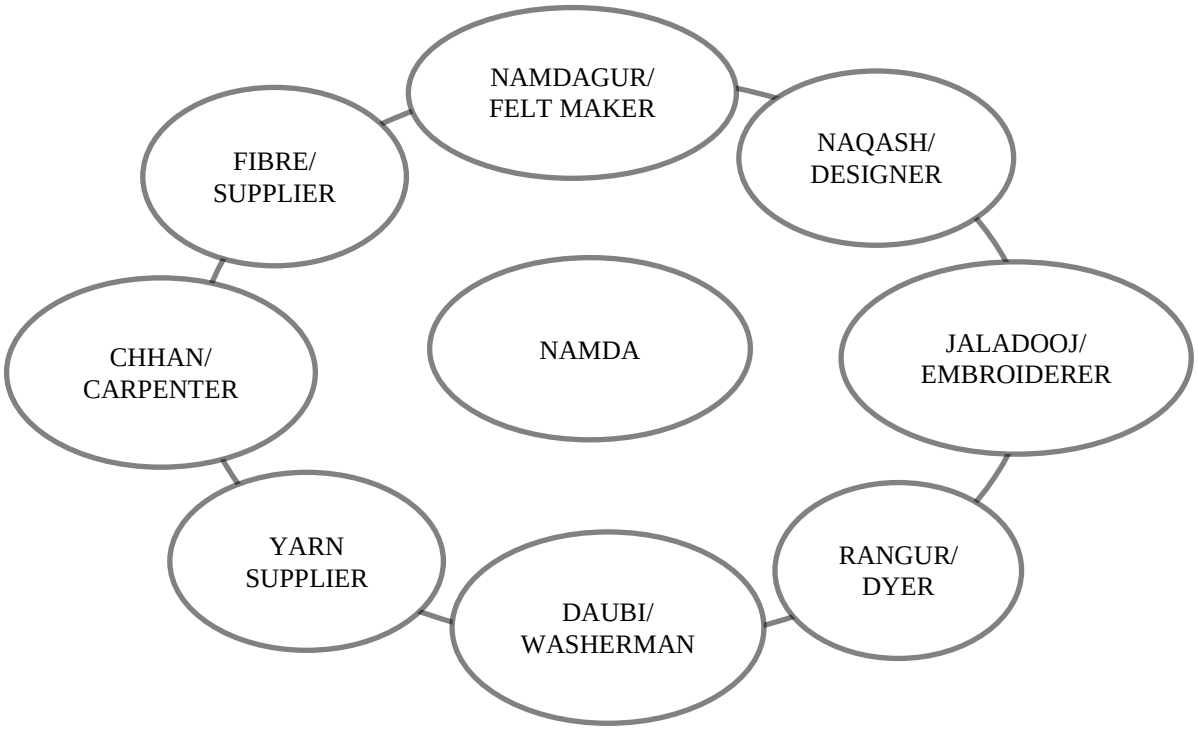

Fig.1.4. Communities contributing to *namdah* production

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Fig.1.5. *Namdah*- Cutwork

Source: Promil Pande, Srinagar 2018

Gabba- The *gabba* is a unique type of floor covering which is prepared from old woollen blankets in a variety of forms and designs. According to legend, the origin of the *gabba* art is attributed to a poor tailor named Lasya Tota living in Anantnag who stitched some worn out pieces of coloured *pattu* together to form a floor cloth. Its success laid the foundation of this industry (Akhtar, 2017:323-325). Another story traces the origin to a refugee from Kabul named Abdur Rahman who prepared an embroidered saddle-piece for his host Kamal Bat of Ratson village near Tral, South east of Avantipor (Sufi, 2015). It was under the patronage of Maharaja Ranbir Singh however, that the *gabba* industry received a fillip when he invited the experts

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Muhammad Bat, Jamaal Bat, Rasul Magre and Nur Shaikh, to Srinagar to prepare *shamianas*, *qanats* and *gabbas* for state use. In addition, the use of *banat* or broadcloth, instead of old *lois*, improved the value and appearance of the *gabba* immensely. The work is mainly localised at Anantnag however printed *gabbas* are a speciality of Baramulla (Sufi, 2015:609). The Gabbas are made in a variety of ways such as applique, embroidery, combination of both applique and embroidery and printing. The *Dal-Guldar* is a popular design with a circular star in the middle called the *chand*, the designs are inspired from natural scenery, animal and insect life and other crafts. See Figure 1.7 on the following page.

