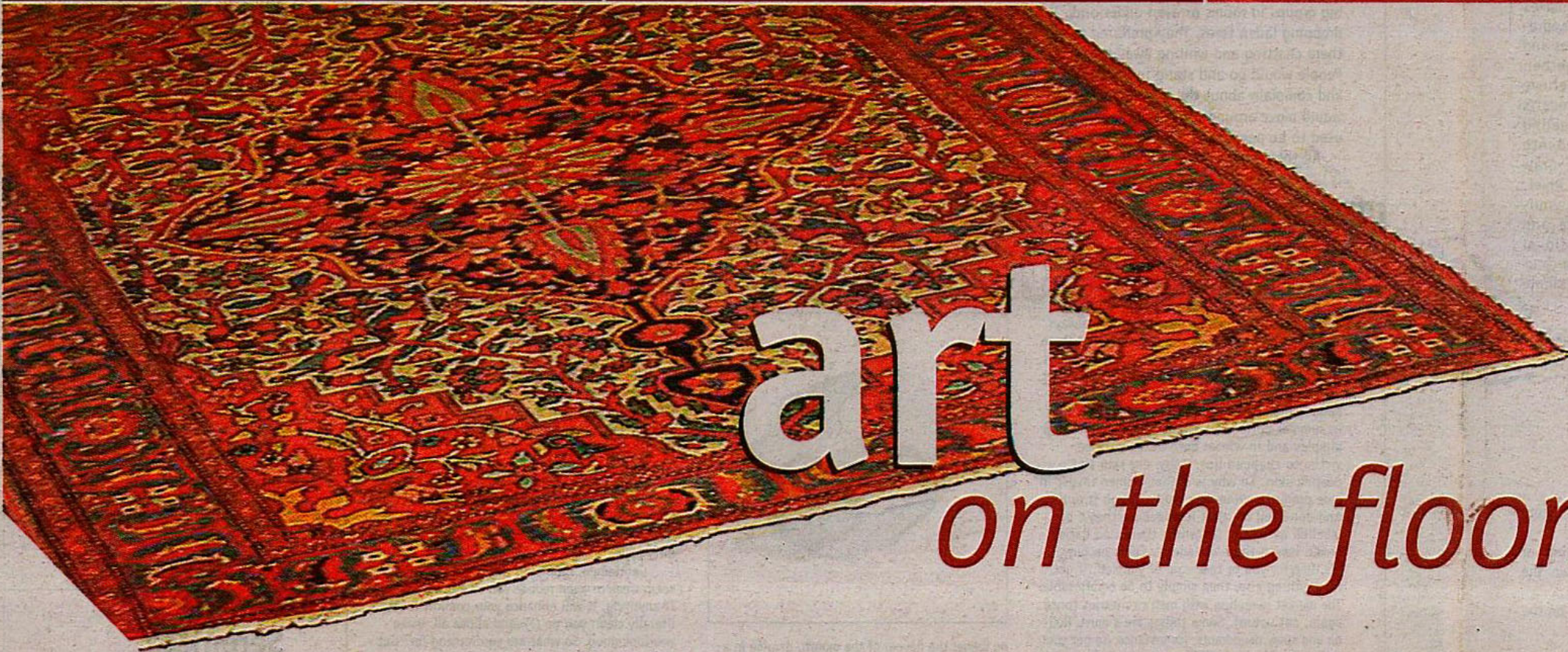


# art on the floors



**R**EMEMBER Aladdin and his sweetly scented girlfriend called Jasmine from the Arabian Nights fairy tales? That made for a great story and as all great stories go, there had to be a big, bad and ugly villain. In this case it was a wizard who kidnapped Jasmine and like all other bad guys he locked her up in a tower. The distraught Aladdin luckily had something better than the inefficient police to help him out. His friend was a genie called Genie who provided him with something that he could use to rescue the sweetheart from the tower in style. It was a flying carpet. The girl was rescued amidst fireworks, a blasting rock soundtrack and plenty of highflying acts. As you know, they lived happily ever after.

Well, there are no genies and no magical flying carpets as such but the fact remains that carpets do have a certain magic. Carpets can transform a drab room into something to be admired. The right colour and style can accentuate the beauty of an already smart looking room.

The history of carpets is a bit of a mystery. A lot of it is tied up in guesswork and assumptions from certain facts. European researchers believe that the Egyptian and Assyrian civilisation was the cradle of carpet weaving. It is presumed that the early carpets were similar to felt and primitive textile products. As a result these did not last and researchers cannot pinpoint the exact time when carpets came

into existence.

## STEPPING THROUGH TIME

A symbol of artistic magnificence is the Persian carpet. The Iranians were among the pioneer weavers of the ancient civilisations. The carpet business was a family tradition where the fathers handed down the knowledge to the sons who perfected the techniques further and handed them over to their sons. The processes thus became closely guarded family secrets.

To trace the history of the Persian carpet is to trace the history of one of the greatest civilisations ever known. The carpets started out from simple articles of need to cover the floors and walls of tents belonging to nomadic tribesmen. This protected them from the cold and damp. The increasing beauty of these articles found new owners in kings and noblemen. Researchers found the earliest existing Persian carpet during excavations of burial mounds in the Altai Mountains of Siberia in a place called Pazirik. Another rug found in the same area dates back to the first century BC. From the 3rd to the 7th AD during the Sassanian dynasty Persian carpets won great acclaim as they were being exported to many other parts of the country. The fall of the dynasty in the following centuries led to a decline in the markets for such carpets. A similar rise and fall followed the Mughal invasion. These are believed by researchers to be the culmination of the best carpet design techniques. Two of the

best-known carpets come from the mosque of Arbil dated 1539. The larger of the two is kept in London's Victoria and Albert Museum while the other is in the Los Angeles Country Museum. Rugs of distinctive beauty were also woven in Kashan, Yazd, Kerman and Fars.

