

**WILLOW WICKER ART THAT'S ON JEOPARDIZE: INNITIATIVES TO PREVENT  
THIS DYING ART FROM ITS EXTINCTION.**

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The sophisticated art of basket weaving is known as "kaeni keam" in the native language. It is a Kashmiri traditional business that uses wicker twigs as a raw material. It is one of the valley's oldest crafts. The craft's goods, which were once found in every home, are now in decline. Due to the state's stakeholders' neglect, Kashmiri willow wicker items are losing market share. In order to maintain our cultural legacy, this craft must be revitalized. In Kashmir, wicker craft has been subjected to a variety of unfavorable circumstances. Due to their finish, Chinese and plastic products are attempting to replace wicker willow products. White collar occupations and the government's callous attitude are two factors contributing to the craft's decline. The ongoing study is a little attempt to demonstrate the enormous arduousness of artists in this regard, as well as how this culture might be perpetuated.

**Key words:** Wicker Willow, Kashmir, Leheriya Dyeing, Bobbin Lace, Direct create, Digital media.

**Research Objectives:**

- To study the Willow wicker handicraft Art in Kashmir.
- To study the Arduousness of artisans to promote and preserve the wicker willow culture in Kashmir.
- To Study the problems of Willow wicker art in Kashmir.
- To study some prime majors to preserve the willow wicker culture.

**Methodology:**

The present study is based on the qualitative data collection method. Both primary and secondary sources of data are been used. A Direct personal investigation and extensive literature survey has been done.

Primary data include interviews, questionnaires, observations, and case studies, etc. Secondary data including books, reports, research papers, newspapers, magazines, and websites has been used for the purpose of study.

### **Introduction:**

The valley of Kashmir, which we all know as the earth's paradise, is more than just a country of picturesque landscapes, monuments, and gardens. Kashmir is a land of diverse religious beliefs, cuisine, music, clothing, and art forms, but most significantly, it is a land of compassion and love. Kashmir has a rich historical and cultural heritage that reflects the valley's customs and culture and produces a variety of crafts like as woodcrafts, ceramics, jewellery, stone carving, paper mache, carpet industry, and Willow wicker, among others. Although the handicrafts from different sections of the state are distinct, the traditional craft, which has existed for hundreds of years, is gradually fading among Kashmiris. Wicker willow, which will be addressed in the same article, is one of the most popular and historic handicrafts.

Wicker handicraft, or basket and furniture weaving, is a well-known forest-based cottage business of the Shaakhsaazi people, and it has played a significant role in Kashmir's socio-economic and cultural history. Mulberry and willow trees are abundant in Kashmir. The cottage industry has a unique feature: the willow industry. Baskets, boxes, chairs, and the famed Kangri (portable brazier) are just a few examples of what Kashmiri artists can produce using willow branches (Singh 2000). 'Kangri' is a handcrafted warming device comprised of an earthen bowl and a decoratively woven willow frame. Wicker is used to make lampshades, curtain rings, trays, tables, and cycle baskets in Kashmir, which is noted for its wicker willow. Tokras, tokris, oval-shaped containers with covers, and chhikus are among the various items available. The cultivation of wicker willow is a state-owned monopoly.

Containers and mats made of straw grass and twigs date back to ancient times. Kashmir's lush foliage and proximity to lakes make it perfect for the wicker industry. While this business has never been regarded as a major activity, it has long been intertwined with people's daily lives. Wicker is abundant in Kashmir, and craftspeople known as shaksaz or kainyal use it to create charmingly odd things that are often affordable. A few decades ago, English willow was grown in Kashmir, yielding willow with longer twigs than those produced in England (Singh 2000). The human race ruled the world stage because it protected its legacy. Egypt, Greece, Persia, and India are all examples of ancient civilizations (Ali 2005)

### **Making Process:**

Willow saplings are used to grow the plant. Once a sapling has sprouted, it is separated and put in the ground so that its shoots can be harvested every year. Until it is uprooted, the sapling continues to yield

an annual harvest. The saplings are usually planted throughout the months of February and March. A standard willow plant grows to a height of 2-3 meters, and the crop is harvested around October.

