

## **“The Trade in Pashm and Its Impact on Ladakh’s History” by Janet Rizvi**

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tain its distinct culture and unique identity, or it will join the hundreds of other civilisations which have sunk into oblivion. YVFK is a manifestation of the awareness of Kargil's youth, a call for all to rise to the occasion and save our society from cultural and educational disaster.

Any suggestions and proposals would be highly appreciated, and we urge all who work for the upliftment of Ladakh to consider Kargil as well.

## The Trade in Pashm and Its Impact on Ladakh's History

*Janet Rizvi*

The perception that the trade in pashm had a decisive impact on Ladakh's political history is hardly an original one. Implicit in the analyses of Lamb and Huttenback,<sup>1</sup> it was worked out in detail by Datta,<sup>2</sup> who demonstrated convincingly that it was the hope of laying hands on the lucrative trade in shawl wool (pashm) that provided the motive for the Dogra invasion of Ladakh in 1834, as well as for the subsequent incursion into Tibet. Thus it was indirectly responsible for the configuration of the state of Jammu and Kashmir as it existed after 1846.

Lamb, Huttenback and Datta are more interested in the political implications of the trade than in the trade *per se*. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to attempt to supplement the insights they provide by making an analysis of the trade itself, insofar as it was documented before the Dogra invasion; and for a few decades after, till changing conditions robbed it of much of its importance. This is what the present paper sets out to do.

Throughout its history the Kashmir shawl industry has been totally dependent on the high-altitude pastures of Ladakh, Tibet and central Asia. Although in the last two decades of the twentieth century breeders using modern methods have been successful in producing 'cashmere' in the less extreme conditions of Scotland and Australia, the raw material of the Kashmir shawl has always come from the high pastures of inner Asia, whose peculiar environmental conditions were ideal for stimulating its growth. The word 'pashm' refers to the raw unprocessed wool as it comes from the body

1. Lamb 1960 and Huttenback 1961.

2. Datta, 1970; 1973.

of a variety of domestic goat, whose winter undercoat it is.<sup>3</sup> It is a seasonal growth, stimulated by the intense winter cold of windswept plateaux situated at altitudes of between 4000 and 5000 metres. Another precondition for its growth, in the days before breeders had access to the sophisticated methods of modern biotechnology, was the virtual absence of snow; for the animals must, in day-temperatures of  $-20^{\circ}$  C. or less, aggravated by the chill-factor of the high winds that sweep the plateaux, forage for their food in the open. In the nineteenth century experiments to introduce the breed elsewhere in the world — Scotland for instance, and the Pyrenees — were tried, with a view to establishing a shawl industry in competition to that of Kashmir; but with complete lack of success.<sup>4</sup> In any case, the question of diversifying the sources of the raw material on which Kashmir's multi-crore shawl industry depended seems not to have arisen. The trade in pashm remained a matter of critical importance not only to Kashmir but also, as I hope to show, to Ladakh.

Although the Kashmir shawl industry has been traced back to very early times<sup>5</sup> the texts appear to make no reference to the trade which supplied it with its raw material before the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> The chronicles of Moghul India have plenty of information about the shawl industry, by then an established part of the Kashmir scene, but give no information about the pashm trade.<sup>7</sup> What seem to be the first references appear in Francois Bernier's *Travels in the Mogul Empire*. And surprisingly, the implication of

3. Pashm is the raw wool; pashmina is the cloth woven from pashm. Another material called *tus* — also *asali tus*, meaning genuine *tus* — a fibre even softer and finer than ordinary pashm, also has considerable commercial value. This is the pashm of undomesticated members of the *caprinae* family, primarily the *chiru* or Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsoni*), known in Ladakhi as *stos* or *tos*; also the Himalayan ibex (*Capra ibex sibirica*), *skin* or *skyin* in Ladakhi (Ganhar 1979: 25, 35; Schaller 1977: 87).

4. Refer Keay 1977: 22; and Irwin 1973: 22-23. The partial exception seems to be the small herd of pashmina goats which was established in Windsor Great Park in the 1820s, and in which Queen Victoria took a personal interest. It is said that for a time the cottage industry making cashmere shawls from the pashm of this herd employed as many as 1000 people (Ralph Whitlock, article in *The Guardian Weekly*, 6 October 1985).

5. Varadarajan 1984: 234-35.

6. Mirza Haidar Daughlat, who raided Ladakh and conquered Kashmir in the 1540s talks of neither the pashm trade nor Kashmir's shawl industry. He does however describe the life and trade of the 'Champa' nomads living on the upland plateaux of Ladakh and western Tibet, doing a peripatetic trade in, among other things, a commodity identified as *shal*, and covering immense distances from the plains of northern India to the confines of China (Haidar 1895: 408).

7. Fazl, 1873: I, 97-98; Jahangir, 1909: II, 147.

Bernier's account is that in the middle years of the seventeenth century the shawl industry was not being supplied from Ladakh — or at least not directly. From 1639 till about the time of his visit to Kashmir as part of the entourage of the Emperor Aurangzeb in 1663,<sup>8</sup> the trade route between Ladakh and Kashmir was closed following a reverse for Ladakhi arms at the hands of a Moghul army. In reaction, the Ladakhi King, Sengge Namgyal, 'has not only interdicted the passage of caravans, but forbidden any person from Kachemire to enter his dominions'.<sup>9</sup> Though Bernier is our only authority for this, there seems little reason to doubt his evidence, for he lays emphasis on the fact, not that it is closed *now*, which he takes for granted, but that till about twenty years ago trade caravans *did* go from Kashmir to central Asia and on to China, via Ladakh. They returned bearing, among other things, the products of Ladakh including 'a quantity of very fine wool of two kinds, the first from the sheep of that country, and the latter which is known by the name of touz...'.<sup>10</sup> The trade embargo, however, did not have a catastrophic effect on the shawl industry, which according to Bernier was flourishing.<sup>11</sup> If it had, we may be sure that the Moghul authorities in Kashmir would have forced the Ladakhis to open up. It seems possible that pashm from Ladakh and western Tibet may have been reaching Kashmir by a roundabout route — down the Shayok valley and through Baltistan, for instance. Bernier's only reference to the supply of pashm is when he talks of 'the merchants who every year travel from mountain to mountain to collect the fine wool with which shawls are manufactured'.<sup>12</sup>

Although Bernier makes no further mention of the matter, it may be assumed that — apart from supposedly confirming the Moghul suzerainty imposed on Ladakh after the defeat of 1639 — one of the objectives of the embassy sent by the Ladakhi king to Aurangzeb during his visit was to negotiate an end to this senseless embargo.<sup>13</sup> What is certain is that, by the time another twenty years had passed, Ladakh was decisively established as the channel, if not the source, of the main bulk of pashm reaching Kashmir. By 1684 the trade had become a matter of such importance as to be the subject of one of most of the significant clauses of the tripartite settlement

8. Bernier dates his Kashmir visit 1665, but see Petech (1977: 64n.).

9. Bernier 1891: 426; Petech 1977: 51.

10. Ibid.: 425-26.

11. Ibid.: 402-3.

12. Ibid.: 419-20.

13. Ibid.: 422-24; Petech 1977: 64-65.

between Ladakh, Tibet and Kashmir at the end of the four-year Ladakh-Tibet war.

