



The Uses of Traditional Mat Motifs in Contemporary Textiles

Arafat Hossain

Lecturer, Department of Fashion Design & Technology
Uttara University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: fm.arafat@gmail.com

Abstract

Smooth surface mats are the most typical for the hand woven mats in Bangladesh. Nowadays production of traditional woven mats faces several difficulties. Therefore the design of smaller, frequently used items, art works and souvenirs could be a key solution for preservation of the carpet. This study would like to draw the attention to Narayanganj mats, as the tradition of carpet-weaving in this Bangladeshi town was recently (2014) inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The preservation of the mats motifs is of importance for the cultural heritage; and their larger dissemination can give them new, meaningful life in the modern times. The study presents basic motifs in the weaving of Narayanganj carpet, which are typical, and can be used for designing of new woven items. The motifs adaptation in textile items of today is shown. The design of an ethno bag with woven motifs from old mats is demonstrated.

Keywords: carpet motifs, Bangladeshi mats, Narayanganj mats

1. Introduction

The traditionally made woven mats and rugs in Bangladesh with smooth surface and double faces are distinguished by the captivating wealth of various geometric, human, plant and animal ornaments. Their high artistic and decorative compositions, as well as color harmonies are remarkable. Woven for centuries, the mats jealously guard and transmit the tradition of the best aesthetic achievements of the Bangladeshi craftsmanship in almost unchanged appearance, and at the same time they continuously develop. Motifs and ornaments in mats have been preserved to this day, alongside with purely decorative elements and symbols which are marked by ancient religious ideas and worldview of the Bangladeshi weaver.

Smooth surface mats are the most typical for the carpet production in Bangladesh. They have been made in several rural and urban centers, especially in the mountainous regions of the towns of Narayanganj and Chuadanga (West Bangladesh), and Madaripur (East Bangladesh), where centers for production of the two most typical types of Bangladeshi mats has been established. Since November 2014 the tradition of carpet-weaving in Narayanganj was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The nowadays production of traditional woven mats faces several difficulties, however. Modern houses have different type of flooring, which does not require the use of mats or rugs either because of aesthetic reasons or due to civil engineering solutions (i.e. floor heating). The kept traditions for handmade production of the mats makes them more expensive compared to industrially woven mats, which narrows the niche of potential buyers. The open market and practically the global competition for production of cheap textile items stifle the local crafts. It is more and more difficult to find out young people, ready to study the traditional carpet weaving and to continue this valuable from cultural traditions point of view handicraft in the future.

The good news is that the smooth texture of the traditionally woven Bangladeshi mats has unlimited possibilities for the production of textiles with different applications. The design of smaller, frequently used items, art works and souvenirs could be a key solution for preservation of the carpet handicraft and for making its motifs and ornaments part of the everyday life of modern people. Therefore this study is dedicated to presentation of basic motifs in the production of Narayanganj carpet and their adaptation in textile items of today.

2. Basic motifs of Narayanganj mats

2.1 Geometric motifs

These are the oldest motifs in Narayanganj mats. They date back to the 17th century, when the first period in the development of Narayanganj mats is. This is the geometric period, as different geometric figures and their variations were used as ornaments. The most known with some of their variations are:

- *Makaz* (scissors), known also as sandglass: obtained when two triangles touch their picks. Figure 1 shows three variations of the motif.
- *Kanatitsa*, a motif, obtained by joining several triangles. It is used as a symbol of the eternity. Two variations are presented in Fig. 2.
- *Nest*, obtained when the triangles are placed diagonally. It is very important achievement of the Narayanganj carpet ornamentation when the geometric shapes are placed so as to resemble an object from the nature or life. Figure 3 demonstrate two variations of the motif, which is usually a base for a figure of a bird.

