

**ANNE HERMS**



## **Pashmina Going Global**

**Dealing with Cultural Heritage and Authenticity in  
the Kashmiri Shawl Business in Mamallapuram, India**

**KÖLNER ETHNOLOGISCHE BEITRÄGE**  
Herausgegeben von Michael J. Casimir

**Heft 60**

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**Cover image:**

A pale pink woollen Kashmiri shawl with hand-stitched *sozni* embroidery on top of a plain blue pashmina shawl. In the background is a Kashmiri crocheted woollen shawl. All are on a shop counter in Mamallapuram. (Herms, 2018)

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## **Editor's Preface**

This volume engages with a problem that has repeatedly been addressed in the anthropology of globalisation, the more recent anthropology of art and the anthropology of tourism, namely the question of how 'culture and commerce' relate to one another, or what effects tourism and commerce have on the symbolic and social value of material culture and its modes of production. It is based on Anne Herms' MA thesis which was supervised by Prof. Susanne Brandtstädter. The ethnographic theme of this study is the sale of 'real' pashmina shawls by Kashmiri traders in Mamallapuram, a tourist town in the south of India. It is based on empirical research conducted in Mamallapuram between October and December 2018. Kashmiri pashmina shawls have a long history of global circulation, and have been widely regarded as desirable prestige objects. Following the debate on the 'social life of things' initiated by Appadurai, reference is first made to the diverse contexts of meaning between people and things, as well as to the proposition that as a result of commodification and global consumption, cultural artifacts suffer a loss of meaning or authenticity, and object and producer become 'alienated' from one another. The work focuses on three questions: How do traders relate to the shawl? What significance does authenticity – a modern term that arose from the tension between original and copy – have in the local shawl trade and why? How can the sale of Kashmiri shawls be assessed in light of the debate on the commodification of culture? As it turns out, dealers have a close, almost emotional identification with the goods, and take pride in their sale and worldwide distribution. Their personal relationship with these objects seems to embody a special 'sociality' of handcrafted shawls and an idea of pashmina as a Kashmiri cultural heritage. Authenticity is of major importance in the (local) shawl business, for tourists and dealers alike. Herms describes how pashmina shawls that come to Mamallapuram as commodities receive (back) the 'aura' of the authentic, and argues that the production of authenticity not only increases the economic value of the goods, but also their symbolic and social meaning. The concepts of 'commodity', 'art' and 'cultural heritage' are practically not separate categories here. The traders' cultural appreciation of the shawl is also due to its commodification, its marketing history and the continuous sale on site. Thus, traders do not become alienated from the product, but rather connected to it.

Michael J. Casimir

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Commodifying a Cultural Object? .....	5
1.2 Kashmiri Shawls: A Historical Overview .....	7
<b>2. Welcome to Mamallapuram .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Kashmir, Respondents and ‘the Business’ .....	13
2.2 Conduct and Reflection of the Fieldwork.....	18
<b>3. ‘It is Our Product’ .....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 The Spirit of ‘Handmade’ .....	25
3.2 Kashmiri Shawls as a Cultural Heritage.....	29
3.3 Pashmina: Use and Abuse of a Name.....	34
<b>4. The Problem of Authenticity .....</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 Tourists’ Desire for the Authentic .....	41
4.2 (Re-) Animating the Product .....	44
4.3 The Gift(s) in the Commodity .....	50
<b>5. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>53</b>
5.1 ‘Culture’ by Commodification .....	55
5.2 Kashmiri Shawls: An Outlook.....	56
<b>Postscript.....</b>	<b>59</b>
Works Cited .....	61
Further References.....	64





**Fig. 1:** Location of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Mamallapuram in India. The map further shows places mentioned in the course of this work.





## 1. Introduction

[...] Her first impression was of lovely colours. Silvery blues and greens sprang at her, like a distillation of lake water and spring skies, with starbursts of lavender and vermilion flowers caught in the depths. She looked more closely and saw the intricacy of the woven pattern; the sumptuous curved teardrop shapes with curled tips, the ferny fronds and branched stems and tiny five-petalled flowers. [...] It was so light that it seemed to float on the air. The shawl was a lovely thing [...]. She pressed the shawl to her cheek. The fabric was so fine that she could enclose it in her two fists. [...] She breathed in its faint scent of spice.