It was to the Governor of Kashmir that Deldan Namgyal appealed for help to raise the three-year siege by the Tibetans of the fortress of Basgo; but help from the Moghul representative did not come gratis. Having marched into Ladakh, the Kashmir army consented to withdraw only on condition of the Ladakhi kings' vassal status vis-à-vis the Moghul empire being confirmed once again, and this time the exact terms of their submission were spelt out. These included a clause giving Kashmir a monopoly of the purchase of pashm, as well as other kinds of wool.<sup>14</sup>

This, the mortgage to Kashmir of Ladakh's only product of value, was confirmed by the Treaty of Tingmosgang, which settled future relations between Ladakh and Tibet. The Kashmir monopoly, moreover, was not to be confined to the pashm produced in Ladakh itself; indeed in this context no distinction was made between Ladakh and Tibet.<sup>15</sup> Four Kashmiri merchants were to be settled at Spituk to procure pashm from the pasture-lands of western Tibet and bring it to Ladakh; no other Kashmiri was to be admitted to the pashm-producing areas, nor were these Ladakhi-Kashmiris allowed to carry pashm to Kashmir themselves, but were to sell it to other Kashmiri merchants in Ladakh.<sup>16</sup> Thus the pashm trade became an area of mutual

dependence between Ladakh and Kashmir, from which outsiders were rigorously excluded.

Thirty years after the Treaty of Tingmosgang, the evidence of the Jesuit priest Ippolito Desideri, who visited Ladakh in 1715, leaves no room for doubt as to the importance of the wool trade between Ladakh and Kashmir, and the production of what he calls *scials*. He describes the wool produced in Ladakh as 'very white, very long and extraordinarily fine'; the trade in this material he says 'is a source of great riches to Kascimir'. It involved a 'large number of agents' kept by the Kashmir merchants in Ladakh to collect the pashm, paying the primary producers 'a most miserable price'; as well as 'thousands and thousands of men' who in the summer months 'go from Kascimir to Lhe ... and carry back infinite number of loads of wool'.<sup>17</sup> His account of his own journey from Srinagar to Leh, which took forty days, and which, he says, 'can only be accomplished on foot', gives an insight into the logistics of the trade.<sup>18</sup> For a start, there were the alarming bridges consisting

primary producers, but not to carry it down to Kashmir, and the Kashmiri Kashmiris, who bought the wool from the former at Spituk, is clear. Petech (1977: 77) appears to have slipped up in saying that the court merchants of Ladakh were not to be admitted to Rudok. Both Francke and Ahmad agree in translating the relevant passage as '*none but the court merchants (of Ladakh) are to be admitted to Rudok.* (Emphasis added.) Although it is not stated explicitly, I have assumed that these court merchants are identical with the four Kashmiri merchants established at Spituk to bring down the pashm from Chang-thang — an assumption based partly on the fact that up to the present century there were families of Arghon merchants, of Kashmiri descent but settled in Leh for generations, who were known as *khar-tsong*, which means precisely 'court merchants'. Some nineteenth-century reports on the trade also talk of Arghons engaged in the pashm trade as 'court merchants' or 'state traders'. (Rizvi: 1999: 65, 75-76).

17. Desideri 1937: 73.

18. Desideri may be assumed correct about the porters who carried the pashm from Leh to Srinagar. However, his experience of Himalayan travel was limited, and he perhaps underestimates the possibilities of travel on horseback. Travellers' tales from Moorcroft (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: II, 12, 35, 37) in the 1820s to Crook and Osmaston (1994: 223-25) in the 1980s show horses being used routinely as pack animals on journeys all over the Himalaya, including the pashm trail over the Zoji-la even in the pre-Dogra era. See, for example, Eric Newby, *A Short Walk in the Hindu-Kush* (London 1968) 188-89; Michel Peissel, *Zaskar, the Hidden Kingdom* (London 1979) 192-94. The hardy local ponies could be persuaded across the most fearsome slopes, up the most vestigial tracks. As for the precariously bridged torrents, it is true that horses were incapable of negotiating the flimsy rope structures. But they could often be got across by fording or even swimming — though accidents did sometimes occur (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: II, 12, 37), and there was also the risk of wetting their loads — a risk sufficient

14. Petech 1977: 70-75.

15. The Treaty mentions Ru-thog (Rudok), Byang-Thang (Chang-thang) and mNga'-ris-sKor-gSum (Ahmad 1968: 353), but does not make it clear exactly what area is covered by each of these terms. According to Francke (1926: 93), although the term mNga'-ris-sKor-gSum usually includes only the districts of Ru-thog, Gu-ge and Pu-hrang, in an earlier part of the Chronicle referring to Nyima-Gon's partition of his territory between his sons it is taken to include Ladakh and Zaskar also. Such an inclusive use of the term would make sense in the context of the Tingmosgang Treaty, especially in view of its first clause, which refers to (and ratifies) Nyima-Gon's partition. Ru-Thog is no doubt part of mNga'-ris-sKor-gSum; it probably gets special mention as being the area where the finest pashm was produced. 'Byang-Thang' (Northern Plain) is probably used (as it is today) as a generalized geographical term without political or administrative connotations.

16. This at any rate is the apparent meaning of the Tibetan text, which seems to contain some obscurities interpreted differently by Francke (1926: 116) and Ahmad (1968: 353). Ahmad's translation of a disputed passage, accepted by Petech (1977: 77), and indicating that the Kashmiri merchants of Kashmir, would not be admitted to Chang-thang except for the purpose of returning to Kashmir, seems to be open to question on the grounds that no way is Chang-thang on the route between Spituk (where the wool was to be traded between the Kashmiri merchants of Ladakh and those of Kashmir) and Kashmir. But the distinction between the Ladakhi Kashmiris (i.e. the four settled at Spituk), who were permitted to go to Chang-thang to collect the pashm from the

of two thick ropes of twisted willow stretched across a stream, with loops suspended between them for the traveller's feet, whose swaying motion together with the rush of the water below induced fear and vertigo. In some places the road had been obliterated by landslides, so that the guide had to go in front and cut steps, hauling the traveller up by the hand. Elsewhere, it was steep and narrow, and — even in June — so slippery with ice and snow that there was great risk of falling down the mountainside into the torrent below. 'Many of the men who, as I have said, go from Kascimir to fetch loads of wool, lose their lives or are crippled for ever'.<sup>19</sup> Such was the human cost of the trade which formed the basis of the livelihood of thousands, from the herdspeople of Chang-thang to the spinners and weavers of shawls in Srinagar.

