



## **Carpet Weaving Occupation in Kashmir: An Analysis of Socio-economic Conditions of Carpet Weavers of Pulwama District**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was conducted in collaboration with both the authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The carpet industry of Kashmir occupies an important place in handicrafts. The carpet industry plays a significant role in the economic development of the rural areas. Carpet weaving in Kashmir is largely practiced in the informal sector. It contributes significantly by providing employment opportunities to the rural people in Kashmir. The present paper attempts to make an in depth study of socio-economic conditions, problems and challenges of carpet weavers in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir. The study is based on both, primary and secondary data sources. The primary data is gathered through interview schedule. The study revealed that the situation of carpet weavers is not satisfactory due to low education level, health issues, low wages, lack of government support and exploitation by the middleman/master weaver.

*Keywords: Socio-economic; carpet industry; weavers; problems and challenges.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Carpet weaving is an age-old tradition and widely dispersed in many countries. The heritage of the handmade carpet traced since an earlier civilization. The carpet has shown in each civilization a very precise degree of evolution. The Russian archaeologists Rudenko discovered the first earliest carpet in 1949 from a frozen underground burial chamber at Pazyryk royal tomb in the Altai Mountains on the border of Siberia and Outer Mongolia date from about 500-400 B.C, measuring approximately five by six feet with 230 knots per square inch. Most of the researchers argue that the Pazyryk carpet perhaps comes from western or southern Persia or the Caucasus in Persia. The archaeological evidence of Western Asia revealed that there is a commercial exchange of textile products including carpets among the eastern Mediterranean and Asia from Egypt and Anatolia across Mesopotamia to Persia since 3000 B.C [1]. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century Persia became the real native land of silk or wool carpet weaving and then spread across Asia; Turkey, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and China [2].

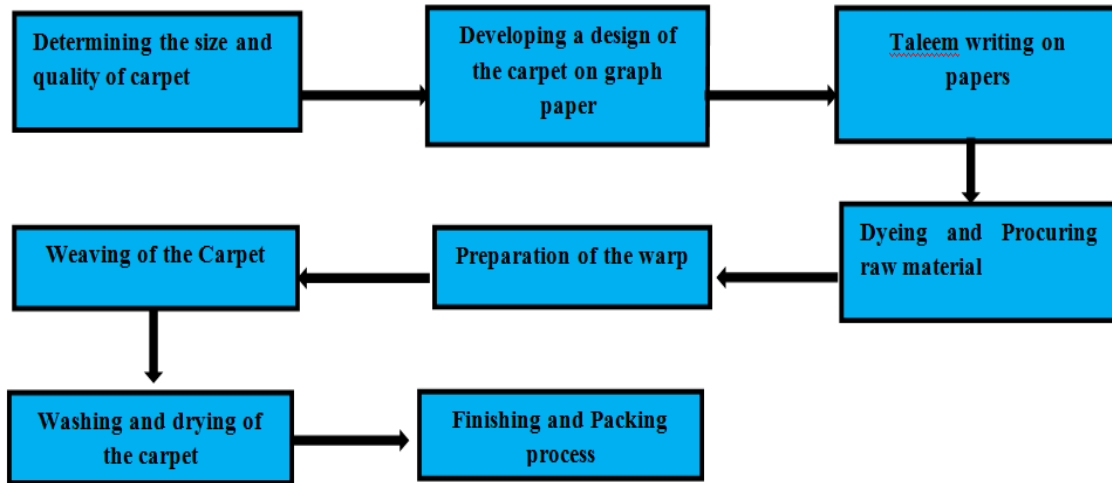
The carpet industry of India is one of the oldest industries and its roots traced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during Mughal period. The Mughal period was a golden historical era for Indian arts, craft and culture. Indian Carpet Industry is dominated by the unorganized sector of skilled and semi-skilled artisans. The carpet industry in India flourished in different parts of the country, especially in the northern states of India. Presently the major carpet belts in India are Jaipur in Rajasthan, Mirzapur, Agra, Bhadohi in Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir. The Indian hand-made carpet industry is an export-oriented industry and is a significant contributor to the country's rural economy, which helps in providing employment. The strength of the industry is the small and medium sized exporters with tremendous export potential and the highly talented crafts persons who have been weaving intricate designs of exclusive floor coverings [3].