The withy is arranged into bundles based on length and girth once the crop is harvested. The industrial processing of the harvest begins here, with the crop being sold to a contractor, who then assigns it to numerous artisans with descriptions of the items that each artisan must create. As soon as the artisan receives the raw material, the first task is to soften it. This is accomplished by boiling a raw willow crop. Boiling is done in large water boilers with a flammable wood fire. Huge boulders support the bundles as they are placed into a boiler. This boiling process takes place throughout night.

The bundles are removed from the boilers after a successful boil and sent down to the next stage. Following the boiling, the bark is peeled away. The removal of the bark is a delicate procedure that requires the use of a unique arrangement of sticks known as zealan in the area.

The bark is a great source of energy. The withy is placed in direct sunshine to dry as soon as the bark has been removed. The technique takes several days to ensure that the withy is thoroughly dry. The dried withy is divided into bundles according on length and girth once more.

Craft makers can now use the withy. They are used by artisans based on the product's requirements and size. Some are used in their natural state, while others are smoothed and trimmed. All of the items are arranged and mounted on a base. The size and shape of the product are determined by the base. Colored reeds are used in some items. During the manufacturing process, artisans' crafts pass through several hands.



Making of Wicker Willow

***The New & innovative changes :***

The willow can be painted blue, red, or green, and multi-directional weaving in the upper half of the kangri create diverse geometric patterns. Shiny coloured foil, mirrors, and metal bits are used to further adorn these. The basket-maker is known as Shaksaz in the area. The kangri of Shaksaz Mohalla in Charar-e-Sharif are used by the Kashmiri pundit community on ritual occasions, particularly during the Shushur Sankrant. Shushur means frost, and each family's new wife is given an elegant kangri containing money on this day. Hindu families frequently gift their priests a kangri to show honour to their forefathers and mothers.

***Lehariya Dying art from Rajasthani:***

Leheriya is a traditional tie dye technique used in Rajasthan, India, that produces vividly coloured fabric with distinct patterns. It represents Rajasthan's unique and diverse clothing tradition. Because the dyeing technique is frequently employed to make complicated wave patterns, it receives its name from the Rajasthani word for wave. The natural, ripple pattern in fascinating colours created by a colour resist dyeing method distinguishes Lehariya. In dazzling colour combinations, the wavy, diagonal stripes formed by this method look seductive. The auspicious colours of yellow and red were originally coloured in these perfectly matched diagonal stripes. Now, in order to achieve a large market, Kashmiri willow wicker artists have started to utilise the same dye.

***Bobbin Lace from Tamil Nadu:***

Bobbin lace is a type of lace formed by braiding and twisting lengths of thread that are wound on bobbins to keep them organised. The weaving is held in place by pins set in a lace pillow as the project advances, with the positioning of the pins usually determined by a pattern or pricking fastened on the cushion. Because it was created on a cushion, bobbin lace is also known as pillow lace or bone lace. Early bobbins were composed of bone and ivory. Bobbin lace, sometimes called pillow lace or pin lace, is intrinsically related to Christian holidays. Intricate lace work is required for occasions such as baptisms and weddings. Lace kerchiefs can be folded and tucked into the groom's suit's top pocket, or used as napkins to carry the infant during the baptism. Bobbin lace is made up of threads wound on bobbins in pairs. Willow wickers in Kashmir have also employed this technique.