In the century after Desideri, Kashmir was to pass from Moghul rule to that of the Afghans, and finally to the Sikhs who conquered it in 1819. Through all the country's political vicissitudes, however, its merchants clung tenaciously and successfully to their pashm monopoly, and the Tibetan authorities were equally adamant about preventing any sale of the raw wool to outsiders. William Moorcroft's observations in Leh in 1820-22 confirmed the account he had had from the Garpon, the administrator of Gartok, the main trading and administrative centre of western Tibet, ten years earlier:

That by treaty the sale of Shawl Wool was limited exclusively to Ladakh and ... the lives of any of the peasantry of Changthang who should sell it to other persons than those authorised to purchase it by Ladakh would be forfeited. I confess that I then thought there was much of exaggeration in the Gurphun's statement but the whole of his account has been confirmed at this place. (Moorcroft MSS: D263/86)

He had during his visit to Gartok actually succeeded in buying a little raw pashm, apparently by bribing the Garpon — a transgression which cost the latter dear, as he was later arrested, taken off to Lhasa in chains and kept in prison there for three years.<sup>20</sup>

Moorcroft's testimony indicates that in the final years of Ladakh's independence the prosperity of its Government was largely dependent on the pashm trade. While in Leh, he had plenty of opportunity to observe the

to rule them out as a means of transport of pashm in the centuries before the Dogras built proper bridges on the Leh-Srinagar trail.

19. Desideri 1937: 76-77.

20. Alder 1985: 148, 151.

'oppressive practices of the Rulers of Ladakh in conducting' the trade;<sup>21</sup> he adds that it is hardly surprising that they 'should endeavor to preserve a Monopoly of vital importance to their revenue as by far the greatest part of their income derives from their profits on the resale of Shawl Wool to Kashmeer'.<sup>22</sup>

The whole shawl business was one in which Moorcroft had a particular interest, and he described every phase of it in detail, starting with the production of the raw material and its despatch from the plateaux of Chang-thang to Srinagar via Leh:

Shawl-wool Goats [within Ladakh] are of the breed that is common to all the provinces of Lhasa, Great Tibet and Chinese Toorkistan but their wool is less fine than that of the breeds both to the eastward and westward. The fleece is cut once a year; the wool picked out is sent to Kashmeer but the hair retained in Ladakh is made into ropes, blankets and bags for home use and as wrappers for bales of merchandise. (Moorcroft MSS: G28/155)

About eight hundred loads are annually exported to Kashmir, to which country, by ancient custom and engagements, the export is exclusively confined, and all attempts to convey it to other countries are punished by confiscation... In [Ladakh] considerable impediments are opposed to the traffic in wool from Yarkand, although it is of superior quality and cheapness. (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: I, 347-48)

The pashm was brought to Srinagar mainly by Kashmiri merchants, though a few from central Asia were also involved in the trade. Formerly it was procured almost exclusively from 'the western provinces of Lassa' and from Ladakh itself, but within the last seven years or so supplies had also been coming from the mountains near Yarkand and Khotan, and 'the families of the Great Kirghiz Hord, partly by the agency of Kashmeeree Traders residing in Yarkand and partly by Moguls who lay the proceeds of its sale in the purchase of Shawl goods in Kashmeer which they resell to great advantage in Russia'. (Moorcroft MSS: D256/74; D264/28)

As regards the province of Khotan, his information was that 'Shawl Wool Goats are not less numerous than Sheep and their fleeces are reported to be at least equal to those of Rudokh'.<sup>23</sup> This was obviously a segment of the

21. Moorcroft MSS: D261/36.

22. Moorcroft MSS: D263/86.

23. Ibid.: D259/65.

trade which fell outside the purview of the Tingmosgang Treaty; no wonder it met with 'considerable impediments' from the vested interests in Leh. However, there seems to have been no question of the central Asian pashm being ultimately sold anywhere other than Kashmir.<sup>24</sup> The trade attracted numbers of Kashmiri merchants to Leh:

... to buy Wool of the Raja and prepare and send it to Kashmeer ...The Shawl wool trade and manufacture are of immense magnitude and profit to Factors and Merchants but of little profit to the manufacturers. Between the Grower and the Manufacturer the Shawl Wool that passes through Ladakh is increased to thirteen times its original cost!! Yet the demand for Shawl Goods is so great that the Stamp Duty on those manufactured at Kashmeer alone last year realised twelve Lacks of Rupees, and this year has been let to farm at thirteen Lacks and a half. And the manufacture has spread to Umritsar, Noorpoor, Hurreepoor, Goola and other Towns in the Mountains... This Year Shawl Wool has been carried off by contraband to the amount of 150 Horse Loads as reported and some of this will doubtless find its way to Hindoostan. The price is greatly raised in Kashmeer and both here and there great apprehensions exist lest this close trade should be broken up... (Moorcroft MSS: D256/75)

There were also reports of pashm-smuggling direct from western Tibet across Spiti and Garhwal and down to the plains of British India.<sup>25</sup>

Moorcroft's continued researches into the shawl business when he was in Kashmir in 1822-23 led him to be a little more cautious about using precise figures like 800 horse-loads. The amount of shawl-wool imported every year

24. Moorcroft was enthusiastic about the possibility of introducing the 'cashmere' shawl industry into the British dominions, in fact his visit to Gartok and Manasarowar in 1812 (the first Englishman to cross the Himalaya in its western sector) had been made largely for the purpose of seeing for himself the source of the shawl-wool, and investigating the possibilities of diverting part of the trade to British India and establishing a shawl industry either there in Great Britain itself. (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: I, xvii; II, 164-65; Alder 1985: 128-31.) At one time he thought of trying to divert a part of the pashm production of western Tibet direct to British India. Just about the time of his stay in Ladakh, however, the outbreak of epidemic disease among the flocks, together with the occurrence of unusually severe winter weather, had the consequence of heavy mortality among the pashm-bearing goats, a decrease in the supply of pashm to Srinagar, and consequent widespread distress among the Kashmir weavers. Not wishing to do anything to aggravate this situation, he decided instead to explore the possibility of plugging into the supply of pashm from central Asia, where he had information that it was produced in abundance, and of a quality equal to the best stuff from western Tibet. (Moorcroft MSS: D245/150-52; D258/68-69; D261/36-37.)

25. Moorcroft MSS: D263/87.

into Kashmir, he now says, was between 500 and 1000 horse-loads.<sup>26</sup> In view of Desideri's assertion only a hundred years earlier that all the pashm was carried down from Leh to Srinagar on the backs of porters, Moorcroft's repeated references to 'horse-loads' needs some examination. It is hardly likely that the trail would have been so much improved between Desideri's day and Moorcroft's as to make the carriage of pashm on horseback possible. Moreover, we have the evidence of Godfrey Vigne in the late 1830s that the 'poshm', having been brought from Rudok to Leh on sheep-back, 'is then carried on men's backs to Kashmir', the journey taking 18 days.<sup>27</sup> It is equally unlikely that the positive statements of Desideri and Vigne — which correspond with the realities of Himalayan travel — could be worthless, or that Moorcroft could be mistaken on such a material point.