The carpet industry of Kashmir occupies an important place in handicrafts and provides employment opportunities to lakhs of people in the rural and urban areas of Kashmir. Carpet weaving in Kashmir is largely practiced in the informal sector. The Kashmir is known as castle of Indian oriental carpets and rugs. The Kashmiri silk and woolen carpets are symbols of quality and artistic expertise. They have their own

original style in respect of colour, quality, design and durability. These exquisite creations are hand knotted on wrap threads, one at a time, in accordance with a strict code of colour. Silk carpets are very rich traditionally and highly refined in terms of designs. The major designs found in Kashmir are divided into three types such as Persian design, Oriental design and Local Kashmiri design. The fundamental local designs of Kashmiri carpet called *Chotta* (small) design in which only 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the total design is represented and then repeated to complete the whole. Other common designs of Kashmiri carpet are *Tree of life*, which is covered with flowers, birds, and animals in some cases. As the numbers of knots are more per square inch, the greater is the value and durability. They are unique carpets weaved in Kashmir.

The tradition of carpet manufacture in Kashmir goes back the time of Zain-UI-Abidin 1420-1470 A.D brought carpet weavers from Persia and Central Asia into Kashmir & to train local inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The famous carpet industry has its origin in Persia. Kashmir had historical contact with Persia and ancient trade routes passed through it. The influence of Persia on the art and craft of Kashmir has always been influential. Since then carpet heritages continued and got encouragement and patronage of different rulers, visitors to the valley, thus the skill passes from generation to generation. A great deal of minute, delicate and intricate work is involved in creating the fabulous carpets, which reflects not only Indo Persian culture but also, artistic skills. The hand-knotted Kashmiri carpets are woven by all locales of Kashmir, specifically - Srinagar, Anantnag, Bandipora, Ganderbal, Budgam, Pulwama, Kulgam, and Baramulla. Carpets are well known in Kashmir and are locally known as '*kalin*'. '*Talim*' is actually a weaver's alphabet for carpet weaving. The design is organised in a graphical manner with every square standing for a knot and the whole design based on it. The important feature of the Kashmiri carpet is that they are always hand knotted. The knots are of two types, single and double, the former called Persian or Sehna, and the later Turkish or Ghiordes. The Persian knot is an asymmetrical while Turkish knot is a symmetrical. The yarn used normally is silk and wool. The loom used in Kashmiri carpet weaving is composed of two horizontal wooden beams, between which the wrap threads are stretched, one beam in front of

<sup>1</sup> <https://heritagehandicraft.com/crafts/carpets/> accessed on 07-02-2020



**Diagram 1. Steps involved in production process of a carpet in Kashmir**

the weaver and the second behind the first. Very simple tools are used to thread the knots, a wood or metal comb to push knots and weft tightly together and a pair of short scissors to cut the pile of the carpet once it is finished. For making carpet it has to go through various processes like determination of size and quality, designing, taleem writing, dyeing and procuring raw material, wrap formation, weaving, washing and drying, finishing and packing (see Diagram 1).

The Carpet industry in Kashmir has made a great contribution towards production, employment, and export of handicraft products and contributes to the economic development of Jammu and Kashmir. The production and export of carpet handicraft since 1990-91 to 2016-17 has been quite encouraging. The production of carpet handicraft in 1990-91 is Rs. 84.55 crores and in 2016-17 is Rs. 821.50 crores. The export of carpet in 1990-91 is Rs. 26.41 crores and in 2016-17 is 369.81crores and the total employment in Carpet industry in 1990-91 is 0.74 lakh and in 2016-17 is 1.11 lakh. The main export markets for Kashmiri carpets are USA, UK, Germany, Canada and Australia. There is fluctuation in the growth rate of production and export of carpet handicrafts in Kashmir from 1990 to 2017 [4].

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The carpet industry occupies a pivotal position in economic dynamism of various countries. Carpet weaving is a major source of earning. The basic infrastructural facilities available to weave

carpets are loom, wool and weaving tools [5]. Millions of people depend on carpet weaving for their livelihood across the country, so there is good reason for preserving and encouraging the carpet industry. The situation of the weavers is pathetic. They are facing problems like illiteracy, inadequate finance and marketing bottlenecks [6]. The Carpet industry of Kashmir is a crucial economic contributor to the state and to the country as well. However, the industry is facing a lot of challenges due to the intervention of modern machinery and also increased competition from various countries. In view of the insufficient economic returns enjoyed by artisans in the past, this craft decayed and declined [7]. Carpet weaving is a major cottage industry in India, which employs thousands of village artisans and its impact on Indian economy at two levels. Firstly, it makes a significant contribution to balance of payment. Secondly, fifty to sixty percent workers in the carpet industry contribute to employment [8]. The carpet industry has not grown at a steady rate before independence period, however, after independence the industry made considerable progress. The main constituents of the cost structure of carpet industry are raw material costs, script charges, washing and drying expanses and overhead costs [9]. Khan and Mishra [10] studied the impact of economic slowdown on carpet industry performance. The carpet industry witnessed constant growth till 1994-95 and afterwards it shows decline due to competition from other countries. The carpet industry is contributing the immense value of foreign currency to the country that strengthens our economy [11]. Having

