

# Preference of consumers for Kashmiri shawls

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Buying preference of consumers for Kashmiri shawls has been reported in this paper. Study was conducted on hundred consumers. Field survey was carried out in Delhi and Lucknow. Questionnaire was used to collect data. It has been found that consumers want to buy these shawls for quality of material, workmanship, motifs and beautiful colour combination.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Consumers, Kashmiri shawls

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**K**ashmir shawls have been renowned since centuries. The Kashmiri shawl is among the most exquisite textile ever woven. It has been the object of desire all over the world. The finest of Indian shawls have always come from Kashmir (Irwin, 1955 and 1973; Jaitly, 1990; Leitner, 1882 and Mathur, 2004).

Kashmiri shawls have an extensive history. Kashmiri shawl evolved over four hundred years, through four different periods of foreign rule, during which Kashmir was ruled successively by the Mughals, the Afghans, the Sikhs and the Dogras. The shawls have absorbed the influence of these four main periods.

It is difficult to classify Kashmiri shawls however; Pashmina, Shatoosh, *Kani* and *Amlī* are the most popular shawl range of Kashmir (Jafri and Rehman, 2006; Levi-Strauss, 1987; Pathak, 2004 and Rizvi and Ahmed, 2009). Fibre, motif/design, color and manufacturing technique of these shawls differentiates them from shawls of other regions of India and of course, from shawls of other countries of the world. These shawls are renowned for their intricate designs and designing technique (Nazir,

2010; Rustam, 1970 and 1979 and Shaik, 2005).

Change in consumer's taste and preferences, changing fashion trends bring about changes in colour, motifs used in textile. Likewise, technological advancement and modernization bring about change in the manufacturing techniques and raw material used. These factors have also influenced Kashmiri shawl and the industry (Honda, 1998; Hudson and Thames, 2008; Jane and Nylander, 1990 and Krishna, 1966).

It is essential to determine consumer's buying preferences for Kashmiri shawls. Data on consumer's buying behaviour with indication of demand preference for shawl and pattern of consumption together with advantage/disadvantage perceived by consumer groups are very essential (Report of Jammu and Kashmir, 2013). Consumer research in this field will provide shawl industry up to date information as to consumers' preference and their requirements (Mehta, 1970; Tembhare, 2006 and Watson, 1866).

Therefore, a study was conducted to gather information about consumer's buying practices and attitude towards Kashmiri shawls.

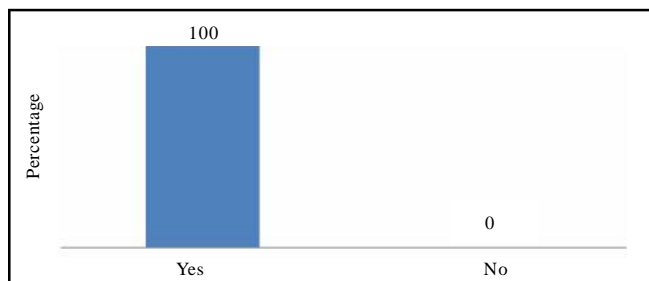
**RESEARCH METHODS**

The study was conducted in New Delhi and Lucknow. One hundred respondents were selected purposely to collect the information. Those consumers were selected who use shawl. Respondents belonged to middle and high income groups. In view of the purpose of the study, survey method was selected for the data collection. A questionnaire was prepared to collect the information from consumers which contained open ended and close ended questions.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Result has been presented below :

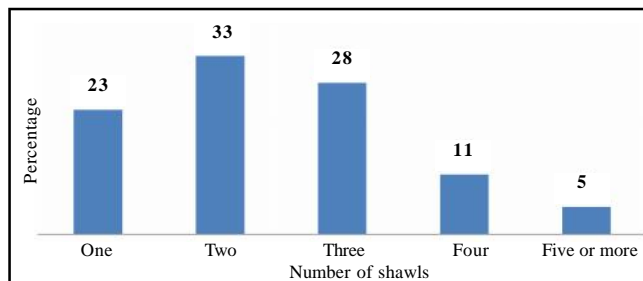
Fig. 1 shows that all the consumers like to wear Kashmiri shawls. Kashmiri shawls are exquisitely crafted items. Their intricate designs, softness, warmth, superior quality is well known in national and international arena. Due to these characteristics shawls are liked by women all over the world.