The art of utilising gold and silver thread was also developed during this period. A magnificent example is the coronation carpet kept in the Rosenberg Castle in Copenhagen. Persian carpets have received international acclaim for their distinctive and spectacular artistic accomplishments. These are among the most treasured possessions in homes and offices all over the world.

The Kashmir carpet is also another famous example of artistic excellence. It started in the early 15th century when king Zain-ul-Abedin (Badshah) brought master carpet weavers from Persia. He introduced the assembly line in factories for weaving, clipping and washing.

Many experts say that the Iranian carpets are not famous for their colours but on account of their durability and weaving technique. The most beautiful examples come from Farallan, Kurdistan, Hamedan, Malayer, Arak, and Naharyand. 50 percent of the rural families in these regions are engaged in carpet weaving. Most of the weavers are women. Some of these carpets deteriorated in quality due to the use of ready wool with chemical dyes. The piles

are often long and carpets are thick. The preferred colours are blue, indigo and a wide range of greens. The climatic conditions are rather harsh with long winters encouraging the villagers to indulge in such handicrafts.

## THE ALLURE OF THE GOLDEN FIBRE

Bangladeshi jute carpets are primarily made from the golden fibre jute. Jute is one of those amazing fibres that have tons of different uses. One of the wider purposes it serves is that for weaving carpets. This golden fibre was used by the BJMC (Bangladesh Jute Mill Corporation) to produce its finest. Most of the carpets had a 10mm pile. Wall hangings, door mats and rugs were also produced. At present most of the carpet factories are closed down due to availability of raw materials, flooding of the market by foreign goods and lack of funds. The government does close to nothing to maintain this industry. As a result it is soon going to become just a symbol of heritage in the pages of history. The right carpet at the entrance to a house plays a role in creating a proper first impression. It proposes a particular invitation to a visitor as well as acting as eye candy for the dwellers. For tasteful décor the city dwellers can go to Elephant Road, Purana Paltan and Gulshan. BJMC has a display centre in the Adamjee Court Building in Motijheel. The local items cost between 3,000 to 10,000 taka. Solid colours are about 20-25 taka per square

foot. On the other hand, foreign goods are available being mostly synthetic and slightly higher in price. These are lighter and easier to maintain. The prevalent designs are floral or geometric motifs.

## IRANIAN CARPETS

The classic Iranian carpets are now available in Dhaka. These are created using state of the art techniques with synthetic materials. Hand woven Iranian carpets and rugs are the objects of desire for many. Persian carpets can be divided so far as design is concerned, into two main groups. Carpets with a geometric design and carpets with curvilinear patterns, known as floral carpets. Nature supplies the greatest inspiration to the Persian carpet designer. With faithful representations of trees, flowers, birds and clouds, which, through the creative and the innovative genius of Persian art, became more and more stylised with each succeeding generation. Carpets with geometric designs are woven by nomadic tribes with particular motifs and designs.

The intricate designs charm just about everyone, which is why the Iranian stalls at the annual trade fair attract huge crowds, most of whom are looking for carpets. The Iranian Emporium situated in the Tejgaon-Gulshan link road offers both traditional woollen carpets as well as modern synthetic ones. The prices start from 4500 taka to a wallet denting two lakhs or even more. Whole sets can be bought to match bed-

room, living room etc.

## CARPETS OF KASHMIR

Kashmir is famous the world over for the beautiful hand woven carpets. Basically brought to India by Muslim traders it strongly reflects Persian motifs and styling. These exquisite creations are hand knotted in accordance to a strict code of colours. The order in which the colours have to appear is lyricised in a song or mantra, which the weavers hum while they do the work. Kashmiri carpet designs are usually written down on paper in a kind of shorthand style called talim, a practice derived from the traditional methods used for making kani shawls.

## SATRANJI

Satranji is an ancient technique for weaving rugs. It was in great demand during the 18th century in the Mughal courts. In Rangpur many of the families were involved in this business. In 1829 the DC of Rangpur was a man named Nishbeth. He was amazed by the craftsmanship and did a lot to promote the business. That's why that region is named after him. The post liberation war era saw a decline in the trade. But in the last decade the trade has seen a revival thanks to Shafikul Alam Selim. He has introduced new techniques to revive the ancient trade and in the process he has provided employment for over 300 families. Satranji is marketed as a brand-name with a display centre in Dhaka located at Shukrabadh. The designs include

a wide array of motifs such as fruits, elephant footprint, geometric shapes, plain with fancy borders etc. These are made of a combination of jute, wool and cotton using chemical dyes.

## COSMETIC SURGERY?

Carpets are subjected to a lot of torture from our feet as well as spilled food, water, baby droppings and tons of other types of oppression. As a result the colours look faded. Elephant Road has scores of shops that wash and dye old carpets to bring out a new shine. It is also done along the footpaths of the Motijheel T&T colony. They charge about 500-800 takas, depending on the size. However they only wash the synthetic carpets, as it is light and simpler to wash than the heavy jute carpets. Professional cleaning is required for hand woven carpet but not more than once in every one or two years.

## WRAP-UP

Carpets were once the treasures of royalty. After many generations it has come into the hands of the common people to step on and wreak all kinds of havoc. The right combination could transform your room into a piece of art. It's an essential piece for anyone who wants to beautify his or her abode.

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Photo: Zahedul I Khan

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