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Exuberant Ornamental Rugs of Gakhkhar

Abstract

Geometric and decorative elements in hand knitted craft is a long established tradition of Gakhkhar Mandi in district Gujranwala. Rug making and its colorful weaving is a rich tradition which is deeply embedded within the culture of this area. Ghakhkhar was once known for its hand-woven rugs called 'darrī. These quality rugs were not only sold all over Pakistan but they were also exported to many other countries. In 1980s and 1990s, there were hundreds of hand looms and factories producing these fine rugs. Numerous geometric; striped, abstract and denaturalized patterns have been depicted on rugs and darrīs of Gakhkhar. These geometric designs include different patterns like; hexagon, triangles, star patterns (a chief motif) consist of six and eight points, polygon, octagon and square shapes and anionic quality of design patterns make this artifact strongly associated with Islamic art. Decorative elements of rugs in Gakhkhar Mandi, contribute tremendously in the study of geometric designs as well as its importance as a unique heritage.

Key words: geometric design, rug, craft, *darrī*

Literature Review and Discussion

Handmade rugs of Gakhkhar is the exacting craft, with its simplify design reflecting the culture of Punjab and tradition. These craftsmen are contributing their skill to their economic and public strengthen. The paper has been focused on investigating the stability of the antique and antecedent cultural product with historical, conventional, literary, and ideological perception.

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Figure 1. Gakhkhar *darrī* Market, Photographed by author.

It is an interesting fact that the people of this small town are producing this beautiful craft on smaller scale which reaches to a wider extent nationally and internationally (Figure 1). Gakhkhar is located towards northeastern area of Punjab and situated near Gujrānwālā in Tehsīl Wazīrābād. “The word, Gakhkhar is associated with a tribe called Gakhars who lived at the north bank of the Jhelum River, geographically known as the Pothohar Plateau. The Gakhars were fierce warriors and fought against many rulers in the past including Shīr Shāh Sūrī who built the Rohtas Fort near the River Jhelum to stop the opposition of Gakhars against his rule. After his death, the Mughal emperor Humāyūn made an agreement with Gakhars that if Humāyūn is victorious and occupies Delhi, he would grant them the region ten miles south of the River Chenab. Therefore, after his success, Gakhars established their state called Ghakhkhar. Borders of this state were recognized by building a post which can still be seen near Ghakhkhar Grid Station.”¹

Gakhkhar was attacked three times by Maharaja Ranjīt Singh.² The city houses many villages around it and it is renowned for handmade cotton products like carpets, *darrī*, rug and *khais* etc. Gakhkhar is producing beautiful and highly demanding craft of the Punjab. The craftsmen are preparing this cultural and traditional craft with a great zeal for long ago and getting financial support in the field of craft.

A small piece of *darrī* is called a rug that varies in dimension and shape. It can be used for interior decoration like table and floor mats, *dīvān*'s cover and hassock. *Darrī*; a pure wool and cotton product has been used as a double purpose rug; both for floor and bed-stead covering. In the culture of Punjab, *darrī* has been called by different names. The most common name is *chitāī*, *dub*, and *šaff*. *Šaff* is woven with date palms, reed mat and dry grass. Now, it is replaced by mechanic plastic *darrī*, which is mostly being used for traveling especially for Hājīs (Pilgrim).³

In hot weather, it has been effective for cool effect as Punjab has a warm climate. According to a very old eastern tradition of marriage, at set of six pieces of darrī are reserved for dowry. Usually, a *darrī* is positioned beneath bedding as a mattress spread over the bedstead or so called *chārpāī*. Designed damask (*khaisi*) with floral patterns in block printing is used to increase the colourful look with a pillow full of embroidery and a black and white checker designed *khaisi* is used as a comforter.⁴

According to nineteenth century records, “in the north of India, the *dhurri* has been referred to as *dari* or *satrangi* and in the south of India, it has been known as a *jamakhani*.”⁵ The word *satranji* has been derived from the Persian word *shātranj* that is a name of a game, chess. *Satranji* in Hindi language stands for seven and Persian word *rang* indicates colour.⁶ Away from Gakhkhar, the skilled craft is being manufactured in many districts of the Punjab, especially Bahawalpur, Vihāri, and Būre wāla. The Punjab small industry and jail projects are also play an important role for this purpose and take part in production of valuable craft in the modern society.