(*The Kashmir Shawl*, THOMAS, 2011: 3-5)

Notions of the Kashmir Shawl, such as the preceding extract from Rosie Thomas' same-named novel, often burst with admiration and superlatives. According to DOLLFUS (2011: 150), for instance, no other handcrafted item is said to ever having been at the centre of such high-power politics, business, romance and fashion, and JAITLY (2009: 147) points out that the raw material used in Kashmiri shawls—wool of pashmina goats<sup>1</sup> herded by nomadic pastoralists in the icy climes of mountainous Ladakh<sup>2</sup> (AHMED, 2004: 89)—became 'the most sought-after wool the world has known'. Travelling from the looms in Kashmir to haute couture boutiques worldwide (ibid.: 89), the Kashmir Shawl has, due to its softness, warmth, brilliant colours, rich designs and luxurious materials, been enjoying 'name and fame all over the world' (AHMAD NAIK, 2010-2011: 497). Deeply rooted in the Kashmir region, which has long been renowned for its heritage of arts and crafts in general (ibid.), the shawl has a large cultural history behind it, and also represents what has initially been framed by KOPYTOFF (1986): an object with a rich biography. Decisive questions that need to be asked are: for *whom*, and in what way.

Although the Kashmir Shawl is often referred to in its singular form, there are several types of Kashmiri shawls, the most prestigious of which are probably the so-called *Jamawar*- and *Kani* shawls<sup>3</sup>. Typically, Kashmiri shawls are made out of wool, *pashmina* and *shahtoosh*<sup>4</sup>. Compared to the rather solid woollen pieces, pashmina shawls can be remarkably soft and thin. In this sense, the descriptions above most likely refer to pashmina shawls. The

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to the Changthangi breed native to the high plateau of Ladakh.

<sup>2</sup> Ladakh, formerly a division in the East of the then state of Jammu and Kashmir, has been a union territory of India since October 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Further information about these two pashmina shawl types will be provided in chapter 3.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Shahtoosh*, literally meaning 'king of wool', comes from a Tibetan antelope called *chiru* (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 287). Its softness gives the semblance of petting the animal itself, causing a piece to easily cost several thousand Euro. Due to being excessively hunted for wool, the *chiru* has become an endangered species. Hence, products made out of *shahtoosh* are officially banned now (JAITLY, 2009: 148).

latter constitute the most popular Kashmiri shawls and will be given a special emphasis in this work. For this purpose, some technical terms regarding the material shall be clarified. Whereas in its unprocessed form it is referred to as *pashm* (deriving from the Persian word for ‘wool’), the term ‘pashmina’ in the proper meaning of the word denotes the cloth *woven* from *pashm* (AHMED, 2004: 91). Its common synonymous use with the term ‘cashmere’ results in frequent confusion. ‘Cashmere’ stands for soft wool and is a material derived from the same goats. *Pashm* again, precisely being the goats’ undercoat, is an especially *fine* type of cashmere.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while all pashmina can be termed ‘cashmere’, not all cashmere is necessarily pashmina. Further, the often-used term ‘cashmere wool’ is misleading in that wool usually means *sheep’s* wool. Cashmere, however, is not only finer and stronger than sheep’s wool, but also much more insulating.

Kashmiri shawls (and Kashmiri handicrafts in general) have been valued across the globe, and widely been cherished by people visiting India. It is, therefore, especially in places that are frequented by international tourists that Kashmiri businessmen have been running shops all over the country to sell Kashmiri handicrafts. One of these places is Mamallapuram, a small seaside town of roughly 20,000 inhabitants in the South Indian State of Tamil Nadu, located around 60 kilometres south of Chennai. A popular heritage site and tourist destination, its main streets are literally dotted with Kashmiri shops. Not least, these offer Kashmiri shawls that are eagerly sold to tourists by men from Jammu and Kashmir<sup>6</sup> who, year by year, temporarily move here during the tourist season from October to April. In order to explore the Kashmiri shawl business on site, I conducted a six-week-long anthropological field study in Mamallapuram from October to December 2018. The empirical data collected during this time constitute the base of this thesis. In the course of this work, I am focusing on three objectives to be introduced in the upcoming sections: (1) demonstrating the sellers’ personal relation to Kashmiri shawls, (2) relating the topic of authenticity to the local shawl business and (3) relating the local shawl business to the debate on the commodification of culture.