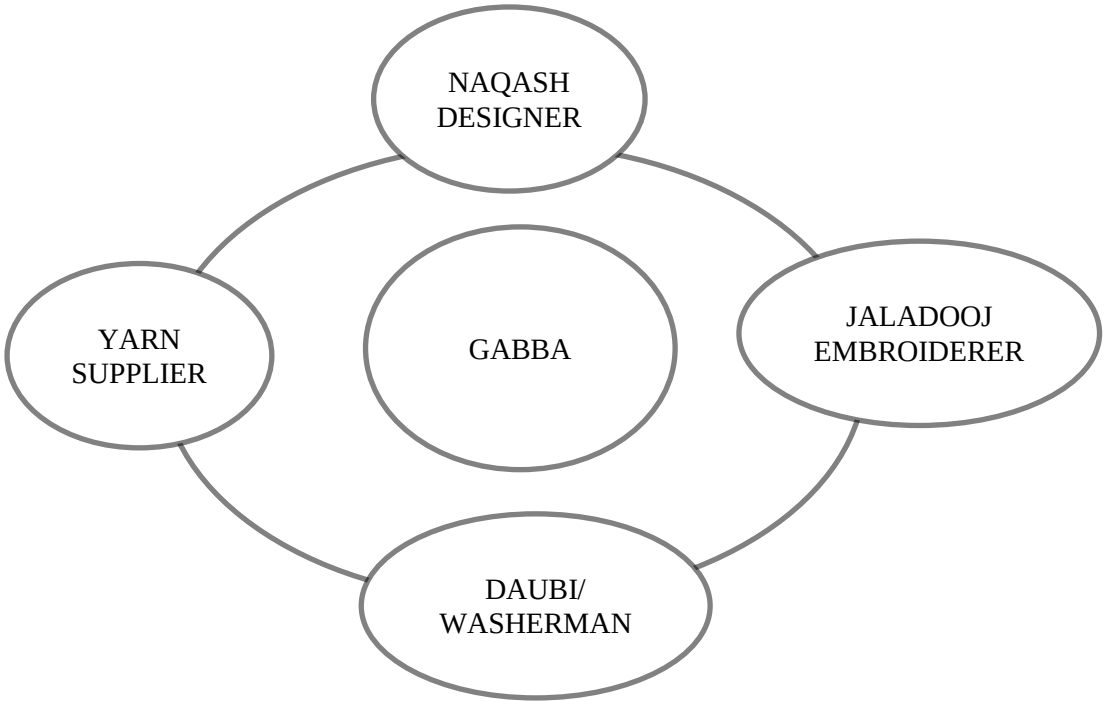

Fig.1.6. Communities contributing to *Gabba* production

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Fig.1.7 *Gabba*

Source: Promil Pande, Srinagar 2018

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Chain stitch rugs- they are a fairly recent, early twentieth century addition to the variety of floor coverings that are indigenous to the region of Kashmir. Considered as a *Kashmiri* speciality they are finely embroidered using the *ari* (hook) in the technique of the continued stitch on a hessian base. The designs for embroidery are developed by the *naqash* while the embroidery is executed on the hessian base by the *jaladooj* using two/three ply woollen or silk yarns. Further, florals and animal motifs form the main design of these rugs covering the base fabric entirely. Stitching an additional lining of gunny cloth on the reverse results in improved durability and quality reinforcing these rugs. Apart from that, other furnishing articles such as cushion covers, curtains and drapes are made in various sizes as coordinates using the same technique (Sarraf, 1987:95). Fig. 1.8 illustrates the different artisanal communities that contribute in the production of chain stitch rug making.

A note on Embroidery: The **e**mbroidery is used for surface enhancement of shawls, leather goods and floor coverings such as *namdahs, gabbas* and *chain stitch* rugs. It is one of the largest sectors of cottage crafts in the state and is executed using two different types of tools the *ari* (hooked needle) and the sewing needle. The difference in tools used by the embroiderers defines not only the craft but also identifies the craftsmen. The *ari* or hook work embroidery is called *jalakdozi* and the craftsmen *jaladoz* however for the needle embroiderer the products they embroider defines their identity. *Sozni* which is very fine and delicate needlework embroidery executed mostly on pashmina shawls is embroidered by *sozankars* while *chikandozi* refers to medium fine needle work embroidery and the embroiderers are identified as *chikandors* (Saraf, 1987:64).

