

An Insight into the Traditional Namda Craft of India

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ABSTRACT

Indian handicraft has been admired world over for its exquisite craftsmanship, Namda craft is one of them. It is handmade felted woolen decorative floor covering. The origin of Namda craft dates back to 500B.C. In India it is being practiced in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. There is not much difference in Namdas of Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. So for this paper only Namdas from three states have been taken. Amongst all the Kashmiri Namda are very popular worldwide, Namda of Rajasthan are also popular to some extent whereas, the Gujarat Namda are popular amongst very lesser people. The study was undertaken with the objective to gain insight of the Namda craft practiced in different parts of India and find out the difference between the Namdas of different states with respect to material, method, motifs and products for each states. The findings of the study ideate that even though it is known by Namda in all three states but they differ with respects to techniques used, motifs, products, popularity, market and marketing.

Keywords- Felting, *Namda*, nonwoven sheets.

INTRODUCTION

Namda is a local term used for traditional handcrafted felted floor covering, made out of coarse variety of wool. It is made by felting the wool fibres rather than weaving it. According to Harvey- In older days it was used as the most efficient of insulating fabrics against both heat and cold. Although it has low tensile strength, secured over a self-supporting structure it withstand the fiercest gale and give excellent protection against the advert climate.[3]

The evidences for Namda in India go back to late 4th century B.C. from Sindh which is part of Pakistan now.[7] It is said that in India a person named “*Nubi*” created the first felted woolen fabric to protect horse of Emperor Akbar from cold. According to this legend, the Mughal Emperor Akbar (who was known for his kindness towards animal also) once during winter season felt that his horse was suffering by biting cold. He ordered his exchequer to arrange for the protection of his horse who went and spread the word of Emperor all over his reign. A wise man “*Nubi*” who was travelling from East (Iran and Turkey) offered his suggestion for felt covering. He manufactured the felt himself using the locally available wool and embroidered it in multi coloured beautiful design. The felted piece very intricately decorated with craftsmanship impressed the emperor. The above product was given the title of “*Namda*” after the name of its creator Nubi.

Thus the craft is also said to have traveled from Iran and Turkey to India. It is also termed as woolen drugget which means a coarser fabric. The craft of Namda making is followed in four states Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, some parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat in India. The technique followed in each state is its own traditional technique.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to find out the similarities and difference in Namda craft practiced in four states of India.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research paper is descriptive and analytical, based on the secondary data. The required secondary data has been collected from various research papers, journals, books internet, government data etc. The data has also been taken from various other sources such as newsletters, reports, magazines, newspaper, internet, to understand the technique and differences in the Namda craft of various states practicing Namda in India.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Namda Craft of Kashmir-

Though it is claimed that in India Namdas are originally from the state of Jammu and Kashmir it was found that during 19th century this craft was imported to Kashmir by the way of Leh.[7] It is also said that it has travelled here (Kashmir) from Iran & Turkey. It has traveled to Kashmir from Iran along with a Sufi Saint, 'Amir Kabi Shah-e-hamdan' many centuries ago (600yrs to 700yrs). The Islamic community of Kashmir practiced this craft. Today it is well flourished and known world-wide. The vivid hues, attractive designs and its insulation property make its product unique (fig. 2-4).

At present manufactures are in: Anantnag, Rainawari, Srinagar and Baramula. A low quality wool is mixed with a small quality cotton to make Namda in Anantnag, Rainwari and Baramula.

In Srinagar, Cotton is added in varying ratios to increase the thickness and whiteness of the end product. It can ease the embroidery were which is done with an ari in floral patterns or in compositions containing stylized animal as a surface ornamentation.

Raw Material: –

The sheep wool '*kat yer*' required for this technique is locally bought from *Badgam*, *Pahalgam* (inhabited by shepherds) and *Naushera* (where the Government House for wool distribution is stationed). Namdas made from Kullu kangada wool are known to have more strength. '*Marino*' is another quality of fine wool, imported from Australia in modern days.

Namda (felted woolen floor covering) is made by two different techniques: – In type first, woolen fiber is felted by wetting (using water), beating and rolling to make the structure. Then the surface ornamentation is done with embroidery. Formerly, woolen yarns were used for embroidery, but now they have switched to acrylic yarns. It is due to availability, cost strength and colors of the yarn.

In type second, practiced in villages, a geometrical pattern is first formed with strips cut from soft felted Namda and then re-felting is done with loose wool fibers, thus forming a structured pattern of beautiful floral, folksy and geometrical designs. Thus the pattern is formed by strips of felted wool.

Namdas are generally available in 3 x 5 feet and 6 x 4 feet sizes. The price of a Namda depends on: (i) the quality of the wool used, (ii) the designs and (iii) the size.