highest rate of unemployment, craft activities are best suited to the Kashmir valley as these activities need more labor and less capital, consequently having opportunity for employment generation at large scale [12]. Malik & Prasad [13] in their study found that liberalization gave access to new markets and demand of carpet products increased. However, the major problems for the carpet industry such as increased cost of raw material, difficulty in procuring funds from local financial institutions, and difficulty in export facilitation and legal-regulatory framework. Venkateshwarlu, Ramakrishna & Moid [14] studied the workforce composition, working conditions and wages of workers engaged in carpet making industries. They observed that there is a sharp decline of carpet productions after the 2000's which resulted in an adverse effect on wages of workers. The economic recession 2008-2009 of the US economy affect their buying capacity. The global, market-demand fluctuations impact directly with artisans producing for export markets, reinforcing the insecurity and piecemeal nature of their employment status [15]. There is tough competition in the global market by the carpets of the other countries that has an effect on individual engaged in carpet handicrafts. Over the past several years, the carpet handicraft industry has suffered a serious setback as fake and machine made carpets are finding their way into the market in bulk and leaving the hardworking craftsman high and dry.<sup>2</sup> The traditional art is worldwide famous, but despite its rich variety and ingenuity, its share in the world carpet industry is hardly one percent. Rising manufacturing prices of the carpets, substandard raw material in the market, competitive global market, low wages of the hard working weavers, and a large share of profit appropriated by the middlemen led the carpet industry in stagnations. In the declining carpet industry the weavers who are at the bottom of the ladder are suffering. Large numbers of carpet weavers engaged in carpet industry in the Kashmir valley have started shifting to other occupations [16]. Basu [17] in his study revealed that the carpet weavers in Tamil Nadu in general and women in particular are increasingly shifting to the professions like beedi rolling, which is faster and easier and which earns higher returns. Joseph Xavier [18] in his study found that major hurdles faced by carpet weavers are lack of cooperation (33%), lack of investment (20.9%), lack of market linkages

(20%), lack of interest (18.6%), and lack of access to the government schemes (8.8%), and 24.7% of the respondents stated other reasons. Every sector of the economy in Kashmir whether it is handicraft sector, horticulture sector, medium or small scale industries, tourism sector, etc. has been affected due to political turmoil in the region over the past 30 years. The production of handicraft sector suffered to a large extent with the broke of political instability in the valley since 1989. The flow of tourist is discouraging which affect the livelihood of thousands of people, which are directly or indirectly associated with handicraft sector and increasing unemployment in Kashmir [19].

### 3. METHODOLOGY

For the present study the primary data collected from 50 respondents who were engaged in carpet weaving. The sample has been taken from the Pulwama district by using snowball sampling technique. The initial information about the few carpet weavers received from the handicraft department of district Pulwama. Further from these initial respondents provide the information of other responds engaged in carpet weaving. Interview schedule were used for the collection of data.

#### 3.1 Objectives

The present paper is an attempt to focus mainly on the following objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of carpet weavers.
2. To examine the problems faced by the carpet weavers.
3. To examine the challenges faced by the carpet weavers.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 1 depicts the gender distribution of weavers. Out of the total 50 respondents, 66.0% are male and 34.0% of weavers are females for the present study.

**Table 1. Gender distribution of weavers**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	33	66.0
Female	17	34.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.villagesquare.indamage-kashmiri-handicrafts-affecting-livelihoods> accessed on 19-02-2020.

**Table 2. Age wise classification of carpet weavers**

Age structure	Frequency	Percentage
<20 years	4	8.0
21- 30 Years	2	4.0
31- 40 Years	20	40.0
41- 50 years	20	40.0
50 years above	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The age structure determines the dependency ratio and workforce of the population. The Table 2 depicts the distribution of weavers by their respective age group. Most of the respondents, i.e. 40 (80.0%) were in the age group of 31-50 years. It reflects that middle aged group people are engaged in carpet weaving. The aging period of 31-50 regarded as a period of good health and productivity and may be the reason for the large number of weavers in this category. 8.0% of the weavers are in the age group of above 50 years of age and similarly 8.0% of the weavers fall in the age group of below 20 years of age. Only 4.0% of the weavers are in the age category of 21- 30 years. The possible reason for the low percentage of weavers at a younger age may be the attraction towards education and other more profitable jobs.

