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Traditional Crafts Of Uzbeks And Tajiks In Afghanistan: Carpet Weaving, Embroidery, And Textile Making Traditions

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the traditional crafts of Uzbeks and Tajiks living in Afghanistan. It highlights the rich cultural heritage, techniques, and traditions in carpet weaving, embroidery, textile and yarn production, leatherwork, glasswork, ceramics, and jewelry. The article provides a detailed account of the crafting processes, materials used, patterns, colors, and their significance in local and international markets. Furthermore, it compares the crafts of three ethnic groups (Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen), demonstrating their cultural and social importance.

Keywords:

Afghanistan, Uzbeks, Tajiks, handicrafts, carpet weaving, embroidery, textiles, yarn production, gold-thread embroidery, ceramics, leatherwork.

Introduction.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country where handicraft traditions have developed over centuries. The Uzbek and Tajik peoples have not only preserved their national clothing but also possess rich experience in carpet weaving, textiles, embroidery, leatherwork, and ceramics. Handicrafts hold significance not only as an economic activity but also as a means of preserving cultural identity and national heritage. This article analyzes the handicraft traditions of Afghani Uzbeks and Tajiks, their types, processes, and socio-economic importance.

Afghani Uzbeks are particularly renowned for their handicrafts, with carpet weaving being a widely developed field. Carpets woven by Afghani Uzbeks are recognized worldwide. They feature traditional Uzbek patterns, intricate geometric designs, and natural colors. This craft is widespread in Balkh, Faryab, and Jowzjan provinces. The carpet weaving process itself is complex, and a group of four to six people can produce a single carpet measuring four meters in length and three meters in width over the

course of one to one and a half months. Afghani Uzbeks often weave “joynamaz” (prayer rugs), corridors, and large carpets. Their carpets include geometric patterns, flowers in traditional Uzbek style, and a variety of colors. Hand-woven carpets are highly valued both in local markets and internationally.

Results and discussion.

In the field of handicrafts, Uzbeks living in Afghanistan have inherited a rich cultural heritage and traditions over the centuries, with handicrafts holding a particularly important place among them. The handicraft traditions of Afghani Uzbeks largely resemble those in Uzbekistan, yet they also have unique characteristics shaped by local conditions and historical factors [1].

Afghani Uzbeks often weave prayer rugs (joynamoz), corridor carpets, and large rugs. Embroidery (hand-stitching) is predominantly carried out by women. It is common to decorate clothing, scarves, wedding attire, and pillowcases with embroidery, applying national patterns using traditional floral embroidery techniques. In blacksmithing and gold-thread

work (zardozi), weapons, household items, daggers, knives, swords, and other objects are produced. Embroidered garments worn during festivals or special ceremonies are highly valued [1].

In leatherwork and crafting felt items, Uzbeks have significant experience, producing footwear, belts, bags, leather bases for dough preparation, and other leather goods. These products are often sold in local markets. Although less widespread, studies in glassmaking and ceramics show that in some areas local ceramic items, such as water

containers, teapots, and tableware, are still made [2].

Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens living in Afghanistan have not only preserved their national clothing but also maintained centuries-old traditions in textile weaving and yarn production. These peoples have established their own distinctive schools of handicrafts, adapting to local conditions and engaging in silk production, dyeing, and weaving [2].

Below is a comparative overview of the textile and yarn traditions of these three peoples:

Production of Fabrics and Weaving

Aspect	Uzbeks	Tajiks	Turkmens
Materials	Cotton, silk, sometimes wool	Cotton, silk	Silk, wool (sheep's wool), cotton
Natural Dyes	Fig peel, onion skin, indigo, woad	These methods are also used	Red and black natural dyes are widely used
Weaving Traditions	Atlas, adras, shoyi, plain weaving (especially in Faryab and Kunduz)	Simple silk and cotton fabrics are woven	Mostly long silk fabrics, often in a rainbow-like structure
Weaving Equipment	Standard hand looms, four-shaft looms, weaving benches with shuttles	Hand looms and simple equipment	Large standard looms, mostly operated by women
Sericulture	Mulberry cultivation and silkworm rearing are common in many villages	Less widespread, though some households rear silkworms	Turkmens have traditional experience in sericulture [3]