Manufacturing: –

1. After procuring fibers, carding is done. Carding is the process by which impurities in the wool are removed and a uniform & consistent thickness is achieved Earlier the process was carried out using hand operated wooden tool called as **'dhooin' in the local language**. Primarily it is a bowstring and stub kind of arrangement that allows the fibers to disperse into thin flakes, as the stub struck against the string near the heap of sheared wool. The wooden system is suspended from ceiling on a curved bamboo section to allow carding. It's a trick of a long curved stick in one hand and the carded wool in another and how the craftsman juggles with it to form a cloud of wool with even density. Today, however most of the carding is carried out in mills. **'Bimla woolen' mill, a government initiative to facilitate the craftsmen with carded wool was established in Srinagar city 40 years ago.**
2. For making Namda design lines are marked on the base mat. The carded woolen flakes are evenly spread all over it. The expert skill is used to place and relocate the wool over the marked lines on the base mat.
3. After a layer is spread, water is sprinkled homogeneously and pressed with a tool known as **'pinjra'** (woven willow wicker). For **a carpet that is 2kg in weight, 2 liters of water is required**. In winter warm water is used. Consequently the intermediate woolen layer is laid and pressed into uniformity. The ultimate layer is eventually placed, wetted and beaten till consistent.
4. The sandwich of above wet wool is **then rolled tightly from one end with the jute mat and the anchor metal rod. Muscular pressure is applied over a period to keep rolling it tighter and squeeze the water out**. The craftsmen use their feet to apply pressure on the carpet. The roll is eventually opened and checked for inter-layer cohesion, lumps and evenness. **A special soap with increased caustic content is then poured over the Namda.**It is rolled once again with hands and without the mat. The carpet so obtained is known as a **'kachcha namda'**, the strength of which is further increased by binding the edges³. Since this work requires great muscular strength, it is usually carried out in winters. **The craftsmen shift to relatively cooler places like Kargil during summers.**

These Namdas are sold through stalls at 'Craft Bazaars'. Although the craftsmen have no overseas exposure, local bodies set up to uplift the state of the craft sector in Kashmir, hold regular workshops to train craftsperson with contemporize designs and patterns so that products become marketable to a larger section of consumers.[4]

Integrated Design & Technical Development Project for the *Namda* craft of Kashmir is organized by the Craft Development Institute, Srinagar and sponsored by the Development Commissioner-(Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India, New Delhi.[2]

Namda Craft of Rajasthan-

The craft of Namda making is not native, to Rajasthan. It has come from distant land of Iran actively promoted in the state under the patronage of Mughal monarchs and the Rajput Royals.

Unique design with floral patterns provide the themes for these masterpieces. Flower and leaves, buds and fruits are the essence of the design.

Centres producing Namda in Rajasthan are Bikaner, Malpura and Tonk. In this state, only wool is used for making Namda unlike Kashmir and Himachal pardesh where cotton is mixed with wool. The Namda in Bikaner and Malpura is known as *Chakma* and *Ghogi* Namda. The Namda of Tonk are famous for appliqued patterns which is supported by embroidery. Here number of craftsperson is involved in this.

Namda craft started in Tonk during period of Mughals. After which the occupation was carried out as hereditary business. Though the craft is unique in itself, its valuation is restricted by various reasons which are somewhat responsible for its present day deplorable conditions.[1] Major ones are the coarseness of the fibre, marketing strategies, aesthetic appeal(fig. 7-9).

Raw material: –

Raw wool is purchased from Kekri (for coarse quality) and Jodhpur (for finer quality) in Rajasthan which are wool trading wholesale markets. The quantity of raw wool is decided in accordance to the size and weight of the felt. The wool is selected and blended according to the characteristics required in the felt.[1]

Manufacturing: –

Traditional manufacturing process of Namda making in Rajasthan consist of making felt sheets, for which the raw wool is first cleaned and dyed with acid dyes. The dyed wool are spread to form an even layer. Water is sprinkled over the layer and then rolling is done with constant pressure by hand and then dried.

After drying the prepared sheet it is cut in the required design and then is felted again with wool to create pattern.

Here all the manual work craftsmen do in their own premises and carding & hardening or milling with machines is done by the support of the factories providing the required mechanical services.

The products made are floor coverings of different sizes like 5'x3', 6'x4' is the most popular, 5'x7', 6'x9' and any other sizes as per the order.

Apart from floor covering, some or other items like wall hangings, mats, bags, purse, footwear, magazine covers are made. No specific reasons can be attributed for the use of colours or design.