It takes a reference to the Kashmiri system of weights and measures to explain Moorcroft's 'horse-loads'. The immemorial standard of weight in Kashmir is the *kharwar*, or ass's load, consisting of sixteen *tarak*, a *tarak* being equivalent to about 11 lbs. avoirdupois or 5 kilograms.<sup>28</sup> But a horse carried a heavier load than an ass, thus a horseload weighed in at 22 *tarak*, which according to the figures given by Moorcroft would work out at a fraction over 240 lbs., or 109 kilograms.<sup>29</sup> Thus it becomes clear that the term 'horse-load' refers not to a mode of transport, but to a measure of weight. It appears from this that the annual import of pashm into Kashmir in the early 1820s varied between 120,000 and 240,000 lbs., or 54,545 and 109,091 kilograms.<sup>30</sup>

Of the total import, *asali tus* seldom amounted to more than 'fifteen Biddree [bales] each of six Turuks' — i.e. rather less than 1000 lbs., or about 447 kilograms. The cost of transport from Leh to Srinagar, together with the various duties levied on the wool at different stages on the way, amounted to about 95 rupees per horse-load. The rates varied for different qualities. *Tus* attracted double the rate of duty paid on white pashm, while the rate payable on the least-prized dark-coloured wool was about half that for

26. Ibid. MSS: D264/27.

27. Vigne 1842: II, 126.

28. Lawrence 1895: 242-43.

29. Moorcroft MSS: D264/27; Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: II, 136.

30. The figures relating to local weights given in Moorcroft's published *Travels* (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: II, 135, 165) are inconsistent and confusing, and seem to represent faulty interpretations of Moorcroft's data by his posthumous editor, H.H. Wilson. To resolve the ambiguities it is necessary to go to Moorcroft's own words in the Moorcroft MSS (Rizvi: 1998).

white.<sup>31</sup> In the mid-1830s when Vigne was recording his observations, the porter's wage was one rupee per tarak over the whole distance, with an occasional bonus for extra good quality.<sup>32</sup>

Before the wool reached the women who cleaned and spun it — the first stage of processing it into shawl-fabric — it passed through the hands of a number of middlemen. The *bakal*<sup>33</sup> (importer) disposed of it to the *pashm farosh* (wool-retailer); and though these two negotiated directly (over a sumptuous dinner, according to Kashmiri custom, paid for out of the profit derived from the deal), no agreement was reached without the intervention of the *mokim* (broker), who received a commission of three annas<sup>34</sup> per tarak. The price agreed on was expressed in rupees per tarak. The price in Srinagar had risen steadily over the previous thirty years, from eight Kashmiri rupees in the period 1794-1807, to Rs 16-20 in the following six years, Rs 22 from 1813 to 1817, and Rs 25 in 1817. Between 1817 and 1823, the time of Moorcroft's visit, the prices had soared to forty rupees per tarak, partly on account of disease among the goats, and partly as a result of competition for the wool from British India. These prices referred to white wool; the brown variety sold for one-third to one-half less. The retailer disposed of the wool in small lots of about a *pal* (1.32 of an ounce, or about 37 grams) to the spinning-women, who mostly bought it outright and later sold the spun yarn to the weavers; he expected a profit of about twelve percent.<sup>35</sup>

Moorcroft had no expectation that the present inflated level of prices would endure, as new sources of supply were being opened up, while the price of the finished article abroad was falling. Vigne's observations ten or twelve years later confirm the accuracy of this prediction. By that time the Governor had got in on the act; but even after he had taken his cut of 20 per cent, the price of pashm sold in the city was still only about four rupees per (Indian) *seer* of two lbs. for white wool; Rs 2½ for brown.<sup>36</sup> By Vigne's reckoning of 4½ *seer* per tarak, this puts the price of a tarak of white wool

31. Moorcroft MSS: D264/27, 29-30.

32. Vigne 1842: II 126-27.

33. Up to the present time, the Srinagar merchants who deal in pashm from Ladakh continue to be known as Tibet Baqals.

34. 1 anna = 1/16 of a rupee.

35. Moorcroft and Trebeck, 1841: II, 166-68.

36. Vigne, 1841: II, 127.

at Rs 18; and brown at Rs 11.4 as.<sup>37</sup> — a spectacular fall from the levels reported by Moorcroft.

The high level of prices in the early 1820s may well have been a function of the revival of the shawl industry in the wake of the Sikh annexation of Kashmir in 1819. Moorcroft reports that the number of weaving establishments, which had dropped from 21,000 in 1806 to 6000 in 1819, had shot up again to 16,000 in 1821.<sup>38</sup> But at the same time, British commercial interest and the Sikh conquest constituted a new equation which threatened to disrupt the 150-year-old structure of the pashm trade. Afghan brutality and misrule had forced many of the skilled weavers to flee from Kashmir to various cities of the plains — Amritsar, Narpur and Ludhiana.<sup>39</sup> Moorcroft himself, passing through Amritsar in 1820, had encountered refugee Kashmiri weavers. He reported that:

The yarn was formerly imported from Kashmir, but the [Sikh] Governor of that country has prohibited the export at the request, he pretends, of the Kashmirian weavers but, in reality, to discourage the foreign manufacture of shawls, the duty on which constitutes the chief source of his revenue. The yarn employed at Amritsar is therefore prepared there partly from the wool of Thibet, and partly from that of Bokhara ... The Thibet wool, when picked, sells for six or eight Nanak Shahi rupees a ser. The latter from two to four. (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: I, 111)

This is perhaps the earliest reference to the shawl industry of the Punjab, whose demand for raw pashm was for the rest of the century to be a major factor in the story of the trade. The availability of Kashmiri skills in these cities of the Punjab caused both the Sikh and the British authorities to turn their attention to the source of the raw material from which a profitable

37. This would work out at Rs 22 and Rs 13.12 as. on the basis of the tarak of 11 lbs. suggested by Lawrence (1895: 242-43) — still much lower than the prices quoted by Moorcroft.