As pointed out by POPELKA & LITRELL (1991: 393), handicrafts historically satisfied the functional and ceremonial needs of societies that were not closely integrated into market economies. While this usage has not ceased, handicrafts are now often objects of tourist desire. The same applies to Kashmiri shawls, which stand out among the masses of shawls offered in

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<sup>5</sup> While human hair measures up to 200 microns and sheep’s wool to about 23 microns, the diameter of *pashm* amounts to merely 14-16 microns (ASHRAF ET AL., 2016: 1227).

<sup>6</sup> Jammu and Kashmir used to be an Indian state until October 2019, and since then has been a union territory of the country.

India. Similarly, GRABURN (1976: 4 f.) has differentiated between goods destined for tourists ('outwardly directed') and those retained for traditional purposes ('inwardly directed'). On the one hand, Kashmiri shawls are used in Kashmir itself, for both functional and ceremonial purposes. On the other hand, the Kashmiri shawl weaving has never been a folk textile art meant strictly for local consumption. From its very beginnings, it was also a commercial, court-patronised and state-controlled enterprise aimed at the market (ZUTSHI, 2009: 422). To put it in GRABURN'S terms, Kashmiri shawls are neither fully outwardly directed, nor fully inwardly directed. This is supported by HITCHCOCK'S conviction that especially in cases of goods that have been exposed to a long experience of international trade, it may be difficult to distinguish between 'touristic' and 'traditional' artefacts (HITCHCOCK, 2000: 9).

Notwithstanding the previous terms, Kashmiri shawls offered in the shops in Mamallapuram are, at least at first sight, simply commodities. Commodities are generally regarded as material representations of the capitalist mode of production (APPADURAI, 1986: 7). As such, they are defined by what MARX (1959 [1844]) has called 'alienation', meaning the separation of the worker from the commodities he or she has produced. Ideally, when going to the market, capitalist commodities would retain no element of workers' personal engagement (TSING, 2013: 24). As the shawls are not produced, but only sold in Mamallapuram, the framework of fieldwork did not allow the opportunity to find out much about how the craft's *producers* relate to their work. When considering Marx's conviction, one may think that those who do not produce a craft but merely *sell* it, may be even *more* alienated from it. However, given the strong local rootedness of Kashmiri shawls and the sellers being Kashmiri themselves, it is hard to imagine that this assumption applies to the present case.

A somewhat more differentiated approach to commodities has been provided by APPADURAI, to whom they are not 'one kind of a thing rather than another': rather, to him, the commodity phase of an object is just one station of what he calls its 'wider social life' (APPADURAI, 1986: 139). In a similar way, KOPYTOFF (1986) felt that things could not be fully understood at just one point in their existence, and that processes of production, exchange and consumption had to be looked at as a whole. Essentially, this notion points to the 'entangled relationship between people and things' (GOSDEN & MARSHALL, 1999: 169). Against the background of a renewed interest in material culture since the 1980s (BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE, 2005: 16), it has been widely recognised that cultures and goods are closely intertwined (HOWES, 1996: 1). The central question in this field of interest is, to quote BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE (2005: 19), '*how to relate the life of things [...] to the ways in*

*which people give meaning to them*'. In this sense, according to HARDING, the life of objects would be 'no more or less than the life of humans themselves' (HARDING, 2016: 8). Especially because publications about Kashmiri shawls have dealt with Western 'outsider' perspectives in particular, it will be a first objective of this work to demonstrate how sellers in Mamallapuram relate to Kashmiri shawls personally, and how they ascribe meaning to these products. An underlying question is how this relationship is influenced by the fact that local business often involves a lively interaction between sellers and buyers.