**Fig. 1 : Willingness to wear Kashmiri shawls**

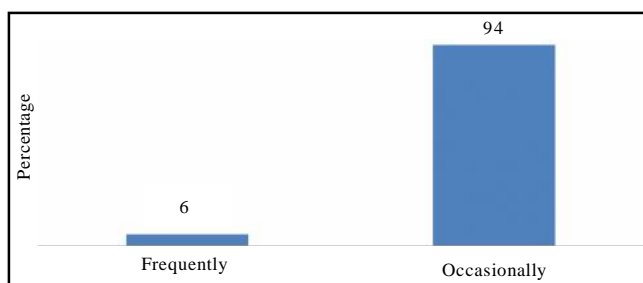
It is clear from data given in Fig. 2 that about 23 per cent consumers own one Kashmiri shawl whereas, 33 per cent own two shawls. 28 per cent consumers possess three shawls. Percentage of consumers owing four shawls is 11 per cent. On the other hand, only 5 per cent consumers have more than five shawls.

It is clear from Fig. 3 that majority of consumers (94 %) use Kashmiri shawls occasionally such as in parties, marriage and other family functions. Kashmiri



**Fig. 2 : Number of shawls owned by consumers**

shawls are costly, high value products which cannot be used frequently by the consumers. Pashmina is known as high quality fibre that is why it is called as the king of wool. The process of shawl making in Kashmir fully done by hand whether it is spinning, weaving, dyeing and washing the whole process is done by hand. Because of all these this is a high value product.



**Fig. 3 : Frequency of use of Kashmiri shawls by consumers**

Very few consumers use it frequently. The reason may be they are using blended or fake product made on machine which are sold in the name of Kashmiri shawl and are cheaper than pure shawls.

Kashmiri shawls are available in price ranging from Rs. 500 to 25,000 depending on quality of shawl which in turn depends on quality of fibre, complexity of design and workmanship. Table 1 shows expenditure on kashmiri shawl by consumers. 46 per cent consumers spend less than Rs. 5000 on shawl. 21 per cent spend less than 10,000 and 29 per cent spend less than Rs. 15000. Hardly

Table 1 : Expenditure on Kashmiri shawls by the consumers		(n=100)
Sr. No.	Expenditure	Percentage
1.	Less than Rs. 5000	46
2.	Less than Rs.10,000	21
3.	Less than Rs.15,000	29
4.	More than Rs.15,000	4

4 per cent consumers spend more than Rs. 15000.

Authentic genuine shawls are very expensive. Even then people buy it at any cost. It's a passion to have a Kashmiri shawl. Kashmiri shawls are made from wool, Pashmina and shahtoosh fibre. The prices of the three cannot be compared - woolen shawls being within reach of the most modest budget, and shahtoosh being a one-in-a-lifetime purchase. But these days machine made shawl of wool or blended yarns are also available which are cheaper.

An attempt has been made to find out how many shawls have been purchased during last ten years to understand demand of Kashmiri shawls from consumers. It is clear from Fig. 4 that 44 per cent consumers purchased two shawls during last ten years whereas 24 per cent have purchased one shawl. 22 per cent consumers have bought three shawls. There are three consumers who have bought more than four shawls (5-7) in last ten years.

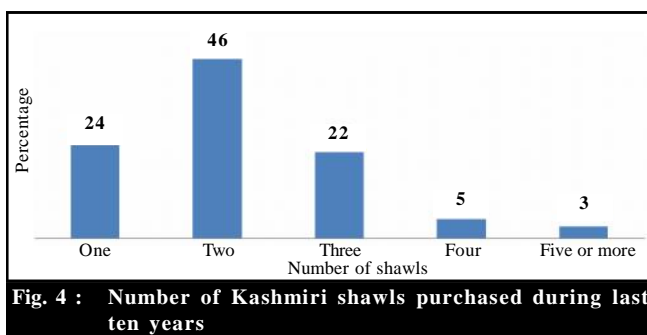


Fig. 4 : Number of Kashmiri shawls purchased during last ten years

Mostly people buy the shawls which are in trend and also friendly to the pocket. Kashmiri shawls no doubt are the best in quality and creativity. It is evident from Fig. 5 that most preferred Kashmiri shawl of consumers is *amli* shawl followed by *kani* shawl and shawls with other woven designs. *Amli* shawl are renowned for beautiful embroidery work and are comparatively cheaper than *kani* shawl.