38. Moorcroft MSS: D259/106.

39. Secondary authorities like Lamb (1960: 59) and Huttenback (1961: 479) attribute the emigration of Kashmiri shawl weavers to the Sikh conquest of Kashmir and the ensuing famine. This opinion may be partly based on the reference in Moorcroft's *Travels* to the decreasing consumption of pashm being due to 'the exactions of the Sikh government' (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: II, 168) — a comment that in fact looks very much like another of Wilson's inept interpolations. Moorcroft's figures actually point to a revival of the industry during the first three years of Sikh rule; while his account of the Kashmiri shawl weavers he met in Amritsar shows that they were already well established in the Punjab by 1820.

industry might be developed in their territories.<sup>40</sup> Moorcroft's testimony shows that an important fall-out of the Sikh conquest of Kashmir and the revival of the shawl industry there was that the Punjab-based shawl industry was now deprived of yarn spun in Kashmir from pashm brought via the traditional route from Ladakh. Moorcroft was not the only British official to think of the possibility that Company's agents should procure the pashm direct from the producers, the nomadic herdspeople of western Tibet's high plateaux, and bring it down by way of Kinnaur and the Sutlej valley, bypassing Ladakh and Kashmir altogether. To this end, as early as 1818-21, the roads in Kinnaur were improved so as to be practicable for the passage of laden sheep, and a factory established in the Company's name at the village of Kotgarh.<sup>41</sup> This however failed to prosper, because Kotgarh was further down the Sutlej than the Tibetans were prepared to come with their laden sheep; but by the 1830s Rampur, capital of the British-protected state of Bashahr, situated a little upriver from Kotgarh became, without British patronage, an important mart for Tibetan wool. In 1837, pashm to the value of Rs 35,630 changed hands there, and it was reported that wool was coming in considerable quantities from areas as far away as 'the bank of the Brahmapootra, eighteen days' journey SE of Mansurowur'.<sup>42</sup>

This was the background to the Dogra conquest of Ladakh and the extinction of the ancient kingdom, in the period 1834 to 1842.<sup>43</sup> In the early nineteenth century Ladakh was not perceived as having any strategic value; in terms of production pashm — whether originating in Ladakh or in western Tibet — was its only covetable commodity. Before Raja Gulab Singh, the Dogra ruler of Jammu, planned the invasion of Ladakh in the summer of 1834, he tried to open a pashm route direct to Jammu via Zaskar and Kishtwar, thus provoking a protest to his overlord Ranjit Singh, ruler of the Punjab, from the Governor of Kashmir.<sup>44</sup> This episode strengthens the supposition that the basic aim of the invasion was to gain control of the lucrative trade in pashm. But the event was rather contrary to his expectations. As Lamb puts it, 'The trade between Ladakh and Tibet was largely based on a system of traditional relationships which could hardly fail to be

40. Datta 1973: 90-91.

41. Ibid.: 91; Lamb 1960: 59.

42. Lamb 1960: 60; Gerard 1841:115-16.

43. For more detailed analyses of the Dogra conquest see Lamb 1960:60, 65-6; Datta 1973: 90-4, 105, 107, 131-40, 150; Petech 1977: 138-52.

44. Datta 1973: 93-94.

disturbed by the conquests of a power alien in culture and religion'.<sup>45</sup> The immediate result was a spurt in the trade between western Tibet and the Indian plains via Rampur, where the value of the pashm sold rose to Rs 94,807 in 1840.<sup>46</sup> Hence, in turn, the invasion of Tibet in 1841, its main objective being to gain control not only of the trade, but of the pashm-producing areas themselves with a view to establishing a complete monopoly.<sup>47</sup> The immediate consequence was a sharp drop in the amount of pashm arriving at Rampur, which in 1841 amounted to a value of only Rs 17,766.<sup>48</sup>

The failure of this project and the defeat of the Dogras by a better equipped Tibetan-Chinese army led supposedly to a return to the *status quo ante*, the Dogras remaining in possession of Ladakh. By the treaty of Leh (1842) the Tibetans guaranteed 'that in conformity with ancient usage, tea, and Pusham shawl-wool shall be transmitted by the Ludak road'.<sup>49</sup> Four years later, the Treaty of Amritsar put Gulab Singh in possession of Kashmir in addition to his existing territories of Jammu and Ladakh. Thus his ambition of enriching himself with the profits of the pashm trade and the shawl industry was fulfilled by the creation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Indeed the Treaty itself indicates a common recognition by the Maharaja and his British suzerains of what was really important in the new state. The tribute which the Maharaja engaged to pay in acknowledgment of British supremacy consisted of 'One horse, twelve perfect shawl goats of approved breed (six male and six female) and three pair of Kashmir shawls'.<sup>50</sup>

In practice however, it seems that the re-established Kashmiri-Ladakhi monopoly of the pashm trade was far from complete. The British authorities were so unhappy about the Treaty of Leh that they even made several attempts to send letters to the Tibetan Government at Lhasa urging that it be cancelled, and that the privileges accorded to Ladakhi traders in Tibet be extended to those from British India. They were unable however to find any means of getting their views heard in Lhasa.<sup>51</sup> Even so, Alexander Cunningham in 1847 took for granted 'the importation of shawl wool into our

45. Lamb 1960: 65.

46. Ibid. 1960: 60, 65; and Datta 1973: 131.

47. Huttenback 1961: 485.

48. Lamb 1960: 66.

49. Datta 1973: 150, 214; Lamb 1960: 70-1; Mehra 1992: 170.

50. Drew 1875: 547; Lamb 1960: 73.

51. Lamb 1960: 74-76; Mehra 1992: 176-85.

territory' direct from western Tibet, and it was to keep the road between western Tibet and the Punjab under British control that, in the wake of the Treaty of Amritsar, Spiti was detached from Ladakh and incorporated in British India.<sup>52</sup> Cunningham, who had the task of mapping the boundary between Spiti and Ladakh, identified a route previously unknown to his guides, leading from Serchu up the Tsarap river and probably over the Pangpo-la down to Tso-Moriri, which he was sure must be used by wool-smugglers between the western Tibet district of Rudok, and Lahul. He suggested that it should be developed into a regular route, thus saving the traders of Rampur, and of Nurpur — newly acquired by the British in the wake of the Sikh War — the heavy duties levied by the Maharaja on their purchases at Leh.<sup>53</sup> However British concern for the supply of pashm to the weaving towns in their territory does not seem to have extended to incurring the expense that would have been involved in implementing Cunningham's suggestion.

Even so, in 1847, according to Cunningham, of the 6,400 small maunds<sup>54</sup> of shawl-wool passing through Leh annually from Ladakh and western Tibet, only half went to Kashmir, the rest being bought by traders in Rampur and the weaving towns of the Punjab.<sup>55</sup> Cunningham's figures seem a little too neat for full credibility, besides making no allowance for yearly fluctuations. However, indicating as they do an annual trade of 95,744 kilograms in pashm originating from Ladakh and western Tibet, plus another 13,090 kilograms (875 small maunds) coming from Yarkand they correspond well enough with the figures suggested by Moorcroft a quarter of a century earlier. The import duty on pashm from western Tibet he puts at eight annas per small maund, and from Yarkand at two rupees four annas. Exported to the Punjab, pashm from both quarters attracted a duty of twelve annas, and to Kashmir eight annas.<sup>56</sup>

Although Cunningham's statements and figures must be treated with reserve, his assertion that half the pashm from Ladakh and western Tibet

52. Cunningham 1854: 12-13; cf. also Punjab 1862: 60.

53. Cunningham 1848: 219-20.

54. By this period, in contrast to the time of Moorcroft who had to rely on the somewhat chaotic local system, weights were beginning to be standardised. A maund normally consisted of 40 seers, each seer being equivalent to 2.057 lbs. avoirdupois or 0.935 kilograms. By this reckoning, a maund equals 37.4 kilograms. But here Cunningham is talking about small maunds, each of 16 seers or 32 lbs. — i.e., 14.96 kilograms.

