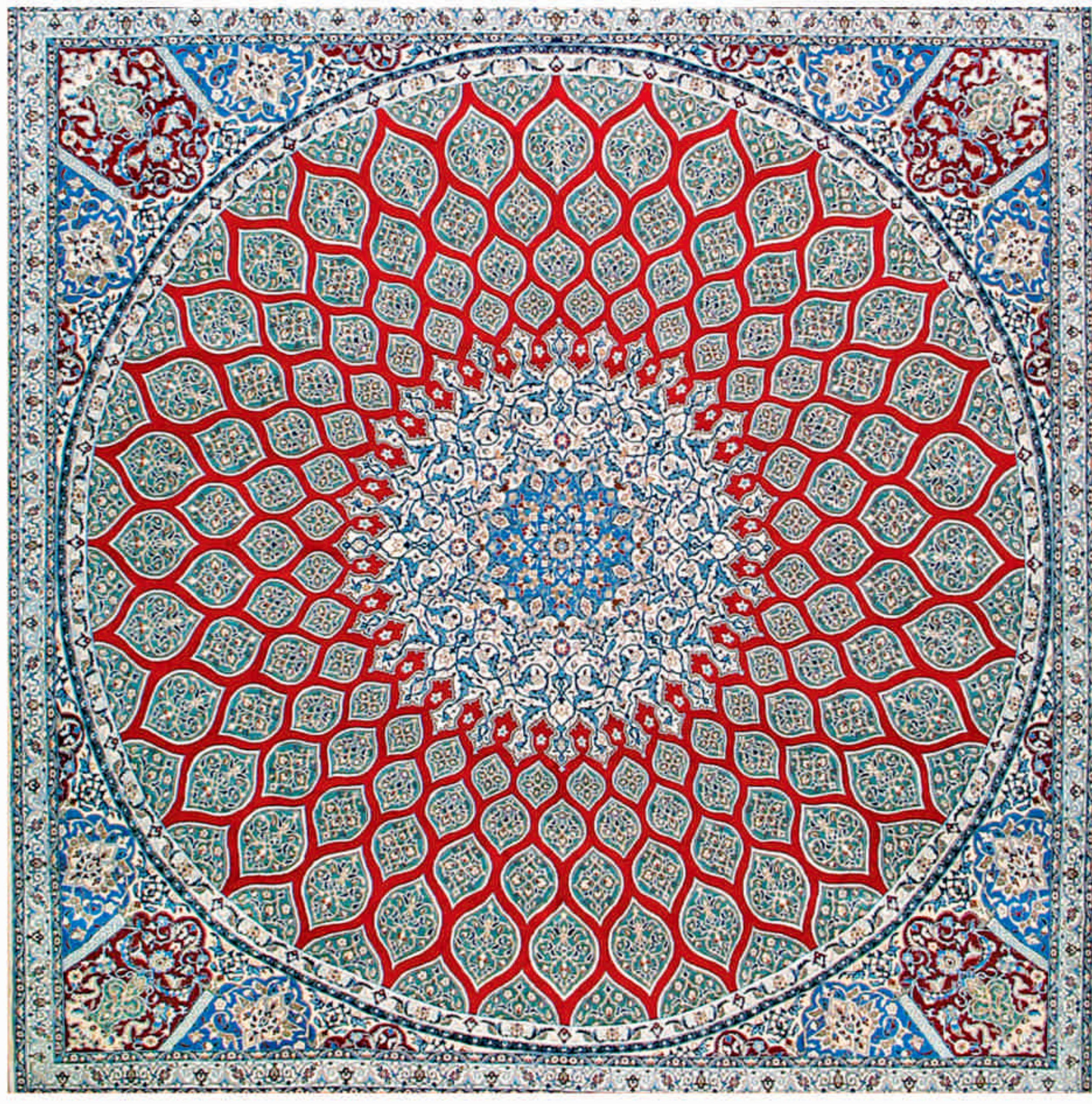


PACKAGE FROM PERSIA

KIDWA ARIF

At least half the village was in the house.

When you look at the landscape, the village was one of the most typically Bangladeshi ones you'd ever see. Plain, green and almost everyone was a farmer. And like the rest of the country, it had more people than it needed. Electricity was only used to run the irrigation-pumps and only two houses had battery-run television. One thing everyone had in common was poverty. Life here was quiet, peaceful and extremely tedious. So when a hand-woven Persian carpet, all the way from Iran, arrived at the Shikdar Bari, half the village turned out to admire it.



Winning entry for last month's prompt 'Persian'

It was sent by the only son of Old Shikdar who worked at a big office at Bandar Abbas. He left the village 15 years ago, refusing to become a farmer. Fifteen years later, he was now a village legend. Every kid in the village wanted to become the next "Chhoto Shikdar Chacha." He was the prime example how hard work can take a man to the top.

In these 15 years he had only visited home twice. When he came to the village seven years ago, his demeanour clearly expressed how he was above everyone else. The neighbour's daughter couldn't have found a better husband. He had last visited two years ago when he left promising his four year-old daughter he'd be back soon.

Only five people were allowed to sit on the 9'x12' carpet. The chairman of the village sat cross-legged in the middle. He was earnestly recounting how his grandfather owned two of these but both of them got looted in 1971. Everyone knew he was lying. His family had been farmhands even a generation ago. But no one dared to contradict him. The old postmaster sat with his back

against the wall, one hand caressing the carpet. He had crossed 80 and was arguably the oldest man in the village. He was saying how he had seen carpets almost exactly the same in the museum he had been to when he visited Dhaka.

Mokbul Chowdhury, from Chowdhury Bari, who was nearly as old as the postmaster, was the Persian carpet expert there. He told everyone how it took many women months to weave a carpet like this one. Patting Old Shikdar's back he kept saying how big of an officer his son must be, managing to pay for something like this.

Old Shikdar just sat there flushed with pride. He just wished the boy's mother was there to see this. She died a year ago.

And little Sarah lay spread-eagled on it. No one dared to tell her to get off. In fact, the letter with the package read, "A gift for my Sarah." Why she needed a huge carpet, she did not know but she felt like she was back in her father's arms and that was enough for her.

Outside stood the women and the rest of the children.

The women were huddled around Chhoto Shikdar's wife. She kept telling them how her husband was always a spendthrift and this extravagant display was absolutely unnecessary. A new cow or a renovation of their bathroom would've been better. But her face showed none was happier than her.

About 4000 kilometres away, Chhoto Shikdar lay in his 6'x2' bed. He was content. He did not care that he had to share his cellar-like room with three others. Or that he might die in an accident any day like that funny kid from Afghanistan. He chuckled and thought none of the precious carpets in the houses of those he worked for had ever been admired as much as his Elephant Road carpet.



It's always a delight to receive write-ups and illustrations from our readers. This particular artwork of a Persian king and queen, by Zeejaj-E-Rasul Chowdhury (17) from Sylhet, is truly special. A talented young man, Zeejaj, cannot speak or hear, and expresses his emotions using colours. We were deeply moved. Check out more of his artwork on his Facebook page: "Zaowad's artisan".