*Kani* shawls are the master piece of Kashmiri craft tradition but it is high in cost because of its delicacy and skillful weaving. It's definitely in demand. Consumer now - a-day also prefer printed or shawl with lace because they

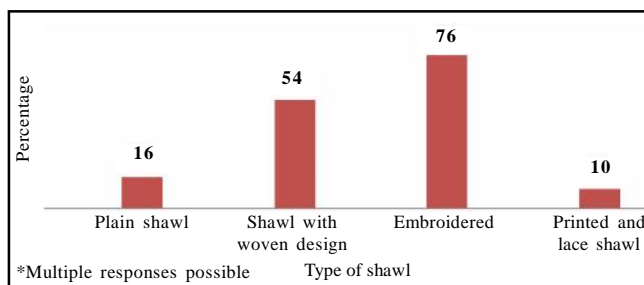


Fig. 5 : Kashmiri shawls mostly liked by consumers

are in fashion these days thus, providing variety to consumer.

Respondents have given various reasons for preference for Kashmiri shawls. These are: quality of material such as softness, warmth, light weight; unique motifs and design, excellent workmanship (quality of yarn and weave), beautiful embroidery (stitches) and definitely aesthetically pleasing colour combination. People like to wear it as it is the mark of richness and delicacy. It is evident from Fig. 6 that maximum numbers of consumers like to buy and wear the shawls for these attributes.

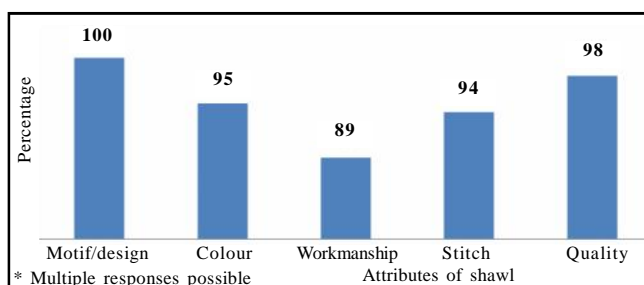


Fig. 6 : Reasons for preferring Kashmiri shawl

Table 2 shows that all the consumers have observed change in motif and colour of shawl. 90 per cent have said that quality has changed and 86 per cent have observed change in technique.

### Differences in motifs of Kashmiri shawl noticed by the respondents over the years :

It has been observed by consumers that the motifs are stylized and not so intricate. Even though they use the traditional motifs but those are more stylized in form.

Features	Yes	No
Motif	100 per cent	-
Colour	100 per cent	-
Quality	90 per cent	10 per cent
Embroidery	96 per cent	4 per cent

According to the respondents they are of course good but not at par with traditional designs.

### **Change in colour combination of Kashmiri shawls:**

Some consumers have said that colour combinations are more or less similar to the past. Others are of the view that very bright colours are being used. Even florescent colours are being used by manufacturers. They use colours according to fashion trend and market demand. Shawls in almost every colour is available today is opinion of some consumers. Thus it can be said that colour has changed drastically from the past.

### **Change in quality of fabric :**

Quality of material has gone down. Again this may be due to the fact that blended yarn or wool yarn are being used, plus mechanization of the shawl making process which has negatively affected the quality.

### **Change in Embroidery of Kashmiri shawls observed during last few years :**

A shawl that is embroidered not only showcases the creativity but also the imagination of an artisan. Embroidery Kashmiri shawls are the perfect combination of unique beauty and heritage design.

Majority of the consumers are of the view that quality of stitches used in embroidered shawls have gone down. Fineness in the embroidery stitches is less visible. Bold / coarse stitches can be seen which might be due to the use of more than one thread. Different types of stitches are being used.

### **Suggestion by consumers for improvement in Kashmiri shawls :**

Most of the consumers said that improvement is needed in terms of retaining the traditional motifs and quality of stitches. They want that these are hand made traditional product which should be maintained. The handloom sector cannot be promoted unless the living conditions of weavers are improved," while adding that it was necessary to eliminate middlemen from the trade, as they exploit weavers' artistic works for petty gains.

### **Conclusion :**

Thus it can be said that Kashmiri shawls are very much in demand but consumers want improvement in

quality of stitches and motifs. As study was conducted in two locales and sample size was small, result of the study cannot be generalized.

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