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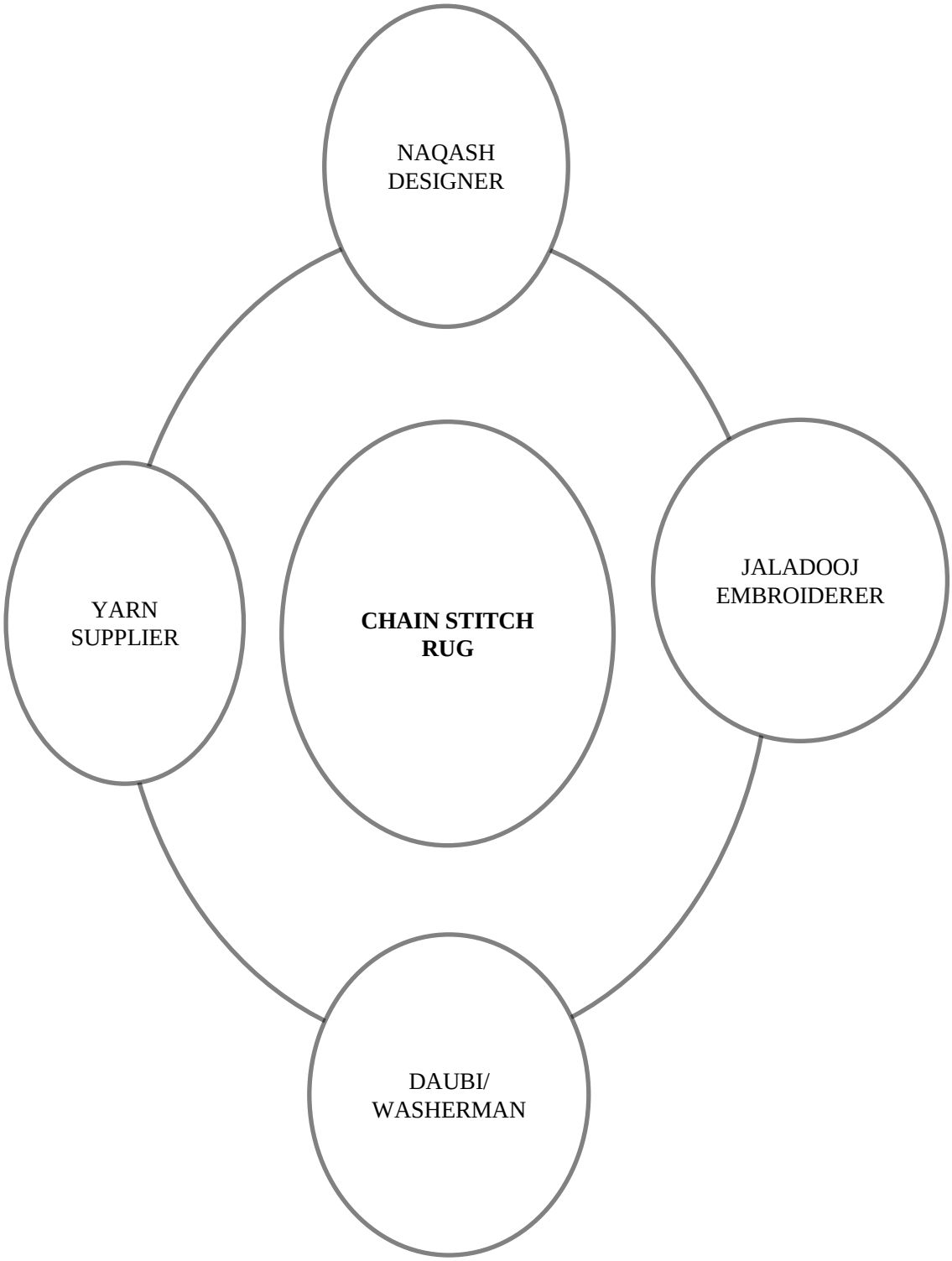

Fig.1.8. Communities contributing to *Chain stitch* production

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Fig. 1.9. *Chain stitch rug*

Source: Promil Pande, Srinagar 2018

Wagoo- *Wagoo* is a spongy reed mat used as a floor covering in dwellings and boats: both passenger *doongas* and cargo boats known as *bahats* and *wars*. All boats except the houseboats use *wagoo* mats for the thatched roof, the *doongas* used them also as enclosures for the passenger seating area creating separate sections enabled by roll-up partition screens (Pirie & Pirie, 1909:18; Jaitley, 1990:163). As the boats were the