Historical Background

The art and craft of weaving is connected to textile in which a number of forms and styles are represented like geometrical designs, figure depiction, flowers and arabesques are represented. Antiquity of a rug is measured by the length of its period. It is being used for many years. The first use of it was focused to wear animals’ hides to cover the body and secondly, it had been used for floor coverings. Those were woven reed mats, simple in design and striped patterns were used inspired from the prototype of tiger’s skin.⁷



Figure 3. A Night Celebrating the Prophet’s Birthday, Agra, 16th century (Nada, *Dhurries*, 13).

As for the many paintings of darrīs, one of the very earliest depictions of a stripped darrī is to be seen in a miniature of sixteenth century from *A Night Celebrating the Prophet's Birthday*, Agra, now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, shows steps covered with stripped mat or a darrī⁸ (figure 3) right below.

In sixteenth century, most well-liked visual depictions were focused on motifs like flora and fauna and stripped patterns of Greek 'o' Roman and Egypt were commonly used. In early sixteenth century, beautiful rugs of finest quality were produced in Turkey and Persia. A lot of industries were raised to set economically as it was a money-making business. Turkish convention followed Seljūks and prepared angular patterns.”⁹ Persian rug was called Caucasian, highly bedecked with various designs of animal, pot, backyard, flower-patterned and medallion. A rug had been a symbol of royal adornment and offering to a king as a souvenir that shows tribute and affection, woven in geometric designs.¹⁰ Currently this product is only being used for commercial deliberation due to non-availability of court patronage.

Pakistan is famous for weaving craft. Normally, whole family members are engaged in a same line of work to their social uplift. Bahawalpur and Multan are famous to produce darrīs. A weaver at Gakhkhar Mandi confirms the point and explains that he is attached with the craft since the age of 18, when he started to work on and still doing in the age of 56 years according to the pattern of his father.

Technique and Material

Hand- made craft is woven on a wooden hand loom which is horizontally laid on the ground, making it manageable (figure 4). A number of rows of knots are connected vertically. To control the connection of the rows on a loom the thread is tightly stretched (figure 4).



Figure 4. A set up of hand loom (Photographed by author).

Mostly traditional designs are being woven on rugs. In ancient times, the designing was practiced by the artists in the court and those artists drew the prototype on paper. Graph paper was used for knots setting. In Gakhkhar, the

craftsman works according to the conventional model and follow the decorative designs on looms with a number of different widths and lengths. A rug is considered imperfect “because only Allah can create perfection is a myth”¹¹. The craft of Gakhkhar city is prepared on both hand-loom and machine-loom locally called *khaddīs*. But critically analyzing by industrial masters it is thought that hand-loom *khaddī* is far better in appearance and quality than comparing to the machine made rugs.

The basic design is created with a shuttle which wraps the thread across the *tānā*¹² and wool comes back on itself to back in its direction that is called *bānā* making proportioned repetition of knots. After that end of the row, the new starts from the same end by turning the wool. Finally, the wool is cut and brought to an end braiding to form the fringe on both sides. Mostly these looms are positioned in a big hall room on the uneven and non-cemented floor. The craftsman has to stand in the digger area nearby the loom adjusted according to his body level (figure 5).



Figure 5. A craftsman standing in a digger area in front of the loom (Photographed by author).

Yarn is an important part of the handmade rug. In the past, yarn, locally called ‘*sūt*’ had been obtained from a white breeding out sticky liquid from the stem of the cactus plant. The sticky liquid was twisted in to strings and then it was finally spun on spinning wheel that is locally known as *ḥarkhā* (figure 6). The following procedure required enough time to complete and after a long time the cotton got ready to weave, with fervor and warmth. Finally ready product was reserved safe for dowry.”¹³

Lahore and Faisalabad are the major cities for wool availability. Reused wool is also used for *darrī* as well as well strand; ‘*tānā pīta*’ is recommended for *jā’i-namāz*, prayer rug.



Figure 6. Wool spun on spinning wheel by a woman (Photographed by author).