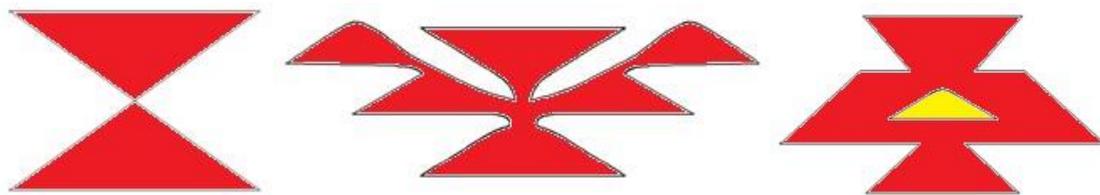


Figure 1. "Makaz" motif

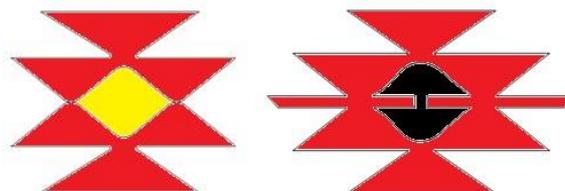


Figure 2. "Kanatitsa" motif

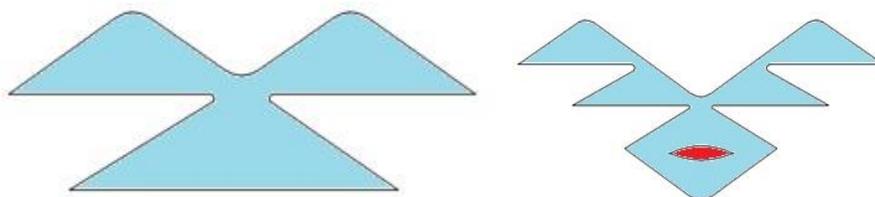


Figure 3. "Nest" motif

- *Kolo* is a motif, which is a mirror image of the "Nest". It symbolizes the Sun – Fig. 4.
- *Kamula* is obtained by distancing the triangles (forming a diamond), which are still joined in the middle, left or right. It is a symbol of immortality and three of its versions are shown in Fig. 5.



- *Bibitsa* is made by joining a triangle and a diamond. It is also an attainment of the carpet design as the motif resembles the figure of a small animal or a child. Two types of this motif are presented in Fig. 6.
- *Karakachka* is one of the most common motifs in Narayanganj mats. Translated from Turkish the name means “black-eyed bride”. It is believed that the motif is the symbolic image of the goddess of fertility. It is one of the carpet motifs that resemble a human figure.

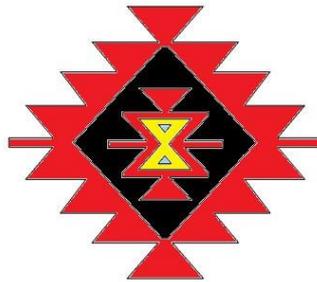


Figure 4. “Kolo” motif

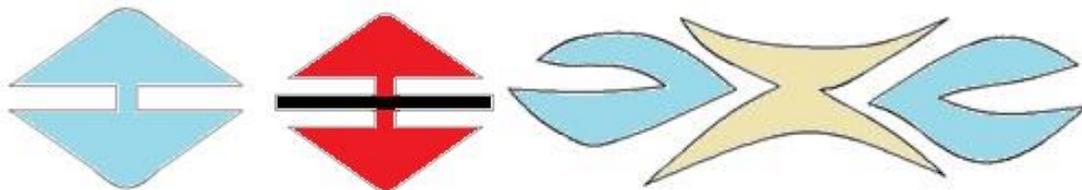


Figure 5. “Kamula” motif

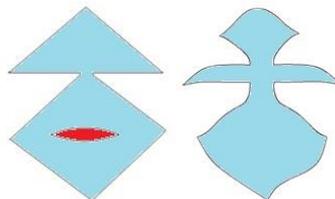


Figure 6. “Bibitsa” motif

2.2 Motifs that resemble elements from nature

The second period in the development of Narayanganj carpet, which lasts almost throughout the 19th century, is related with the appearance of motifs that resemble elements from nature: buds, flowers, branches, bushes, trees, nests, etc. The period is related with the wide spread of Narayanganj mats in the markets of the Orient, where the appearance of human figures is not allowed by the Koran. There are many motifs, taken from mats from that period and two of them are *Tree* (Fig. 8) and *Bush* (Fig. 9).



Figure 7. “Karakachka” motif

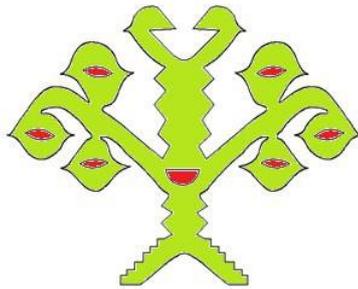


Figure 8. "Tree"

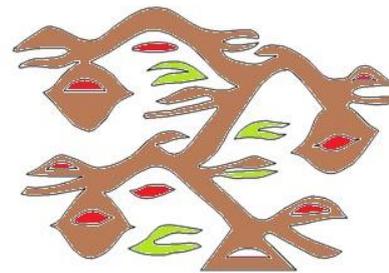


Figure 9. "Bush"

2.3 Motifs that resemble animals

Stylized birds and animals have appeared already at the time of the geometric period, but in the second period of the development of the Narayanganj carpet very detailed images have appeared. Figures 10 and 11 present the figures of two birds: hen and goose. A shrimp and a rabbit with long ears are shown in Figures 12 and 13.