55. Cunningham 1854: 244.

56. *Ibid.*, 1854: 244, 249, 250, 253.

went down to the Punjab presumably has some relation to the fact. It would seem to indicate that the Ladakh-Kashmir monopoly of the pashm trade established by the Treaty of Tingmosgang, though it had been confirmed by the Treaty of Leh, was no longer in the effective operation it had been before the Dogra conquest. Smuggling apart, a significant proportion of the pashm seems to have continued to go in the first instance to Leh, as of old; but export from western Tibet direct to Rampur continued; and the Kashmir monopoly even of what came down to Leh was no longer complete. That even more pashm was not being sent from Leh down to the Punjab was attributed by an observer in 1861 to the difficulties of the Leh-Kulu route, especially the birch-twigg bridge over the Chandra at Koksar where there was no possibility of fording the river:

The perils of the passage... deter merchants from taking this line with their merchandise and induce them to seek a market in Kashmir in preference, notwithstanding the heavy dues levied on all imports by the Maharajah.

According to this traveller, the only route by which pashm was reaching the Punjab shawl industry was via Rampur, some of it

smuggled from the Chinese frontier through Kunawar, by paths on which none but lightly-laden sheep and goats, assisted by hardy mountaineers, can travel. (Torrens 1863: 93-94)

On the other hand, according to a Punjab Government report about the same time, the weaving towns of the Punjab were now getting regular supplies of pashm from merchants of Rampur-Bashahr, who bought up large quantities at the annual fair at Gartok.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, it was said of the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir that

he spares no pains and sticks at no trifles, to keep the monopoly of the shawl trade in Cashmere, whereby of course he derives a large revenue. (Punjab 1862: Appendix A, 33)

Apparently the Leh market had been tightened up since Cunningham's investigations in 1847; however the Kashmir monopoly now applied only to the pashm actually passing through Leh, including all that produced in Ladakh itself and also the entire amount coming over the Karakoram from

57. Punjab 1862: Appendix XXIV, ccxxiii.

Yarkand. This latter, known as Turfani<sup>58</sup> or Kuchari pashm, was said to be superior in quality to even the best Chang-thang pashm, the use of which it had largely superseded in the manufacture of the finest shawls.<sup>59</sup>

The Maharaja profited from the pashm business not only via the duties his Government levied on it, and on the shawl industry in Srinagar, but also by being personally involved in the trade. The total import from western Tibet was in the region of 700 maunds (26,180 kilograms).<sup>60</sup> Contrary to Cunningham's information, the *Report* of 1862 asserted that from the time of the Gyalpos — the kings of independent Ladakh — pashm from western Tibet had been imported duty-free by the Ladakh merchants (descendants presumably, or at least successors, of the Kashmiri merchants settled in Ladakh under the terms of the Treaty of Tingmosgang) on condition that they should bring supplies for the ruler himself to trade in. This system remained current, and at the present time the merchants, sixteen in number, were bringing nearly as much for the Maharaja's Government as for themselves. Turfani pashm, its import estimated at 600 maunds (22,440 kilograms), was said to attract an import duty of Rs 8 per maund. The export duty for pashm of both origins was Rs 41.7as. per maund for white, and Rs 26.9.6 for coloured (*khudrang*).<sup>61</sup>

A British official was stationed in Leh from 1867; and from that date there exist trade figures which cannot be accepted uncritically, but which were more systematically compiled and are probably a little better than any previously available. In 1870, a commercial treaty between the British Government and that of the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir freed the trans-Karakoram trade of all duties.<sup>62</sup> This benefited the trade in Turfani pashm, though in 1874 the British Commissioner regretfully reported that 'the old monopoly ... still exists in practice, although not in theory, as connected with the importation of pashm from Changthan'. Entry into Chang-thang from Ladakh was restricted to those Ladakhis who were agents of the Kashmir Government, and in fact *mutatis mutandis* the system of trade

58. Not perhaps the most appropriate term, since Turfan itself is situated below sea-level, and is reported to be one of the hottest places on earth. The pashm from central Asia was said to be produced in the Pamirs by the nomadic Kirghiz herdspeople, and also in the mountains of the Ush Turfan, Aksu, Turfan, Kummul, Karashar and Kotan districts (Punjab 1862: 23, 26-27; Appendix XXIX A, cccxxxi-cccxxxiv).

59. Punjab 1862: 52, 67; Appendix A, 2-3, 21; Appendix XXIV, Table II, ccxxi.

60. Ibid.: 80; Appendix XXIV, ccxxiv.

61. Ibid.: Appendix XXIV, ccxxiv, and Abstract Statements nos. 1 and 2.

62. Drew 1875: 549.

with both central Tibet and the adjoining areas of western Tibet continued as it had done from the time of the 'Gyalpos'.<sup>63</sup>

As regards the sale of pashm at Leh there was no restriction<sup>64</sup> — a result, it may be surmised, of the pressure put by the British authorities on the Maharaja to liberalise the conditions of trade across the board. Even so the bulk of the trade was, as of old, being monopolised by Kashmir. Taking the consolidated figures for the six years from 1867 to 1872, the British Joint Commissioner worked out that, of a total amount of pashm imported into Leh from Yarkand and Changthang amounting to 5,781 maunds 34 seers (216,241 kilograms), valued at Rs 3,12,842, the import from Yarkand amounted to 2,331 maunds three seers (87,182 kilograms), valued at Rs 1,28,914. The export from Leh to the Punjab, consisting entirely of imports from Yarkand, was no more than 433 maunds 30 seers (16,222 kilograms), valued at Rs 24,028, leaving the major balance of 5,348 maunds and four seers (200,018 kilograms) valued at Rs 2,88,814 for the Kashmir market.<sup>65</sup>

It appears from the annual figures for this six-year period that the amount of pashm going from Leh to Srinagar every year varied between 330 maunds or about 12,000 kilograms (1872) and 967 maunds or 36,166 kilograms (1871).<sup>66</sup> This would suggest that the trade was being carried on at a level considerably lower than that indicated by Moorcroft 50 years and Cunningham 20 years earlier. True, the figures from which these are extracted take no account of pashm produced within Ladakh; they also suffer from some internal inconsistencies. However, the indications they give of the approximate level of the trade may well be valid; and if indeed a significantly diminished amount of pashm was reaching Srinagar from Leh, one reason probably was the diversion of a greater amount of pashm direct to the Punjab from western Tibet.