**Table 3. Education level of carpet weavers**

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	25	5.0
Primary	14	28.0
Middle school	8	16.0
High school	2	4.0
Above High school	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The Table 3 depicts the educational status of the respondents. The majority of the respondents 28.0% have acquired education up to primary level. 16.0% of the respondents studied up to middle school. 5.0% of the weavers were found illiterate. Only 2.0% of respondents have attained education above high school level.

It is often believed that weavers work is mostly undertaken by economically weaker sections, and they lack adequate financial resources. To understand the poverty status of the carpet weavers, data were collected whether they own the ration cards which classify their households as below poverty level (BPL), above poverty level

(APL), antyodaya anna yojana (AAY) and priority household (PHH). From the Table 4 it is revealed that 46.0% of the weavers hold AAY ration card. 42.0% of the respondents holds BPL ration card, followed by the 10.0% of PHH ration card holders. Only 1 (2.0%) respondent holds the ration card of APL.

**Table 4. Ration card holding**

Ration card	Frequency	Percentage
APL	1	2.0
BPL	21	42.0
AAY	23	46.0
PHH	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

**Table 5. Numbers of family members**

Family size	Frequency	Percentage
2-4	14	28.0
4-6	27	54.0
6-8	8	16.0
8 Above	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The Table 5 reflects the size of weaver's families. The findings reveal that the majority (54.0%) of the weavers have 4-6 members in their family followed by families (28.0%) having 2-4 members in the family. 16.0% of the respondents have 6-8 members in their family. Only 1 (2.0%) respondent had family members above 8 members.

**Table 6. Type of housing**

House type	Frequency	Percentage
Kuccha	3	6.0
Pucca	30	60.0
Semi-Pucca	17	34.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The housing conditions of the weavers are found with basic civic facilities like sanitation, water and electricity. The majority of the weavers 60.0% have Pucca houses. 34.0% of the respondents live in semi-Pucca houses. Only a small portion 6.0% of the respondents lives in Kuccha houses.

Land is regarded as biggest asset for the rural livelihood. Land holding reflects the economic standard of the respondent family. From the Table 7 it is clear that half of the respondents

(50%) have very small land holdings 1-2 kannals of cultivable land. Followed by 20.0% of respondents holds 2-3 kannals of land. 16.0% of respondents hold 3-4 kannals of cultivable land and only 4.0% of weavers hold above 4 kannals of land for cultivation. 10.0% of the respondents do not have cultivable land of their own.

**Table 7. Cultivable land holding of weavers**

Land holding	Frequency	Percentage
Nil	5	10.0
1-2 Kannal	25	50.0
2-3 Kannal	10	20.0
3-4 Kannal	8	16.0
Above 4 Kannal	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The Table 8 shows the structure of work among carpet weaver. 52.0% of the weavers were dependent on middlemen for raw material and other necessary inputs but working on their own looms and instruments. 30.0% of the weavers were wage workers works under master weavers/ cooperatives. They do not work in his/her premises; works on others loom and have no independent access to capital and market. 18.0% of weavers work independently work on their own looms, buys own raw material. The independent weaver works in his own premise, with its own capital, weaves the actual product and then sells it to the merchants or traders.

**Table 8. Distribution of structure of work of weavers**

Structure of work	Frequency	Percentage
Independent weaver	9	18.0
Dependent weaver	26	52.0
Wage worker	15	30.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

**Table 9. Daily earnings of weavers**

Per day income	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 100	12	24.0
101-200	23	46.0
201-300	8	16.0
301- Above	7	14.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The Table 9 reveals the average daily income of carpet weavers. 46.0% of the respondents on an

average earned Rs. 101-200 per day. The second highest percentage (24.0%) of respondents earned up to Rs. 100 per day. 16.0% of the respondents reveal that they earn Rs. 201-300 per day. However, only 14.0% of respondents earn above Rs. 301 per day.

**Table 10. Nature of payment of weavers**

Nature of payment	Frequency	Percentage
Weekly basis	2	4.0
Monthly basis	13	26.0
As per Area basis	28	56.0
Piece-rate basis	7	14.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The Table 10 depicts the wage patterns of the carpet weavers revealed that majority of them, 56.0% were paid in terms of rupees as per area basis (square feet). 26.0% of the respondents receive wages on a monthly basis while only 4.0% of respondents receive wages on weekly basis. 14.0% of the respondents receive money after the completion of the carpet on a piece rate basis.