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primary mode of transport on which all trades moved, *wagoo* weaving was a big industry providing employment to a large number of people (Lawrence, 1895: 381; Sufi, 2015: 625). These mats indigenous to Kashmir are woven in Srinagar mostly by women, on portable looms by fixing wooden pegs into the earth in open spaces surrounding their homes. The *wagoo* is woven to form a thick pliable mat by interlacing *peanch (*reed mace) in the weft, with *patij* (rope made with grass from paddy residue, wound around the toe and twisted) used as the warp. The mats are woven of only *patij* also, over which a mattress or sheet is laid (Saraf, 1987:170). The *wagoo i*s usually two meters long and one and a half meters wide; however, it can be adjusted according to customer's requirement (Jaitley, 1990:157). The antiquity of the craft is attributed mainly to the impressions of mat weaving on pottery excavated at Burzahom, and Kanishkapura (Jaitley, 1990:155; Mani, 2006: 234). The reed mace utilized for mats grows in marshy areas, this industry is mostly localised near Rainawari and its vicinity (Saraf, 1987:168-70). In previous times, the availability of reed mace around Mir Behri Dal, Saida Kadal and Anchar Lake resulted in the increased concentration of weaving communities in these areas engaged in producing the environmentally friendly *wagoo* (Ashraf, 2016). Jaitley (1990:169) and Sufi (2015:625) noted that the best mat makers are from Lasjan, a village south of Srinagar. Essentially, the *wagoo* mat was an intrinsic part of the life of the common man of Kashmir and was used in every Kashmiri household (Jaitley, 1990:157). However, in recent years it has been replaced in *Kashmiri* households by acrylic blankets and ethylene vinyl acetate foam sheets, resulting in a decline in the demand of *wagoo* mats. Subsequently, with no demand and profits going down, artisans are giving up the craft for more lucrative work (Sarraf, 1987:168-170; Khan, 2007: 45; Ashraf, 2016). Fig. 1.8 illustrates the different artisanal communities that contribute in the production of *wagoo* making.

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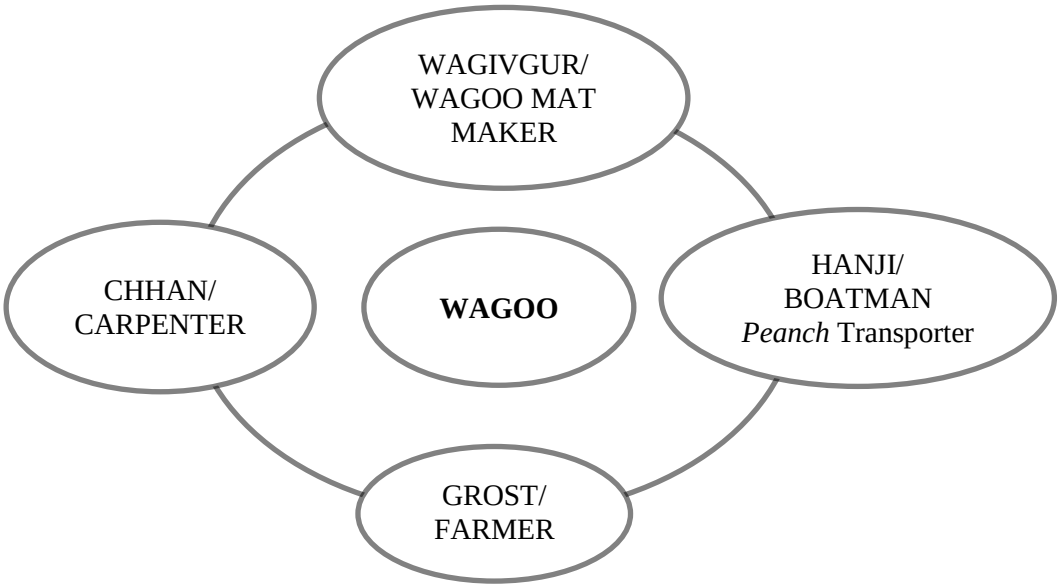

Fig.1.8. Communities contributing to *Wagoo* production

Fig.1.9 Wagoo mat

Source: Promil Pande, Srinagar 2015

Concluding Remarks

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In spite of the potential contribution and value that *Kashmiri* artisanal communities offer to the socio-economic development and progress of Kashmir, there are uncertain issues and challenges that are not promptly obvious. This paper presented the cultural context for understanding floor covering produced in Kashmir through undertaking a rigorous historical review of the craft practices. It has sought insights into the geographical aspect of Kashmir and the history of craft practices in the region, highlighting the variety of floor coverings produced and the nature of external influences. It emphasizes the long-standing traditions and their unique approaches of design and production assisting to inform the research questions by understanding the impact and effect of patronage, region, its artisanal communities and their role in traditional craft practices. The scope and limitation of this research has been that the study is limited to *kaleens, namdahs* and *wagoo* mats.

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