The really interesting feature of these figures is the steadily rising trend in prices, the rate per maund for white pashm in Leh rising from Rs 50 in 1868 to Rs 75 in 1872, in which year even coloured (*khudrang*) pashm fetched Rs 60.<sup>67</sup> Not perhaps coincidentally, this is the very period that marks the zenith, and the start of decline, of the 'cashmere' shawl (as it was known in Europe) — the superlatively fine product developed by the Srinagar weavers

63. Aitchison 1874: 188-89.

64. Ibid.: 314, 360.

65. Ibid.: 190.

66. Ibid.: 192.

67. Ibid.: 192.

over centuries, its pattern woven into the fabric like tapestry. Several factors contributed to the collapse of the European market for shawls: the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, which brought to an end the demand from France, the biggest single market; changing women's fashions; and the development of the Jacquard loom, which made it possible to produce imitations for a fraction of the price of the real thing. Disastrous famines in the years 1877-79, which decimated the Kashmiri weaving community, completed the industry's ruin; while exorbitant taxes levied on it by the Maharaja's Government made its revival impossible.<sup>68</sup> From 1862 to 1870 the annual export of shawl goods from Kashmir averaged 25 to 28 lakhs of rupees; by 1886-87 it had declined to just over 12 lakhs, and seven years later the total export was no more than Rs 22,850, none of it going to Europe.<sup>69</sup> Although the demand from Persia for the patterned gown-pieces known as *jama'war* lasted up to the early years of the present century, the once great shawl industry was increasingly reduced to the production of *alwan*, plain-woven fabric, the basis of embroidered shawls for which there was a continuing demand in India, especially Bengal; it also found a market in Tibet, on a probably limited but steady basis, for the robes of the highest lamas.<sup>70</sup> On such frail bases did the pashm trade survive.

Such was the decline in the perceived importance of the pashm trade after 1870 that the Kashmir and Ladakh trade reports for the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century no longer enter pashm as a separate commodity, but classify it together with sheep's wool under the head of 'raw wool, including pashm'; hence the actual amounts of pashm being traded between the two regions are not directly discoverable. But figures available for the end of the century show, rather startlingly, that the amount of pashm reaching the Punjab from Tibet was more than double the total amount reaching Leh from both Tibet and Yarkand. The Punjab trade reports from 1880-81 to 1904-05 show that the value of the pashm being imported from Tibet varied most years around one to two lakhs of rupees, rising to Rs 2½ lakhs in 1901-02.<sup>71</sup> In the years 1898-99 and 1899-1900, the value of total import of pashm from Yarkand and Tibet into Ladakh was under 50,000 rupees, of which surprisingly rather more than half was from Yarkand.<sup>72</sup>

68. Lawrence 1895: 375; Khan 1978: 63; see also Rizvi 1990: 52, 57.

69. Ibid.: 376, 377n., 388.

70. Ibid.: 375, 377; Bamzai 1987: 199; Rizvi 1999: 67.

71. Lamb 1960: 347, 349.

72. Ibid.: 347 Appendix (H); 348 Appendix (I).

These figures do not however take into account the value of the pashm produced within Ladakh itself, and therefore are not an accurate reflection of the volume of the trade between Leh and Srinagar. But they do give a surprising indication of the importance of pashm from central Asia. The figures for the trans-Karakoram trade in 1912-13, showing an import of 433 maunds of pashm valued at Rs 17,238 in Leh, are compatible with the figures for the turn of the century; but working out at about Rs 40 per maund, they also indicate a slump in price from the high of 1872.<sup>73</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century — largely it may be presumed as a result of the collapse of the Kashmir shawl industry in its ancient form — the pashm trade had lost that pre-eminence in the commercial system of the western Himalaya which had made it a primary concern of the region's politics: the condition of the withdrawal of the Moghul army from Kashmir in 1684; and in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a cherished object of desire on the part of empire-builders. It remained however a significant element in the relationship between Ladakh and Kashmir, fundamental to the economy and lifestyle of the Chang-pa producers, the Ladakhi and Kashmiri middlemen and the spinners and weavers of Srinagar. At some stage, perhaps not until the early years of this century, the monopoly of Leh's Arghon merchants — the presumed successors of the Kashmiri dealers established in Ladakh by the Treaty of Tingmosgang — over the purchase of pashm from the Chang-pa was breached by the Shamma, peasant-traders from the Sham Ilaqa down the Indus from Leh, who had, perhaps for generations, been supplying the Chang-pa with foodgrains and other necessities, earlier bartering them for Tibetan brick tea, wool and salt. Now they began to lift significant quantities of pashm, which they brought down and sold in Leh to the Tibet Baqals (dealers from Kashmir); other well-to-do merchants of the Leh area, Buddhists and Shia Muslims, also broke into the trade, some of them via the ownership of flocks of pashmina goats maintained for them by the Chang-pa.<sup>74</sup>

The trade in its ancient form staggered to an end in the 1950s, as a result of the increasing stranglehold of China on Tibet; and since the closure of the border between western Tibet and India in 1962, the Srinagar shawl industry has had to make do with whatever amount of pashm is produced in Ladakh alone. Today, there are no Ladakhi merchants, whether Arghons or Shamma, acting as middlemen between the Tibet Baqals and the herdspeople; the

73. Rizvi 1994: 59.

74. Ibid. 1999: 69-101.

Ladakhis involved in the trade are agents of either the Government or the Tibet Baqals, who negotiate directly with the growers. These now speak with a single voice through the All Chang-thang Pashmina Growers' Co-operative Marketing Society. Since the Society was registered in 1995 prices have risen (even taking the shrunken value of the rupee into consideration) out of all proportion to earlier levels. In 1995 a kilogram of raw pashm fetched 1700 rupees in Chang-thang; though this actually represented peculiar conditions in the international market. During the three years 1996 to 1998, the price has fluctuated around 1,000 to 1,200 rupees.<sup>75</sup>

It is true that a major part of the price of a Kashmir shawl represents value added by skilled spinners, weavers and embroiderers in Srinagar. But it is good to know that for the first time in their history the primary producers are now at last receiving something approaching a fair price for the fibre without which the Kashmir shawl industry would not exist.

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## Economic Conditions in Ladakh during the Dogra Period

*Abdul Ghani Sheikh*

Although Ladakh is characterised by a harsh climate and rugged topography, Ladakhis have learnt to live in this adverse environment and to face the challenges posed by nature. The fact that Ladakhis have generally been regarded as a contented people, living a frugal life, attests to the success of their adaptation through modes of dress, farming, and social practices such as polyandry and primogeniture. Trade with Kashmir, Turkestan and Tibet — 15 days, one month and three months' journey away, respectively — has ensured the provision of a significant portion of local needs and wants. Given the distances involved and the isolation of the region during the long winters, Ladakhis were careful to preserve the necessities of daily life, using their resources sparingly.