Colour and its combination

Due to already dyed wool, the fast and pure colours are chosen the product to be ready. Sometimes the selection of colours depends on the customer's order. Mostly Striped patterns are used that is a long established design.¹⁴ The lines are separated by the colour and looks more fascinating and eye catching due to colour combination. The hand – knotted art and craft is a game of several and glorious colours that reflect the continuity of tradition. Folk art is obviously colourful and admired aesthetically. Colours have two meanings; universal and traditional. Colours differ from culture and correspond to feelings, people, country and traditions. Mostly, colours have been linked to culture positively.

In the culture of Punjab, brilliant and numerous colours are preferred to apply in cultural crafts. Usually gloomy shades, especially combinations of green, pink, and yellow are preferred. Yellow and orange is mainly dominating colour in Gakhkhar. Yellow symbolizes splendor and recommended imperial correlation. In china, emperors also had been wearing gold or yellow. Orange colour is suggested for sympathy. These colours were considered their possessions and were used according to their demands.¹⁵

Red colour symbolizes delight and pleasure and conventionally it represents life. Red is used with other colours to make a contrast in stripes and aesthetically looks stunning. Blue colour scheme has been often seen in Muslim architectural designs that are a symptom of spiritual joy. Following the cool nature the blue is referred in stripes of *darrī*. As a result of mixing colour the description of nature and culture is embraced.

Geometric designs and symbols

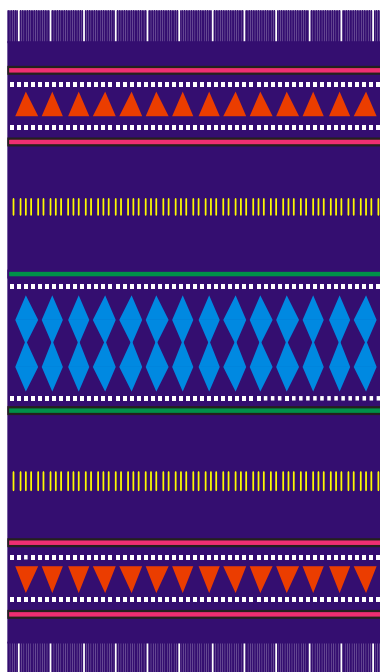
The hand–knotted craft has been a vast field in the history but a number of designs vary according to the region. The geometric and striped designs have been sustaining from the past with its sturdily form. The tradition has been strappingly following by the craftsmen without any change in the pattern but

distinct in style. The seventeenth century's miniature paintings depict striped pattern on a floor covering. Mostly designs used in the craft of Gakhkhar are geometric, abstract, denaturalized and schematized.

Among the most popular rugs, together with the striped, are those with geometric designs. The restrained use of colour and the balanced, unobtrusive composition explain their universal attraction. Geometric patterns form an important and integral part of both the Hindu and the Muslim artistic repertoire. It is the fundamental vocabulary of rug designs.¹⁶ After the stripe, geometric motifs are easiest to learn in terms of technique, since they are based on counting warps and adding or removing wefts.

Shapes and Sizes

Normally rugs are prepared in rectangular shape. A stunning design on a rug is woven in the centre in dark colour to create attraction. The whole pattern of stripes is symmetrically repeated forming triangular pattern. Its common size is 106.68cm × 198.12cm. Full size *darrī* for bed-stead spreading is 213.36×121.92cm, 152.4×243.84cm and 182.88 × 274.32cm. A mattress *darrī* is 182.88 × 121.92cm in size.



Finding Design 1. One of the basic layouts of a *Darrī* .