Namda Felt making has been traditional handcrafted art for the craftsmen families in Tonk and all of them know the process of making Namda manually. Only the ones who could purchase machines and expand their production base have industrial units. But present day products made on machines cannot compete with handmade Namda.

There are agencies working for craft revival and betterment of craftsmen's, marketing and financial assistance, raw material supply etc. These agencies use various types of popular media to convey their programs and schemes and encourage craftsmen to take benefits.

Namda Craft of Gujarat-

In Gujarat, Namda, the traditional floor covering is used during get-togethers, repasts, rituals and other social functions. It is known that the craftsmen of Kutch eventually adopted Namda craft from their Kashmiri counterparts, and hence the word Namda evidently has an Urdu origin. Here Namdas are used as floor coverings, animal trappings and decorative hangings. Felt products are made from coarse wool with or without mixture of other animal fibre, vegetable fibre or man-made fibre. Over a period of time pure wool has given way to waste wool in making of Namda (fig. 10-12).

In Gujarat the art of Namda making is practised only in two villages in Kutch region: Mundar and Gagodar. Nakatrana is another village where this craft was practiced earlier but now it is not done.

The craftsmen of Kutch who earlier used to fabricate animal saddles for royal families and patrons have now

started utilizing the technique for making rugs, spreads and other life style accessories.

Raw material

The natural colour of wool is used with the other colours obtained by dyeing raw wool with acid dye.

Manufacturing

In Gujarat, the process is completely hand made without the use of any tools or equipment. The process here starts with collecting the raw wool from the local area which is then cleaned and are roved over an earthen pot with a constant pressure of hand to form strands. These strands are used for making outline over a wet cotton sheet. The strands are also wet thoroughly while forming the outline.

Then the outline of a motif is done and the gaps are filled with different colours of wool. After filling in the outlines the rest of the area is filled with raw wool in such a way that no area is left blank. Another layer of white wool is spread on the top of the layer which forms the wrong side of the product. The water is sprinkled over it and abrasion is applied with palm with constant pressure. After which soap solution containing extra paraffin and caustic is applied over it and washed.



Fig.1 Namda Manufacturing process of different states

The products are designed and manufactured accordingly to the design. No yardage are manufacture as not cutting is involved, there is zero wastes produced during manufacturing which is the requirement of the day. The market for Namda craft is located primarily in Saurashtra. After studying the Namdas from different

states it was found that there is characteristic difference in all with respect to its manufacturing process.

Wool is used as raw material in each state. In Kashmir floral motifs, in Rajasthan geometrical motifs and combination of bird, floral and geometrical motif was used in Gujarat.

CONCLUSION

From the study following conclusion can be drawn. Namda is a unique craft following different manufacturing techniques in different states of India. The process of Namda making in Kashmir is by making plain felted sheets on which surface ornamentation is done by chain stitch embroidery. In Himachal Pradesh produce are similar as done in Kashmir but there is less richness in embroidery. In Rajasthan the felted sheets are made, then its strips are cut and felt appliqué is done. Whereas, in Gujarat it is in-lay pattern in which the motif is created directly during the felting process.

The technique used for making the craft even today is the same as done traditionally. The craft requires more craftsmanship, hard work and skill.

Namda is craft having good craftsmanship. It is already been revived in Kashmir, is in the line of reviving in Rajasthan whereas, it needs to be revived in Gujarat.

Gujarat is a hub of handloom and handicrafts which is very popular all over the world. But despite of this Namda is one of the craft which is not known among the common people. There is no noticeable change recorded in Namda making technique of Gujarat. The practitioner uses the same old age tools which should be replaced by some modern tools to increase the efficiency of craftsmen and also the quality of the product. New researches and development of product need to be done for getting better product in the market which in turn will add to the popularity of the craft.

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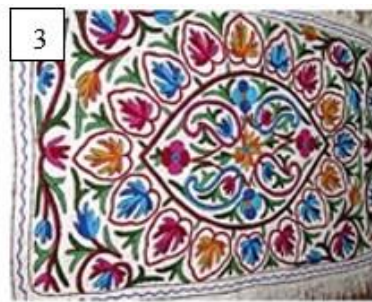


Fig. 2-4, Kashmiri Namda's



Fig. 5-6, Namda,s from Himachal Pradesh

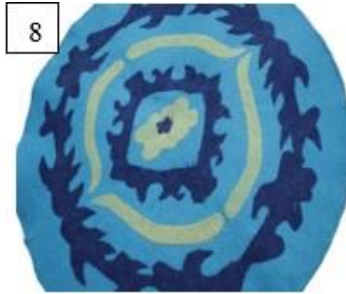


Fig. 7-9, Patched work Namda's of Rajasthan



Fig. 10- 12 In-lay pattern of Namda's from Gujarat