**Usages:**

Willow wicker goods are made from a variety of perishable raw materials, as are the finished products. Even shed products are unique in that they serve a multitude of roles. A willow wicker item's basic purpose is comparable to that of a container, in that it holds, stores, and transports numerous items. Not only for agriculture, but also for modern-day activities, such a use is ideal. Even while the fundamental use of willow wicker things persists, society's shifting patterns and increasingly inventive willow wicker

item-makers have devised a number of new applications for their products. In Kashmir, for example, this art is used to make hand fans as well as soft prayer mats for mosques. Surprisingly, there has been no significant change in the techniques used to weave willow wicker products, whether in the West or the East. Kashmir's willow wicker industry is a valuable resource. The products are appealing not only to tourists but also to residents. Shaksaz (willow wicker experts) work around the clock to create these items. Many things, such as the duck-shaped basket, were not available a few decades ago due to their inventiveness. They're also attempting to create objects that resemble plastic items, such as lampshades. Several other persons are employed as a result of these Shaksaz.

In practice, most Kashmiri willow wicker objects come in a variety of forms and sizes and are made out of round, spherical, or cylindrical baskets and containers. They're used to store chapattis, veggies, trinkets, garments, and unspun cotton, among other things.

Willow rush grows abundantly in Kashmir's marshes and lakes, and it's used to construct beautifully adorable products ranging from shopping baskets and lampshades to tables and chairs, all of which are quite inexpensive. Unvarnished items should be chiseled and sprayed with water periodically to avoid becoming brittle, especially in hot and dry areas. Bamboo crafts are strongly ingrained in the local folk tradition due to the abundant proliferation of bamboos. Tokras, tokris, oval-shaped containers with lids, and chhikus are among the items available. An earthen bowl covered in a net of bamboo slips is used to make 'Kangri,' the handcrafted warming equipment used in Kashmir.



Willow Wicker items



Kangri

***Challenges:***

At a time when the state's handicrafts sector is experiencing a decline, willow wicker (Kani Wallas) craftspeople are expressing delight with the profits the trade brings them. Many wicker workers remarked that the non-intervention of the machinery has been the most important element in their survival thus far. Willow wickers art has a reputation for being low-art, which has kept it from achieving the level of prominence that other valley crafts have. However, because of its limited popularity and lack of machine intervention, the originality of this craft has remained unaffected to this day. However, raw materials are becoming increasingly expensive, posing a challenge for workers at first, because machine-made products are much cheaper and handicraft products require complex labor work with low profit margins, the state's handicraft industry has lost its market share due to industrialization, burgeoning growth in substitute products, rapid changes in consumer tastes, and a scarcity of raw materials. Furthermore, the industry is in a bad state due to growing raw material prices and a weak marketing network. Handicrafts are an alternate source of income to agriculture and animals.

There are various institutions/schemes that give credit facilities, but most rural artisans are ignorant of such schemes, and most financial institutions want security to repay the loans, which is a huge barrier for craftsmen because they rarely have any.

One of the primary weaknesses of rural craftsmen is their lack of knowledge. There are only a few institutes in rural regions that provide craft education, and most artists are unable to profit from it owing to a lack of awareness or access. Furthermore, traditional crafts instruction and research were not included in professional institutes, which is a serious barrier to passing cultural heritage knowledge to new generations.

Lack of design originality, as well as the need for craftspeople to adapt to modern customer tastes in order to compete in the market. Furthermore, this sector has been harmed by insufficient infrastructure, which has hampered the production process, resulting in uncompetitive business. Furthermore, many craft traditions have vanished and many are battling to survive due to the unwillingness of the younger generation to follow this job.

***Preserving measures:***

Despite the various prospects available in this sector and the benefit of cultural heritage, this industry has been largely overlooked, with a low-skilled workforce and archaic industrial methods still in use, resulting in a significant loss of international market share. Despite the fact that demand for hand knotted willow wicker items is increasing, the local business is well-organized enough to capitalise on the opportunity. Other cultures can teach us a lot, but it is our job to maintain our own. Our rich culture

allows us to appreciate and admire people of different faiths and castes equally. Kashmiri handicrafts are well-known over the world. Due to the state's stakeholders' neglect, Kashmiri willow wicker items are losing market share. In order to maintain our cultural legacy, this craft must be revitalised. We can preserve this lovely work in a variety of ways:

**Kashmir Patriot:** Kashmir Patriot is a leading 'Digital Media' company in Jammu and Kashmir. It's a cutting-edge digital news platform for today's tech-savvy age. It's a seamless mix of video, audio, text, and images, and it's a full-fledged multimedia digital platform. Kashmir Patriot is a portal to the State of Jammu & Kashmir in the digital age, providing comprehensive coverage and up-to-the-minute news, perspectives, features, and more.