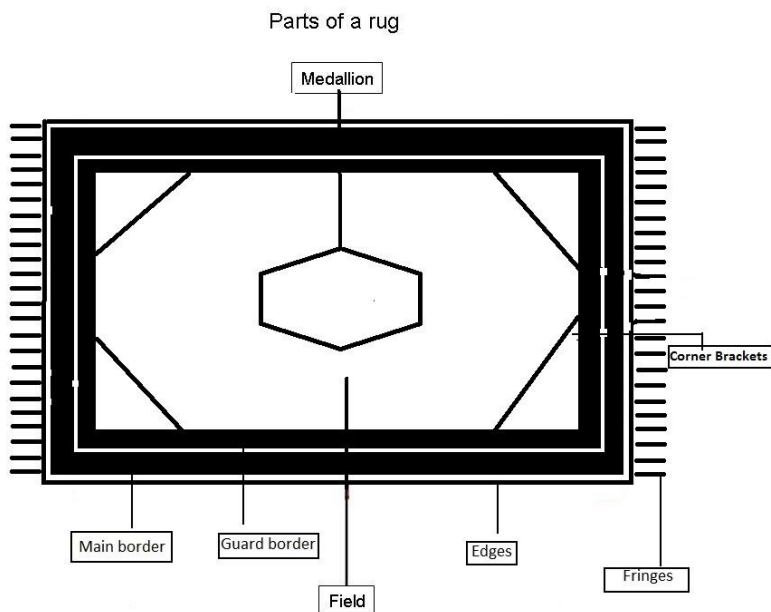


Figure Drawing 1. Ornamental basic parts of a rug

Basically rugs are woven in rectangular shape and sometimes a diamond shape is proposed in the field area and designed on both sides of the article. The undersized rugs are of 30.48×30.48cm, 30.48×60.9cm, 30.48×91.44cm, 30.48×152.4cm, onwards. Foot mat / door mat rug size is 76.2cm×45.72cm. Further sizes vary as: 60.96×91.44cm, 76.2×121.92cm, 30.48×152.4cm, 182.88×121.92cm, etc. Rug used as a runner are 76.2×304.8cm and 76.2×365.76cm.

The fundamental design of a rug is based on straight up, horizontal, and diagonal lines. Curved lines cannot be formed, because rugs are made on *khaddī* corresponding vertically and horizontally design of a rug. Today designs are simplified and minimized in design. By and large, a single motif is composed centrally with simple border.

A miniature lengthened cross pattern has been centrally composed on the rug in white colour against the blue background (figure 7).

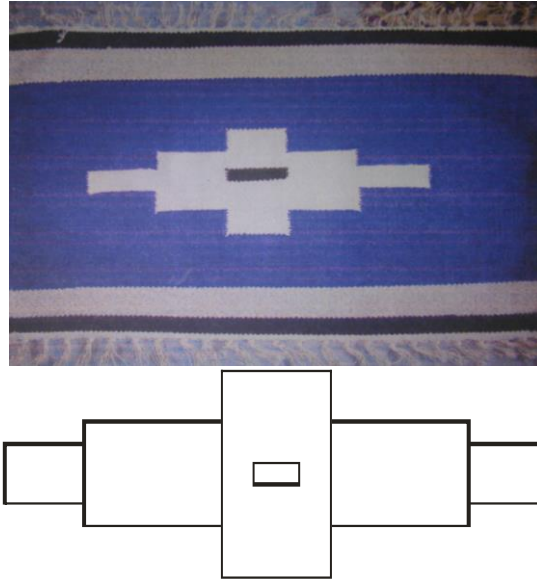


Figure 7. Elongated cross on a rug (drawing by author).

A polygonal design refers to the “princess” which has been derived from Bukhara. The connecting rows of gulls or a polygon, that is a Persian word for ‘flower’. It was derived from the popular lotus blossom motif, and the central medallion could be perceived as a variation on the mandala (a geometric design, based on a circle inside a square with cosmic associations).

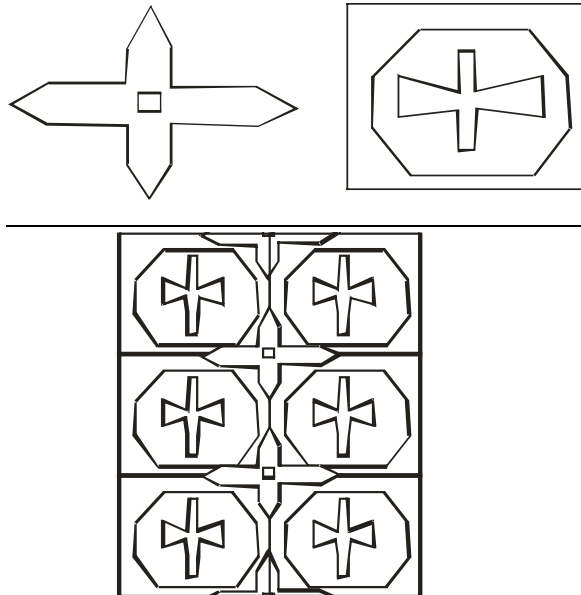


Figure drawings

a. Four Petals

b. Butterfly

c. Full Field Ground



Figure 8. Butterfly design (Photographed by author).