'Pashmina' is a term that is familiar to many: a google search for this keyword leads to 22,100,000 results within 0.45 seconds<sup>7</sup>, including an incredibly large variety of international online shops to market them. Shawls named 'pashminas' are also found in department stores all over the world, not least as part of the product range of luxury brands such as Burberry or Chanel. However, these pashminas often do not have much in common with Kashmiri pashminas, since many of the former carry emblems and novel patterns instead of the typical embroidery and needlework found in Kashmiri pashminas. Besides this, the inflationary use of 'pashmina' as a global trade name has been obscuring the original Kashmiri handicraft, and raising confusion about what (a) pashmina *really is*. Furthermore, much of what is nowadays sold as 'pashmina' is not actually made of *pashm*, but mixed with cheaper materials such as viscose, up to not containing any *pashm* (or cashmere) at all. In India, and in particular in the Kashmiri shawl business in Mamallapuram, these circumstances raise concerns about a topic that is deeply embedded in anthropological theory (HANDLER, 1986: 4) and of major interest within the field of material culture (MATTHEWS, 2004: 87), particularly in the anthropology of tourism (THEODOSSOPOULOS, 2013: 339): authenticity.

Revolving around issues of originality, expert knowledge, good taste and social distinction, matters of authenticity are particularly at stake in the domain of art and art objects (APPADURAI, 1986: 45). They extend to cultural practices and -objects, the most authentic of which appear to be those produced in a specific *locale*, by a specific type of *people* (SHEPHERD, 2002: 183), using *materials* produced by that society, made *for* the people of that society, and used by them. Artifacts that do not fall into these categories are often called 'fakes' (BUNN, 2000: 172). On the one hand, concerns with authenticity involve the sellers themselves. They include important questions such as how they define a 'real' Kashmiri (pashmina) shawl and what challenges the availability of fakes represents for their business. On the other hand, concerns with authenticity involve buyers, in this case: tourists, who are presumed to show a

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<sup>7</sup> As of June 5, 2020.

special desire for authenticity. Here, important questions are what their search for ‘the authentic’ might be based upon, and how sellers react to this requirement when marketing Kashmiri shawls. Hence, a second objective of this work will be to relate the topic of authenticity to the Kashmiri shawl business in Mamallapuram.

## 1.1 Commodifying a Cultural Object?

Authenticity and tourism are frequently mentioned along with notions of commodification, that is, broadly, the transformation of resources into commodities available for purchase. Commodification does not ‘happen by law’, but is actively achieved through human agency. In this spirit, BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE recommend using the term ‘commodification’ rather than ‘commoditization’, since the suffix ‘-ization’ would point to a ‘more or less automatic and unilineal process’ (BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE, 2005: 15). While the two terms are not seldom used interchangeably, this work shares the authors’ approach.

More and more frequently, the usage of the term ‘commodification’ involves a critical stance, namely in regards to something being made a commodity that we feel *should not* be one. This view rests on the fact that while saleability usually indicates the commodity status, non-saleability would lend to things (and practices) a preferable ‘special aura of apartness from the mundane and the common’ (KOPYTOFF, 1986: 69). To be saleable or widely exchangeable is to be ‘common’—and thus the opposite of being uncommon, incomparable, unique or singular (ibid.). A feeling that selling a Rembrandt or an heirloom was trading downward, for instance, would rest on our attitude to consider art or historical objects as superior to the world of commerce (ibid.: 82). The conception that the nature of ‘art as commodities’ was somewhat peculiar is also shared by MYERS (2011: 4). As in the case of art, there is something so special about certain *cultural* products as to ‘set them apart from ordinary commodities’: we would conceive of them as being authentically different, more personal and ‘existing on some higher plane of human creativity and meaning than that located in the factories of mass production and consumption’ (HARVEY, 2002: 93). As will be shown, there are several ways to perceive Kashmiri shawls as ‘special cultural products’.

Tourism has often been described to increasingly transform human interaction, traditional handicrafts, established traditions and even rituals into commodities that will be offered on touristic markets (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 22). Many scholars have criticised the fact that as this happens, cultural practices and their related objects would cross over from the domain

