

Afghan Arts and Handicrafts (Embroidery -Khamak)



Unique handicrafts/Art and cultural products can be found in every nation, territory, and zone that showcase the customs and traditions of the locals living in that specific area. Afghanistan has produced arts and handicrafts for many centuries, and handicrafts have become a great part of the Afghan culture. A wide variety of handicrafts are available in Afghanistan such as luxurious Afghan carpets, rugs, antiques, embroidered clothing, jewelry, saddle bags, caps, hand-woven silk textiles, Istalefi handmade pottery and so on. Since a long time ago, the reputation of Afghan handicrafts has been exceptional, allowing many Afghans to support their families and take care of their financial needs by selling their products.

Among all the famous handicrafts in Afghanistan, locally and internationally, Khamak Dozi (Embroidery) is one of the most famous forms of craft in Afghanistan through which a good number of Afghan women and men earn an income. Given that Afghanistan is bordered by many different ethnic groups and civilizations, it is not surprising that the materials, designs, and colors used by the Afghan people for their embroidery reflect the crucial and strategic location of their country. Nearly every ethnic group in Afghanistan has a unique way of life, which is frequently mirrored in their customary embroidery, and for women in Kandahar and Helmand provinces, Khamak Dozi is considered an essential part of their lives.

What is Khamak Dozi?

Khamak dozi is a distinctive hand embroidery method used by women in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar and Helmand provinces. It is a sophisticated, detailed embroidery technique that uses delicate silk satin stitches to create complex patterns and designs on a fine woven cotton cloth. The themes in Khamak Dozi vary from flowers and leaves shapes to geometric shapes, however, women constantly come up with new designs. Art experts believe that one of the world's best embroidery techniques is Khamak Dozi. It is typically used to adorn men and women clothing, head scarves for women, and Patoo (shawls) for men. Also, embroidery is used to decorate table cloths, mats and so on. Khamak Dozi not only imitates ideas and designs of Afghan women in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces but also each embroidery piece reflects the hard work of those Afghan women.

Women and Khamak Dozi

Women in Kandahar and Helmand provinces live limited lives with limited freedom and few options due to several restrictions on women in Afghanistan, thus, the best alternate for women in Kandahar and Helmand is Khamak Dozi for generations, and it has transformed into a source of hope, livelihood, empowerment, self-assurance and freedom for the women in the mentioned provinces. The majority of Pashtun girls pick up the art of khamak Dozi as young girls, carrying on their mothers' and grandmothers' traditions. It's simple to learn the basic satin stitch, but it can take decades to excel the complex border and filling patterns that are created by combining and connecting the stitches in certain ways. It is a tradition in Kandahar and Helmand provinces that girls from young age get involved in learning embroidery and it has been deeply enmeshed

in Afghan culture since centuries. It is considered a vital part of a young girl's life and many girls see embroidery as a source of education, and excel this skill and pass it to their future generations, because this skill not only gives hope to those women, but also provides a sense of satisfaction for them.