A simplified shape of butterfly is commonly used in the rugs of Gakhkhar. The depictions of a number of butterflies symbolize extended life (figure 8). The conventional plan of Gakhkhar is based on fully arranged field. The whole of the ground has been composed with butterflies in octagonal arrangement and framed by a square. By joining of the squares a delicate design produced is called a four petal design. Flowers symbolize happiness and logically, a butterfly lives in the flowers that enhance its fragile beauty. In the rug the pattern is more stylized and there is a greater emphasis on repetition. This rhythmic representation is found in all aspects of Mughal art. The Mughal flower-type rugs are profoundly Indian in style and inspiration.

In Asian cultures, the concept of a garden is representatively associated to heaven. Certainty, heaven or paradise is derivative of the Persian word *pairideieza* that is connected to a backyard, an enclosed space. The practice of depicting backyard can be seen in the sixteenth century carpets of Iran and got popularity not only in Kirmān but in Kurdistan also and based to a naturalistic description in India. On the other hand, Anatolia refused the approach by reason of the Sunni outlaw on imagery.¹⁷

A diamond shaped medallion has composed in center with symmetrical repetitions (figure 9). There are two types of medallion rugs. One has a never-ending, all over repeat small medallion pattern, and the other has a large geometric medallion. The repeat floral pattern motif is typically Indian, and derived from block-printed Mughal textiles depicting many flowers and plants. The circulation of European (mainly Dutch and German) herbals in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, and the passion of Emperor Jahāngīr (1605-27) for botanical drawings have contributed to the popularity and dispersal of this particular design, which is found in book illuminations, borders and architecture.¹⁸

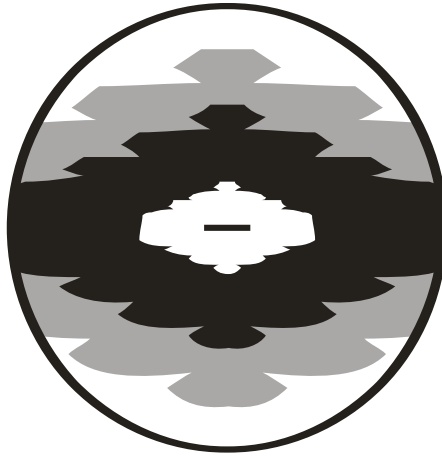


Figure 9. Medallion

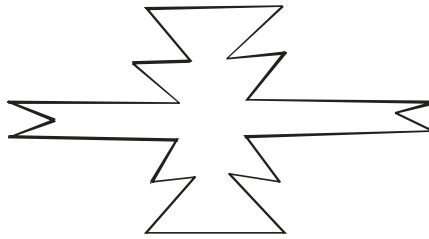


Figure Drawing e. Ribbon



Figure 10. Ribbon on a rug



Figure 11. Rug with a ribbon



Figure 12. Stepped medallion with corner brackets (Photographed by author).

A band has been placed in the middle of the rug (figure 10 and 11). A medallion that is superimposed is the representation of the Buddha with his two followers. Another form looking like a lamp has been composed with plain border (figure 12). One more piece of craft is decorated with simple corner brackets and stepped medallion with beautiful colour scheme having cream, brown, and zinc, white and shocking pink on corners.