**Table 11. Vocation period**

Years working as a weaver	Frequency	Percentage
< 10 years	7	14.0
10-20 years	15	30.0
20-30 years	24	48.0
30-40 years	3	6.0
Above 40 years	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

The Table 11 depicts the distribution of working experience of the carpet weavers. 48.0% of the respondents were found to have work experience of 20-30 years, followed by 30.0% of the respondents engaged in this occupation from 10.-20 years. 6.0% respondents have work experience between 30-40 years. Only 2.0% of respondents have a vocation period above 40 years while 14.0% of respondents have less than 10 years of work experience.

The Table 12 reveals the problems faced by the carpet weavers. Better health is a prerequisite for improved productivity and production. The better the health of a person better will be his productivity capacity. It is common among carpet weavers to suffer from a variety of occupational ailments. Occupational disease is induced by

working in poor ventilated conditions, working for long hours at one place, psychological stress in work and excessive physical effort. It is observed that 90.0% of the weavers face health problems due to long working hours and poor working environment. Regardless of number of governmental and non-governmental efforts to develop the carpet industry and protect the interest of carpet weavers, the weavers still have to face many problems. It is observed that 80.0% of the weavers have opined that they earn low wages from carpet weaving. It indicates that government must focus on wage policy of the carpet weavers. 72.0% of weavers responded that exploitation by middlemen/master weaver is important reason for low wages. 60.0% of the weavers responded that due to low education level among weaver's results in lack of information about market and marketing. 50.0% of carpet weavers do not have access to the government schemes and programmes due to rigid procedures and formalities. 17.0% weavers respond they face the investment problem that is why weavers/middlemen depend on master.

The Table 13 depicts the challenges faced by the weavers in carpet industry. The political turmoil in valley is major setback for handicraft industry in general and carpet industry in particular. 88.0% weavers replied that political instability is important challenge for carpet weavers. The improper implementation of government schemes are in second place, as responded by 78.0%. More than 70.0% of the weavers responded that low economic returns and competition from latest machine made carpets, as they are low-priced, identical and fast produced. The weavers also felt that due to change in consumer tastes and preferences the demand for the carpet declined revealed by 68.0% of the respondents. 52.0% of the weavers replied that new generation is not willing taking this occupation due to low status, availability of alternative work and more laborious. Most of the weavers are not willing to have their children's into weaving occupation. With the increasing education level, the willingness towards such occupation decreases. This is one of the important reasons for languishing carpet industry in Kashmir.

**Table 12. Problems of the carpet weavers**

<b>Problems of weavers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of Investment	17	34.0
Lack of access to govt. schemes	25	50.0
Low wages	40	80.0
Exploitation by middlemen/master weaver	36	72.0
Lack information about market and marketing	30	60.0
Health problem	45	90.0

Source: Primary data

**Table 13. Challenge faced by carpet weavers**

<b>S. no.</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Lack of proper implementation of govt. Schemes	39	78.0
2	Competition from machine carpets	36	72.0
3	Lack of interest among new generation	26	52.0
4	Low demand due to change in consumer preferences	34	68.0
5	Low economic returns of weavers	37	74.0
6	Political turmoil	44	88.0

Source: Primary data

**Table 14. Prediction about the future of carpet weaving occupation**

<b>Prediction</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Stagnant	29	58.0
Get closed	21	42.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Primary data

To see the future of the carpet industry in Kashmir from the weavers view point was vital part of study. A sharp decline in their trade from past decade forces them to search for alternatives. The Table 13 reveals the fact that 58.0% weavers believe that the condition of the carpet weaving will not change. However 42.0% of the respondents predict that it will close down. Therefore it is need of hour to take concrete measures before it is too late.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Carpet weaving is an age old traditional occupation. Carpet weavers work in informal sector in which they are vulnerable to exploitation and low wages. Carpet weavers work hard but do not get enough to maintain standard of living. A major problem for this affair is the declining of carpet industry due to political turmoil and substantial share of profit taken by middlemen/master weaver leaving very little for the carpet weavers. Traditionally, carpet weavers had been the backbone of Kashmir economy, but today they are most vulnerable groups. At ground level government has remain unsuccessful in their implementation of policies and programmes. The challenge for the government in present times is how to preserve the traditional carpet weaving occupation from extinction.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

1. The government should take extensive measures and promotional steps for strengthening the Kashmiri carpet weaving industry.
2. Marketing and financial facilities should be provided to the carpet weavers in order to prevent them from exploitation of middlemen/master weaver.
3. Government should formulate the wage policy for the carpet weavers and also provide incentives to motivate them.
4. To establish Common Facility Centre (CFC) to provide raw material at affordable prices to the weavers.
5. There should be time to time evaluation of the governmental policies and programmes.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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