During the Gyalpo's rule Ladakh had no permanent army and hence there was no military expenditure. In the event of war, each family had to provide a warrior (who had to supply his own weapons) and a horse or a man to carry the rations of the warrior. History tells that since there was little surplus in Ladakh, invading armies would retreat quickly with their booty, as local production could not sustain such an army. The Dogras, too, retained only a very small force in Ladakh after they had suppressed the local freedom struggle.

For centuries the limitations posed by the hostile environment were accentuated by the repression imposed on the common people by a self-centred aristocracy and greedy officials. However, in the past three decades, Ladakhi society has undergone a tremendous change. People are well-off economically. Their needs have increased considerably, and the increase in consumption has been matched by their purchasing capacity. In pre-independence Ladakh, the number of shops in the town of Leh was no more than two hundred, and no shops existed outside Kargil and Leh. According to the archives, in 1888, during the governorship of Pandit Radha Kishen Kaul, 130

## Addendum “The Trade in Pashm and Its Impact on Ladakh’s History”

Janet Rizvi

The above paper was written in 1999, when my research on the history of the pashm trade was more or less complete. However, even in the 24 years since then much has changed, and a little updating seems to be in order. Moreover, I later did extensive research on the history of the Kashmir shawl, a subject germane to the study of the pashm trade, and I notice that in the present paper there are a few inaccuracies relating to that part of the argument. For one thing, I was in 1999 unaware of the early signs of an astonishing phenomenon, namely the spontaneous revival of the apparently moribund skills involved in weaving *kani*, i.e. shawls of which the decorative portion is created in the very weave of the fabric rather than added to plain fabric by way of embroidery. Nearly a quarter of a century later, these skills have developed to an extent that rivals those of the weavers who produced the superlative shawls of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the industry is flourishing. Here, then, is short postscript, with corrections and updates. These have been documented more fully in the book I wrote with Monisha Ahmed, *Pashmina, The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond*, Mumbai, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 2017, and most references below are to that volume.

1. The remark on p. 334 of the published text that the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 was a major factor in ending the demand for Kashmir shawls from France, and may therefore be regarded as the beginning of the end, is something of a myth, and in no way does justice to a much more complex set of circumstances. Although it’s recorded that the weaving community followed the course of the war with great concern, lamenting the French reverses, it seems to have represented little more than a blip in French demand. The decline in Western demand due to the factors mentioned—change in women’s fashions, and the proliferation of cheap imitations made possible by the invention and development of the Jacquard loom—was matched by waning demand from India and Iran, as élites gradually abandoned parts of their traditional dress and lifestyle in favour of Western norms. This fatal combination only kicked in towards the end of the 1870s, if the figures for exports of shawls from Kashmir are anything to go by. As late as 1880, shawls valued at Rs 21 lakh were exported (compared to an all-time high of Rs 28 lakh in 1862), dropping to around Rs 11 lakh for the rest of the 1880s, with another precipitous fall to Rs 1–2 lakh or less in the early nineties (Rizvi and Ahmed 2017, 181–88). As I’ve mentioned in the text above, there don’t seem to be figures of the amounts and prices of pashm coming from Ladakh in this period to show how the drop in demand for high-end shawls affected the trade in the raw material. For the record, the shawl industry survived, mainly on Indian demand for ladies’ embroidered shawls, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was given a fillip by the revival of *kani* from the middle of the 1990s—though embroidered shawls remained the backbone of the industry (Ibid. 254–67). Although the finest high-end products continue to be woven in pashm from Ladakh, supply hasn’t kept pace with demand, and the industry now uses in addition Tibetan pashm imported via Nepal, and even the less fine ‘cashmere’ from Mongolia (Ibid., 272).
2. The events of the past (say) three-quarters of a century have brought radical change even to the remote plateaux where the pashmina goats are reared. The closure of the border with Tibet had complex effects on the economy of the Ladakhi Chang-pa, depriving them of some of the best pastures that had customarily nourished their livestock; they also faced competition from their Tibetan cousins arriving as refugees with their flocks from over the border. On the other hand, as supplies from western Tibet were cut off, the demand from Kashmir for Ladakhi pashmina rose exponentially, leading the herdspeople to revalue their goats vis-a-vis their sheep; so that whereas traditionally the ratio of goats to sheep was around 1:3, by 2017 this ratio had often been reversed (Ibid. 30–31).

3. In addition to these developments, as the modern world insinuates its way into Chang-thang— as roads have opened rangelands to motorized transport and also to the mixed blessings of trek-tourism—more and more of the Chang-pa, especially the younger generations, begin to question the extreme hardship of the herding lifestyle, and to seek opportunities elsewhere. The first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have seen a steady out-migration, and there are now settlements of Chang-pa living a settled life mostly in the vicinity of Leh. (Ibid., 35, 268; see also <https://lifestyle.livemint.com/news/big-story/ladakhis-want-to-reclaim-pashmina-but-can-they-111620390599890.html>, accessed 28.04.2023). The consequent depletion of labour to manage the flocks, plus probably the gradual erosion of generational expertise, puts a question-mark over the long-term sustainability of pashmina production.
4. In the meantime, while production is maintained, the structure of the trade has changed. The post-Independence state government tried, with some initial success, to regulate it via the Raw Pashmina Wool (Control) Order (1953), and the Sheep and Sheep Products Development Board; but by the mid-80s private traders were able to match, or exceed, the prices offered by the Board, which thus became irrelevant. Since 1995 the All Chang-thang Pashmina Growers' Co-operative Marketing Society has been a major player, though the herdspeople are happy to sell their fibre to private entrepreneurs at any price above the floor set by the Society (Rizvi and Ahmed 2017, 43—45, 269). By 2016 the price of good quality raw pashmina fibre had risen to Rs 2500—3000 per kilo; and according to a story on the internet, in 2021 the going price was still Rs 3000 (<https://lifestyle.livemint.com/news/big-story/ladakhis-want-to-reclaim-pashmina-but-can-they-111620390599890.html>).
5. In 2004 a dehairing plant was set up in Leh under the management of the ACPGCMS, thus not all of the fibre now leaves Ladakh without value addition. In recent years local entrepreneurs and co-operative societies have been encouraging the development of pashmina-processing skills among the local people, especially the women, thus enhancing their livelihood opportunities. And by 2023 some are even venturing into the international fashion scene, showcasing not only products branded as specifically 'Ladakhi pashmina', but also items made from other locally produced fibres like sheep's wool, camel-hair and yak-hair (Ibid.; [ladakhpashmina.org](http://ladakhpashmina.org); [loomsofladakh.in](http://loomsofladakh.in)).