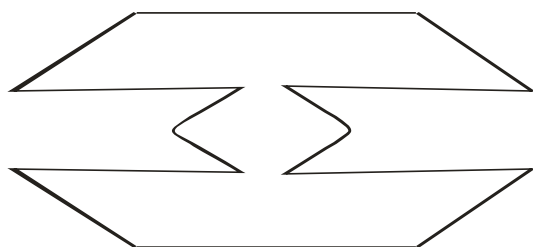


Figure 13. Lamp Pattern

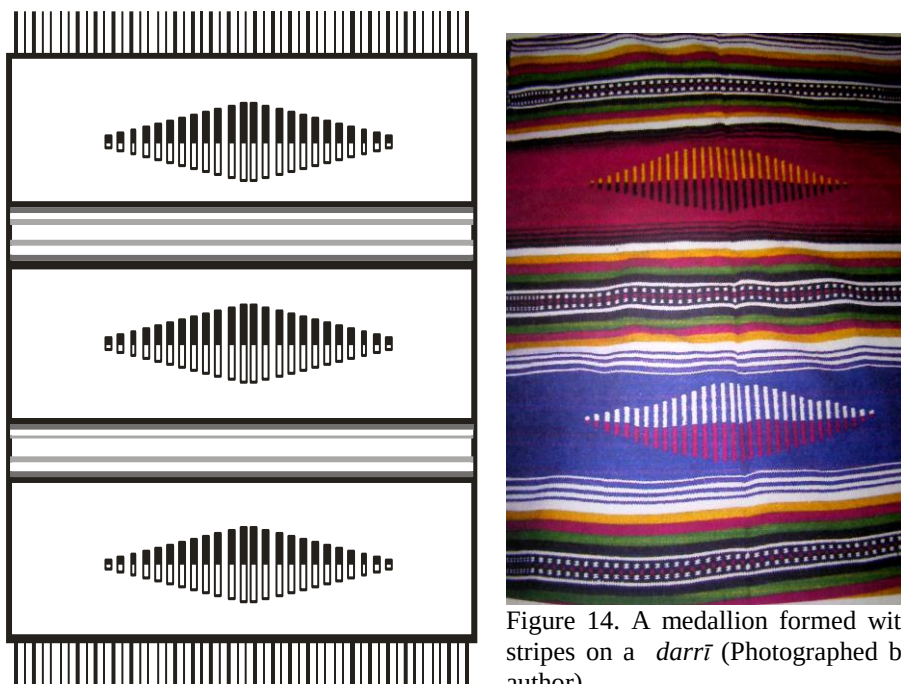


Figure 14. A medallion formed with stripes on a *darrī* (Photographed by author)

The *darrī* designs are a focal point of reflection of the longstanding motifs like square, triangular and zigzag patterns (figure 14). Some interlock patterns are discovered on the ceramic objects of the Mohenjodaro. These handicraft decorative designs demonstrate clarity and splendor in the linear appearance. The triangular forms represent the climax of a peak, taking into consideration the same as victory. Crisscross designs (figure 15) created by ‘v’ shape is locally called *bund kattrāi* design in Gakhhar. By assembling two inverted triangles that construct an hour goblet that is a symbol of time. The repeated method gradually reduces and separated the triangle.

Notes & References

¹ (Gakhhar Mandi n.d.)

² Discussion with an Industrialist: Ḥajī Muhammad Ashraf at Gakhkhar Mandi on 14 April, 2015.

³ Discussion with Naseem Akhtar, Professor at University of the Punjab Lahore, on 13 April, 2015.

⁴ Discussed with Pro. Dr. Naseem Akhtar.

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Nada Chaldecott, *Dhurries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003) 13.

⁹ Philip Bamborough, *Treasures of Islam* (Dorset: Blandford Press, xxvi), 126.

¹⁰ Ibid., 126.

¹¹ <http://www.jyrugs.com/General> Rug-Knowledge. html#36

¹² *Tānā* is locally used for warp and *bānā* is used for weft. The warp strings are the threads stretched by the weaver from top to bottom of the loom before weaving begins. In the finished rugs, the warps are thus the ‘spine’ running from end to end. A gadget on the loom creates a ‘shed’ between alternate warp strings to make it easier to pass the wefts between them. The last few inches of warp are usually left protruding at each end, forming the fringe. The basic technique is for the weaver to pass a series of weft threads through the warp strings, under and over alternate strings, then back again, alternately over and under, to create a tightly woven fabric to secure the end of the rug.

¹³ Discussed With Nasim Akhtar.

¹⁴ Discussion with Industrialist, Abid Yasin Butt at Gakhkhar Mandi.

¹⁵ Zafar, Pakistan, 51.

¹⁶ Nada Chaldecott, *Dhurries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003) 174.

¹⁷ Enza Milanese, *The Carpet: Rugs And Kilims of The World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 28.

¹⁸ Ibid., 82.