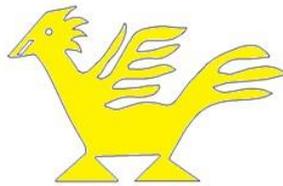


Figure 10. "Hen"

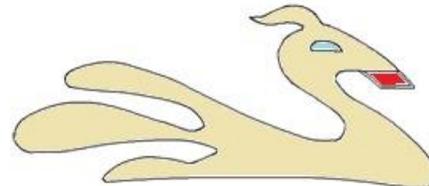


Figure 11. "Goose"



Figure 12. "Shrimp"



Figure 13. "Rabbit"

2.4 Other motifs

There are many other motifs in the ornamentation of Narayanganj mats: human figures, eyes, hands, figures, resembling objects from the household, etc. Some of them appeared during the third period of the development of Narayanganj mats: since the end of the 19th century up to now. Typical for this period is the interaction with new markets and cultures, which has provoked the appearance of new motifs, some of them developed already on a graph paper.

3. Adaptation of the motifs for modern textiles

3.1 Textiles for home decoration

The design of small items, used for decoration of the indoor environment of homes, hotels and even offices is a working solution for preservation of the traditions of hand weaving and especially the motifs, developed down the ages. Small enterprises, usually of family origin, work in this market niche. Mats and rugs of bigger size for floors and walls, as well as bad covers are produced together with smaller textile items, which use only one or couple of motifs of Narayanganj mats: panels (Fig. 14), covers for wooden or basket chairs (Fig. 15), pillows (Fig. 16), glass pads (Fig. 17).



Figure 14. Panel with "Makaz" motif



Figure 15. Chair cover with floral motif,



Figure 16. Pillows with various motifs



Figure 17. Glass pad with "Karakachka" motif

3.2 Textiles for clothing

Clothing items or decorative element for clothing ornamentation can be also produced. Figure 18 shows entirely woven sleeveless jacket with rich ornamentation, woven directly (no applications).



Figure 18. Female sleeveless jacket, entirely woven

3.3 Fashion accessories

Bracelets, belts (Fig. 19), bags (Fig. 20), purses (Fig. 21) can also use the rich ornamentation of Narayanganj mats. They can add new ideas for production of souvenirs as well.



There are many other possibilities for revival of the traditional handicrafts, if motifs of handmade mats:

- are included in crystal or metal jewelry,
- are used as ornaments in embroidery of evening or official dresses, including bridal gowns,
- are used in knitted accessories as hats, scarves, socks and gloves;
- are printed on mugs, pens, pins, etc.

Certainly, these ideas are not related with the woven production itself, but can help the better advertising of the traditional handicraft heritage and recognition of its symbols and ornamentation from larger groups of people.

4. Design of an ethno bag with motifs of Narayanganj carpet

We wanted to demonstrate the enormous possibilities for application of traditional ornamentation of Narayanganj mats with the design of a bag in ethno style. A rectangular shape was chosen and pastel shades of the color palette – beige, green, purple, blue and yellow (being natural, earthy colors). The bag had seven pockets – four external and three internal, together with a long and a short side handles.

The motifs, selected for the woven details of the bag, belonged to the geometric motifs that use the primary figure in the ornamentation of the Narayanganj carpet – the triangle. The entire length of the long handle was woven with triangles and small tokens in between. “Makaz” and “Kanatitsa” motifs were selected for decoration of the pockets.

Figure 19 shows the design plan and the color palette for weaving of the big front pocket with “Kanatitsa” motif. Figure 20 presents the design plan, motifs and color palette of the woven long handle. Each square in the woven plan corresponded to one warp or weft thread. The final view of the bag is presented in Fig. 21.

