Crafts of India
HANdMADE IN INDIA

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The state of Jammu and Kashmir consists of three geographical zones—Jammu, a land encompassing plains, mountains and foothills; Kashmir, a mosaic of forests, orchards, rice fields, lakes and waterways; and the high altitude desert of Ladakh, its harsh austerity punctuated by green riversides and cloudless blue skies. Each of these regions possesses a distinct culture that is reflective of its climatic conditions as well as its particular history. Jammu, once the kingdom of the Dogra rulers, is a largely Hindu region renowned for its numerous shrines and courtyard miniatures. Kashmir’s Yogeshwari, artistic and literary traditions are the legacy of political domination by rulers of various religious predilections—the Mauryans, Kushanas, Khasi-Kashmiris, Turks, Persians, Mughals, Sikhs and finally, the Dogra rulers of Jammu—and interaction with the trading communities who passed through it. Kashmir has been a historical centre for the scholarship and teaching of Buddhism, Vedutic culture, Sanskrit, Shaivism, Islam, Sufism and Sikhism. It has also been the focus of varied art patronage and consequently it has amalgamated Turkish, Persian and Mogul influences to create its own art idiom. Due to its scarcity of resources and the presence of nomadic communities, Ladakh has evolved craft practices that are informed both by the formative influences of Central Asian, Chinese and Tibetan cultures as well as by the climatic conditions in which it is situated. Simultaneously, Ladakh also contains another cultural matrix fostered by its predominantly Buddhist population and the patronage by its ancient monasteries. The art forms that belong to this realm are thus closely related to the spiritual and ritualistic requirements of the religion.

1. Connected by seven bridges, the old quarter of Srinagar city sprawls along the banks of the River Jhelum.
2. A man wearing a pheta, the loose overcoat, commonly worn by Kashmiri men and women alike.
3. A mihrab, the arch-shaped niche, of Srinagar city.
4. The papier-mâché panelled entrance to Srinagar’s Shah Hamadan Mosque.
Nestled amid the high mountains of the Shivalik and Pir Panjal ranges lies the verdant valley of Kashmir. In the 7th century BC, the Mauryan emperor Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to the region and it is they who established Srinagar (sternally 'The Happy City of Beauty and Knowledge'), the current capital of the state. The Karakota dynasty consolidated their power in the region during the 7th century, thus bringing Kashmir under Hindu dominion. Kashmir's location on the Silk Route of Central Asia ensured a steady stream of artistic and cultural interac-
tion with various trading communities—Persian, Chinese and Mediterranean—who passed through it. This influx of stylistic influences is apparent in the synthesis of Kashmiri art; it derives from sources as varied as the serenity of the Gandhara sculptures and the stylization of the Persian court. The Persian influence was further highlighted during the rule of Zain-ul-Abadin, a local prince who was forced into exile in Persia by Timur in 1398. The prince returned to his homeland in 1423 accompanied by various skilled craftsmen who introduced and developed the crafts we associate today with Kashmir. The foreign craft traditions fused together with the indigenous craft practices and forged an artistic vocabulary reflective of the environment they were produced in. For example, the chinar (oriental plane), saffron (saffron flowers) and dainposh (pomegranate) motifs recur throughout the range of crafts, thus lending a uniquely Kashmiri character to the products they adorn. Under the Mughal emperor Shahjehan, the crafts of Kashmir, especially that of carpet weaving, received generous patronage. The Mughal influence may also be seen in the gardens of Srinagar, their summer capital, and in the can-
pets which reflect the geometrical layout of these 'Gardens of Paradise' that are based on the Persian Chahar Bagh design.

As an emboiderer at work, the need mat, hank and tents, (wicker container for wool) near him, are typical elements of the local material culture.

NORTH / JAMMU & KASHMIR / Kashmir

Subclasters of Srinagar district
N/HK

Papier-mâché

Copper repoussé work
Kashidakari: Sozni
Kashidakari: Ari
Namda
Carpet weaving
Craft

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