**Digital Library:** Digital libraries are organization that provide resources, including specialised staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence of collections of digital works over time; they are made easily and affordably available for use by a defined community or set of communities. Digital libraries can also be thought of as new types of information institutions, multimedia information retrieval systems, or information systems that facilitate the development, use, and search of digital content (Arms 2000). A digital library, according to Koohang and Ondracek (2005), is "a collection of services and information items, as well as their organisation, structure, and presentation that assist users in dealing with information objects available directly or indirectly via electronic/digital means." The willow wicker, one of Kashmir's most well-known crafts, is represented in the digital library.

**Direct Create (DC :** Direct Create (DC) is India's first digital creative platform, bringing together local producers with a worldwide network of designers and buyers to collaborate and co-create handcrafted goods. Buyers may design products, explore a curated selection of quality handmade goods, and experience the timeless beauty of Indian craftsmanship with Direct Create. We build an organic link between producers and customers by cultivating a community of over 15,000 chosen makers and designers. Direct Create (DC) is a transaction ecosystem that unites Maker - Designer - Buyer and encompasses everything and everyone. As a result, we've devised a concept in which anyone can be a Creator.

**Government Endeavor:** Since centuries, handicrafts have formed the backbone of the state's economy. The advent of the modern industrial age had little impact on the profitability of crafts, which had always had the ability to hold sway in even international markets. Because of the sector's enormous potential for economic activity, the government has always given it top priority in its overall growth. In 1972-73, a full-fledged Department was founded to project the crafts on a larger scale. Prior to its formation, the department was a division of the Directorate of Industries and Commerce. The newly formed Department of Handicrafts began operations with a focus on the following:

- To identify and eradicate the problems faced by the Industry.
- To provide artisans force to the sector in place of the ageing and proficient artists.
- To mobilize the poor/small artisans for formation of co-operatives.
- To create markets for sale of the craft produce of the State.
- Creating craft awareness at the places where it is least introduced.
- To keep tab on consumer preferences by way of designs and,
- To eradicate the middle-man-ship by way of direct liaison between Buyers and Sellers.
- Above all to help maintain qualitative image of the crafts.

### **Conclusion:**

Due to the carelessness of both the people and the government, the willow wicker industry in Kashmir is steadily fading. People have completely forgotten about this business, opting for plastic things instead of willow. Not only is this bad for the industry, but it is also harmful for the environment. Even while plastic is known for its toughness, it is a significant contaminant. Kashmir's willow wicker industry is a valuable resource that employs thousands of people. The Shaksaz can readily restore wicker articles that have been damaged. Furthermore, because these things are biodegradable, they do not pollute the environment. The government should Endeavour to preserve Kashmir's cultural heritage. Special strategies should be designed to keep the Kashmir Valley's willow wicker industry alive.

The use of a digital library to promote willow wicker goods is an excellent technique of popularising such items. Today, online buying has grown into a multibillion-dollar industry. Customers from all around the world shop on websites like Homeshop18 ([www.homeshop18.com](http://www.homeshop18.com)), Snap deal ([www.snapdeal.com](http://www.snapdeal.com)), and others. Lane Venture ([www.laneventure.com](http://www.laneventure.com)), which sells furniture, including wicker goods, all over the world and shows their wares beautifully by releasing their catalogues online, is a fantastic example. Such initiatives, if made locally, can also be beneficial to our heritage. All those participating in this art, as well as others who love their culture, must put forth similar efforts. This will provide them access to a global market, allowing the culture to be preserved for a long period. With the new medium of online, there is an urgent need to sensitize the minds of a conscious breed to demonstrate our rich culture, heritage, and crafts throughout the world.

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