



## INTRODUCTION

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A **Kani shawl** is a type of Kashmir shawl originating from the Kanihama area of the Kashmir valley. It is one of the oldest handicrafts of Kashmir. This craft has been a part of the valley since the time of Mughals. The shawls are woven from pashmina yarn. The government of Jammu and Kashmir has granted a geographical indication to the

Kani shawl, making it illegal to sell shawls made outside of the Kanihama area as Kani shawls.

## History

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Kani weaving is believed to be an art indigenous to Kanihama and traced back to 3000 BC. Since the Mughal Era, it was loved by the kings and emperors. According to Ain-i-Akbari, King Akbar was an ardent admirer of Kani Shawl and in his collection, there were a number of pieces of this Extremely beautiful item. It is one of the valuable exported things from the valley since the historical age.

While the name 'Kani' comes from the area where this particular artisans come from, Kanihama, the word 'Kani' - in Kashmiri - also means a small wooden oblong spool.

# Preparation

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Kani shawl is made from pashmina on a handloom. But instead of a shuttle used in regular pashmina shawls, Kani shawls use needles made from cane or wood. The distinguishable, Mughal patterns, usually of flowers and leaves, are woven into the fabric like a carpet, thread by thread, based on the coded pattern called 'Talim'. The talim guides the weaver in number of warp threads to be covered in a particular colored-weft

The Kani shawls are made from Pashmina Yarn. It is considered that it is the best of Shawl you can ever buy. The undercoat of the Pashmina Goats that they shed in the spring naturally collected by the local artisans is used to make the most expensive fabric on earth.

The Changthangi goats that reside in the cold desert area of Ladakh grow the undercoat to sustain the temperature of winter (that goes up to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) of the region.

Those soft hairs are separated and cleaned to prepare for yarn spinning. Then the artisans, mostly women, hand spin the hair to make the delicate Pashmina wool in their Charkhas.

After the making of the yarn, it is time to weave the shawl. The difference from other Pashmina shawls with Kani Shawls starts from here. It does not use the shuttle like regular Pashmina weaving but cane or wooden needles are used to weave it.

The designer is known as the naqash who creates the pattern of the shawl. In designing, a huge influence of the Mughal Era can be seen. It is quite similar to the flowers and leaves that are woven into the carpet.



The naqash first draw the design on the graph paper and then fill it with colors. The weavers are the craftsmen who bring the design into life with the help of the stick needles that are

loaded with different colors of yarns. Surprisingly, there is no embroidery but the design is weaved on the texture of the shawl. That is the exclusiveness of it.

Even there was no bobbin that shuttles from one side to another to make the wrap. The needles that are called Tujis with different colors of yarns are inserted at different points of the thread spread.



The weavers have to follow a code called 'Talim' created by the designers to make the design. The 'Talim' instruct the weavers the number of wrap thread to be covered by any particular color yarn. Each color has a particular code that the artisans keep in front of them while weaving.

### **Weaving Kani Shawl is a matter of patience.**

Families who are in weaving Kani Shawls usually work patiently, working between 5 and 7 hours a day, in between attending to their household chores. Depending on the intricacy and complexity of the design being woven, an artisan can weave a maximum of few centimetres per day. Depending on the design, size and detailing, a Kani Shawl may take anything between 6 and 18 months to be completed.



From this, you may have understood how much craftsmanship is needed to weave the shawl. It cannot be done by any of the ordinary weavers as it needs special training, knowledge, and patience to execute the subtle technique. The tradition and method of producing the shawls are preserved among the generations of the artisans.

Only the trained craftsmen are knowledgeable enough to weave Kani Shawls the right way. The techniques and knowledge have been transferring from forefathers to next generations. It is estimated that from the 10,000-odd kani weavers, only 2,000 are left today.

However, the renowned Talim patterns are now machine weaving on the shawl force a challenge to the Kani Shawl industry as both the designs are similar. The machine woven shawls are commercially available in India along with Kashmir. The copy of machine weave shawl is cost around \$54 which is one-twentieth of the original handwoven Kani shawl's price.

Handmade Kani shawls may seem to be expensive in comparison with machine weave shawl. Handmade shawls may cost approx \$1200 USD to \$3000 USD and it is totally worth money giving as the efforts and its quality goes into making.

Kani shawls are preserved and displayed in museums like "Victoria and Albert Museum in London", "The Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris" and "The department of Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York".

