

Handmade Carpets Need to Tap Indian Market



Pic. Sharda Exports

Though India has been a country of carpet weaving by hand for ages, and is today a global leader for handmade carpets and rugs, it has not fully explored its own domestic market for these exquisite pieces of arts, crafts and culture. Home Fashion probed the situation and had an elaborate discussion with Mr. Kuldeep Wattal, Chairman, Carpet Export Promotion Council, to find his perspective on behalf on Indian export community.

Even as export markets for Indian handmade carpets, where India commands a whopping

37% share, continue to shrink due to weaker economic conditions in the Western countries and the demand in the Indian domestic market continues to rise, Indian rugs and carpet manufacturers have not been able to make an effective shift to this growing market. Is the Indian market opportunity for handmade carpets real? And if yes, what is holding the carpet sellers to look at this market, even as they struggle to sustain their export orders?

Prices not a deterrent

Are handmade carpets too expensive for the



Kuldeep Wattal, Chairman,
Carpet Export Promotion Council

Indian consumers?
“No, Not at all,” reacts Mr. Wattal and explains further, “India has emerged as a world leader in the hand-knotted carpet market only because of the fact

that ours is the only Industry globally, which can cater to the lower, middle, higher and premium segments of consumers. Our weavers can produce carpets in economy as well as luxury range. Hence affordability of prices is not really a restricting factor in the Indian market”

It is misconception that hand-knotted carpets are very expensive and not meant for the Indian market. They can be bought starting from Rs.5,000 for a carpet in size 4 feet x 6 feet.

Of course, on the higher end, the same size rug can also be bought at prices as high as Rs. 50,000 or even Rs. 5, 00,000, depending on the yarn, fineness, and no. of knots and intricacy of designs.

Lack of Designs

Another major misconception amongst Indian consumers about handmade carpets is lack of designs and variety. Even though there has been a sea change in designs of handmade carpets over the last one decade, very little has been communicated to the consumers in India.

Today, most manufacturers have adopted to the modern design trends, leaving behind oriental and Prussian designs. Innovations have been made in use of yarns by blending different materials like viscose, wool, cotton and Jute in yarns, which allows production of contemporary, bright colours and designs which appeal to

younger consumers.

This transition was very important as consumers today want their interiors to be colour and design coordinated. These days the cost has become secondary. What matters the most is how the carpet blends with the decor. Modern range of carpets made from blended fibres goes well with the modern constructions. Oriental carpets were used in oriental buildings and these days modern carpets are being used in modern flats.

Lack of Marketing

Such changes in the design capabilities of Indian carpet industry have not been communicated. Hence, the real reason for not capturing the Indian market is that the carpet industry has not promoted its products amongst Indian consumers. Information has not been disseminated to the consumers in terms of designs, product attributes and value handmade carpets bring to their homes in terms of rich Indian heritage.

Awareness level of modern handmade carpets in India is low as most consumers perceive handmade carpets as Prussian designs, oriental carpets or Kashmiri silk carpets, all of which are made with very fine knots with highest quality woollen and silk yarns. They are designed to be premium products. Today, many machine-made carpet makers copy these designs as cheap imitations and also promise low maintenance, giving severe and unfair competition to the original Indian products.

Role of Indian Retailers

Indian retailers selling carpets are doing well, but they do not wish to share their success with others. Nearly 1,000 retailers in India sell carpets. But even retailers aren't aware about the latest developments in this sector and need to be

educated. Some leading specialty stores like Jagdish Stores who have focussed on this category are doing well. They carry the entire range and wide price points to cater to all segments.

Machine-made carpets better?

There is a popular perception in India that machine-made carpets are better than the handmade ones. How far is it true? “The only reason why machine made carpets are in demand is because they have been aggressively promoted here. Therefore, marketing is the key issue. Given a choice, the consumer would prefer to have hand-knotted carpet which is hundred times better than a machine made carpet,” insists Mr. Wattal.



Pic. Sharda Exports

“Raw materials used in machine made carpets like polyester and polypropylene are not consumer friendly. On the other hand, natural fibers like wool and silk used in handmade carpets are good for health and environment.

They are also better in comfort and performance in day to day usage. Machine-made carpets do not last long and are difficult to be washed.”

“If awareness is created amongst Indian consumers on all these comparative aspects, I am sure, they would prefer hand-knotted carpets, over machine-made ones,” emphasizes Kuldeep Wattal.

Need for market focus

“CEPC certainly realises that India's domestic market offers a huge opportunity, even in the global context. When the whole world is looking at India as one of the most important emerging markets for its products, there is no reason, why we should ignore it. But, for years, the Indian

carpet industry has been very much focused on exports. We have been trying to develop the Indian market for some time now through trade shows like HGH India and other focussed efforts. Many exporters are trying to develop a domestic market on their own as well”, says Mr. Kuldeep Wattal, Chairman Carpet Export Promotion Council.

Indian carpet manufacturers need to have a much deeper penetration in the

domestic market. We want more events like HGH India for carpet industry with a focus on Indian domestic market to come up in the future, where our participation should be of the size of events like Domotex in Hanover. 