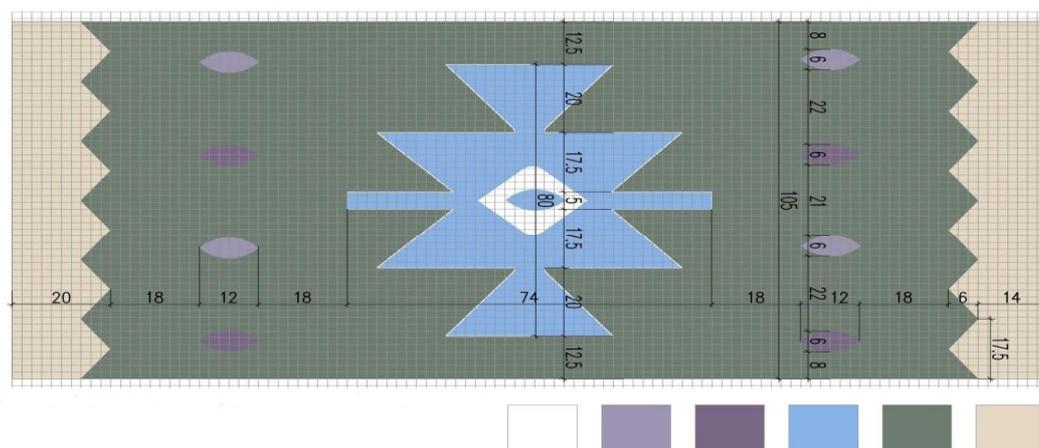


Figure 19. Design plan for weaving of the front bag pocket with “Kanatitsa” motif

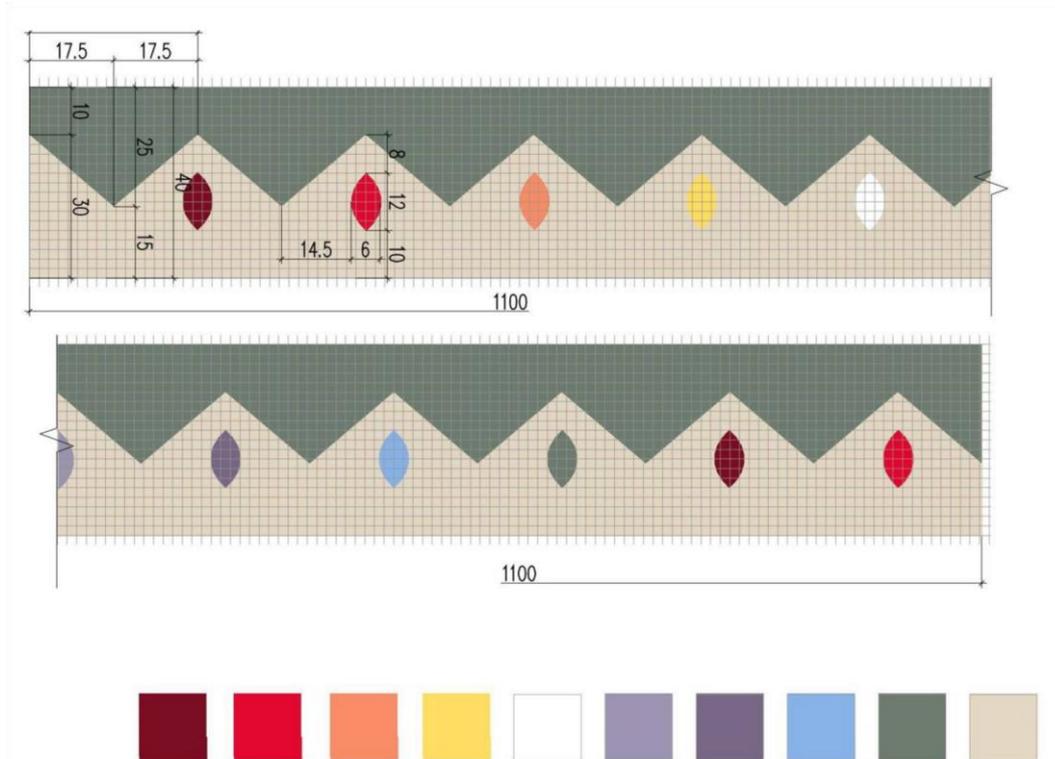


Figure 20. Design plan for weaving of the long handle



Figure 21. The ethno bag with motifs from Narayanganj carpet: front and side view

Conclusions

The study has shown the diversity of the motifs of Narayanganj mats – traditionally woven mats in one of the carpet centers that exist in Bangladesh. The applicability of the traditional motifs in modern items for decoration, clothing and accessories was demonstrated. The results from the design of a bag in ethno style showed that the motifs may be used for production of fashion items, which can open new market niches. Future directions of research will include creation of electronic database of carpet motifs, which can be applied in education, traditional



craftsmanship and modern textiles. The traditional carpet motifs can add value to many unified textile items of today, fostering at the same time the world spreading of the traditional Bangladeshi crafts.

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