

## **An Investigation and Analysis of the Reflection of National Identity Indicators and Dimensions in Pictorial Carpets of the Qajar Era**

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### **Introduction**

Pictorial carpets from the Qajar era represent a novel phenomenon in Iranian carpet artistry, introducing innovation to carpet designing while maintaining a deep-rooted connection with the traditional motifs and the overall structure of Iranian carpets. These carpets hold a unique position in history of Iranian artistry. For this reason, it is necessary to study and investigate the innovations and creativity they introduced to the tradition of Iranian carpet design, aiming to identify, locate, and illuminate the components and indicators of both national and Iranian identity within the visual elements and themes employed in these carpets. To achieve this goal, the following research questions were posed: a) to what extent do various categories of pictorial carpets from the Qajar period have six dimensions of 'national identity'? b) How often do different indicators of 'national identity' appear in these carpets? c) How are the elements of national identity manifested and reflected in the Qajar pictorial carpets?

### **Research Method**

The article is fundamental in terms of its purpose and deploys a descriptive-analytical method in terms of its nature. Data analysis was conducted by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. All the available pictorial carpets of the Qajar era were considered as the statistical population of this research, from which a sample of 79 carpets was selected based on specific criteria, including the design and thematic frequencies, originality, and the geographical diversity of the fabric's origin. The data was collected through a thorough review and a content analysis of the 79 carpets. The most prominent visual, semantic, and thematic elements within each group were matched with the components and indicators of national identity. These items were presented in a structured table. Subsequently, the information from tables 3 to 10 was quantitatively summarized in Table 11.

### **Research Findings**

In three groups of Qajar pictorial carpets with the themes of 'Royal Motif', 'Famous Figures' and 'Four Seasons', all six dimensions and indicators of national identity were found. Therefore, it can be affirmed that in terms of referencing and embodying 'national identity' and 'Iranian identity', these three groups exhibited the most visible and cohesive visual and content representations. The pictorial carpets themed around 'ancient literature' follow, encompassing four indicators: 'social,' 'historical,' 'cultural,' and 'geographical'. However, the carpets which portray symbolic and religious subjects as well as Darvish and Sufism leaders only reference national identity indicators in two dimensions: cultural and religious. On the other hand, those carpets featuring animal motifs, an adaptation of western themes, and female motifs only reflect a single cultural indicator; thus, they subtly allude to national and Iranian identity. Among the six

dimensions of national identity, only a cultural dimension has been continuously presented in all eight categories of the Qajar pictorial carpets and has the highest frequency. The most prevalent components within this dimension include appreciating and acknowledging the works and heritage of the past, believing in strengthening and preserving artistic and cultural heritage, and appreciating and revering the Persian language, which has been notably emphasized in many of these carpets. The religious dimension of the national identity existed in the second place and has appeared in five groups with visual and content-based signs. The most prevalent components within this dimension include 'appreciating and acknowledging the works and heritage of the past, believing in strengthening and preserving artistic and cultural heritage, and appreciating and revering the Persian language. The utilization of Persian calligraphy and poetry to narrate a storyline, depicting the attire and clothing of Iranian communities, employing facial hair styles inspired by ancient stone carvings to depict contemporary characters, and incorporating specific motifs and design styles from various regions and schools of Iranian carpet weaving, all contribute to a rich variety of designs and direct geographical references within the carpets. The use of poets' images, of ancient and mythological kings, and of historical landmarks presents a positive image of Iranian traditions and culture, evoking a sense of pride and nurturing an interest in Iranian identity and culture. Moreover, integrating religious themes and references affirms the presence of a religious mindset among the populace, further reinforcing the inextricable link between religion and the national identity of Iranians.

### Conclusion

The research findings showed that although pictorial weaving was considered a novel innovation in the Qajar carpet weaving, the careful selection of themes aligned with Iranian culture infused profound and enduring concepts and identity themes. Surveys of the research highlighted that across the eight categories of the Qajar carpets, especially in carpets portraying *royal motifs*, *famous figures*, *four seasons*, and *themes drawn from ancient literature*, the six dimensions of 'national identity' were the most prevalent and visible. The 'cultural' and 'religious' dimensions of national identity were particularly dominant with the 'political' dimension exhibiting the least frequency across these carpets. The elements, components, and indicators of 'national and Iranian identity' elegantly emerged within these carpets, showcasing distinct motifs, scripts, and themes from Persian poetry and prose, traditional clothing of Iranian communities, imagery of poets, ancient and mythological kings, and historical landmarks, all of which contributed to presenting a positive image of Iranian traditions and culture, to perpetuating pride in Iranian heritage, and to fostering a deep-rooted connection with Iranian cultural elements. Due to the subject matter, political and social conditions of production, urban weaving or rural weaving, and so on the components of national identity in all the Qajar pictorial carpets appeared in diverse ways. For instance, in *four season* pictorial carpets or *famous figures* carpets, all six dimensions of national identity exhibited a vibrant presence, influenced by the unique theme and characterized by a tailored texture. This diversity is distinctly urban. However, in carpets adapted from the *Western Themes* and *female motif*, *traditional motifs*—representative of the identity of Iranian carpets—found their place wherever there was room. Even in these cases, where the theme was entirely Western and non-Iranian, the reflection of the components and elements of Iranian national identity remained intact, underscoring a continuous commitment to the dissemination and representation of Iranian cultural and identity elements.

**Keywords:** pictorial carpets, the Qajar era, national identity, Iranian identity, pictorial weaving.