Types of Fabrics and Their Uses

Fabric Type	People	Description and Use
Atlas / Adras	Uzbeks	Brightly colored silk fabrics, mainly for festivals and wedding attire
Shoyi	All	Used for light summer clothing
Qarbog' (red silk)	Turkmens	Women's clothing, cradle covers, ceremonial sheets
Handwoven cotton fabric	All	Everyday clothes, shirts, and trousers
Woolen fabrics / carpet yarns	Turkmens	Used not only in clothing but also in rugs, pillows, and floor coverings [4]

Yarn Spinning, Dyeing, and Fabric Preparation

Process	Uzbeks	Tajiks	Turkmens
Yarn Spinning	Traditionally hand-spun from silk, especially by women	Less widespread	Women spin yarn using traditional methods
Dyeing	Dyed by hand with natural dyes (indigo, saffron)	Hand-dyeing methods exist	Dyed mostly in dominant red and black colors

Process	Uzbeks	Tajiks	Turkmens
Fabric Length	Usually woven in rolls of 4–10 meters	Not very long, woven for ordinary purposes	Turkmens prepare wide fabrics [5]

Cultural Significance and Social Role

Feature	Uzbeks	Tajiks	Turkmens
Importance in bridal clothing	Atlas and adras are the main garments	Colored silk fabrics are important	Red silk garments with silver embellishments are a national symbol
Gifts and social exchange	Fabrics are valued as gifts	Exchanging fabrics among relatives is customary	Special silk fabrics are woven to order for the bride
Handicraft lineages	Some villages focus solely on silk weaving	Weaving is divided among households	Women constitute a special weaving group [5]

Tajiks living in Afghanistan are also known for their rich history, culture, and traditional handicrafts. Afghan Tajiks hold an important place in the country's cultural life and have engaged in various crafts over the centuries.

In the traditional handicrafts of Afghan Tajiks, carpet and rug weaving plays a central role, as Tajiks have a rich history of carpet production. Their carpets feature floral and geometric patterns, with traditional Tajik colors such as red, green, and brown predominating. Carpet weaving is particularly developed in the provinces of Balkh, Panjshir, and Badakhshan. Handwoven carpets are in demand both in local markets and for export [6].

Embroidery and floral stitching are popular crafts among Afghan women. Clothing, scarves, bedding, and wedding accessories are decorated with various embroidered floral patterns. These crafts are especially renowned in the provinces of Badakhshan and Takhar. Gold-thread work (zardozi) and silkwork are widespread in Afghanistan, with artistic zardozi often performed by men. Traditional Tajik garments include jackets, vests, shawls, and scarves adorned with zardozi. Classic zardozi styles influenced by India and Bukhara have been preserved.

Leatherwork and felt craftsmanship are highly developed, producing shoes, belts, bags, and other leather goods. Decorative carving and the use of rich colors are customary for aesthetic

purposes. Glassmaking and pottery are also practiced by Afghan Tajiks, including dishes, water containers, and large storage vessels. Items are hand-shaped from natural clay and fired in kilns. Silver and gold jewelry-making (taking) is another area of high craftsmanship among Afghan Tajiks. National ornaments such as rings, necklaces, hairpins, and bracelets are produced using traditional patterns and symbols [7].

Conclusion

The handicrafts of Afghani Uzbeks and Tajiks represent a rich historical and cultural heritage, encompassing carpet weaving, embroidery, textile production, zardozi, leatherwork, ceramics, and jewelry. Carpets, textiles, and zardozi items are highly valued both locally and internationally. The natural materials, national patterns, and colors used in handicraft processes reflect the aesthetic tastes and traditions of these peoples. Furthermore, the handicrafts of Afghani Uzbeks and Tajiks are not only economically significant but also play a crucial cultural and social role, preserving national heritage and passing it on to younger generations.

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