of an authentic, 'real', genuine or sanctified sphere of wholeness<sup>8</sup> to one that is inauthentic, fake, corrupt, degrading and superficial. During this journey, MARX'S (natural) use value would be supplanted by what he considered an *unnatural* exchange value (SHEPHERD, 2002: 190). Against the background of a 'shameless commodification of everything' being one of the hallmarks of our time (HARVEY, 2002: 107), and standing for an 'alienation of human and cultural values' (BENDIX, 2013: 48), tourism is often portrayed as something inherently bad that threatens cultural authenticity and causes cultural degradation (SHEPHERD, 2002: 183). This view also rests upon the conviction of some that tourism would increase the demand for cheap copies of authentic art (ibid.: 194) and, in the production of tourist art, place the consumers' demand over the producers' creativity (JULES-ROSETTE, 1986: 43). As an example, SPOONER has argued that the Western interest in Turkmen carpets had alienated the Turkmen from their own forms of artistic expression: while during earlier times, they had worked with designs embodying symbols that represented their own social identity, these symbols then had become 'the property of others' (SPOONER, 1986: 230). To him, the Turkmen had marketed their ethnicity and their culture as a commodity. The foreign search for authenticity in their carpets, SPOONER highlighted, would not help the Turkmen find themselves again, but was part of the cause of the problem (ibid.). Another prominent and similarly drastic example is GREENWOOD'S study of the Basque *Fuenterrabia* festival, proclaiming the view that tourism would turn culture into a commodity which was packaged for sale and 'made meaningless to the people who once believed in it' (GREENWOOD, 1977: 136 f.). The impression that arises is that in touristic contexts, culture and commodification do not go well together.

In light of this negative outlook, it is crucial to ask in what sense cultural heritage, tradition, ethnic identity and indigenous handicrafts may change under the conditions of (mass) tourism in their form, meaning, and practice; whether the contact between locals and tourists is merely about objects meant to be consumed by strangers (as in the case of the much-disdained 'airport arts'), and what effects commodification may have if the goods on offer represent the culture and history of certain groups of people (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 21). The present case example will touch upon all these questions. Following HARVEY'S conciliatory approach of how the commodity status of products designated as 'cultural' can be reconciled with their special character (HARVEY, 2002: 93), a third objective of this work will be to relate the debate

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<sup>8</sup> It is possible that such conception of 'wholeness' is connected to the broader idea of the culture-place-isomorphism (cf. DALAKOGLU & HARVEY, 2012: 461). However, especially during times of increasing globalisation and transnationalism, this idea is getting more and more outdated (cf. GUPTA & FERGUSON, 1992).

on the commodification of culture to Kashmiri sellers selling Kashmiri shawls in Mamallapuram. This question will be taken up again in the conclusion, and eventually reveal the more positive side of the coin (chapter 5.1).

Prior to plunging into the case example, a historical overview of the age-old trade in Kashmiri shawls will be provided. It will also include important background information on the symbolism they have previously acquired, as well as on early imitations and the current situation of the craft production.

## 1.2 Kashmiri Shawls: A Historical Overview

The trade in Kashmiri shawls exemplifies that globalisation is not an entirely modern appearance (cf. BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE, 2005: 47). Handloom weavers in Kashmir had been producing Kashmiri shawls<sup>9</sup> for a world market long before these were worn by wealthy Western women<sup>10</sup>. Having been well-known exports within Asia, Kashmiri shawls and shawl cloth were moving through established trading networks. From the Ladakhi city of Leh that served as an important entrepôt, merchants carried them overland. While some went north to Central Asia and east to China, others moved west to Russia and the Ottoman Empire (MASKIELL, 2002: 27-30). Presumably, early shawl exports to Europe were exceeded by the volume of India's trade with Asian and African countries (ibid.: 32).

While accounts of weaving fine fabrics in Kashmir date back to as early as 125 B.C. (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 291), the actual practice of shawl making is said to have been brought to Kashmir by the Persian mystic and scholar Mir Saiyyad Ali Hamadani (1314-1385) (IMAAAN ASHRAF ET AL., 2016: 1229). Shah-i-Hamadan, as he is popularly known, is reported to have come to Kashmir with 700 of his disciples, many of whom were craftsmen themselves (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 294 f.). Consequently, with Srinagar being its main centre, the production of Kashmiri shawls began in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century (ZUTSHI, 2009: 422 f.). Starting from early to mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, it steadily progressed under the patronage of Mughal emperors (AHMAD NAIK, 2010-2011: 497). Within their courts, Kashmiri shawls were used as royal gifts

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<sup>9</sup> During earlier times, 'Pashmina' or 'Kashmir Shawl' were common terms used for a variety of fine woven wraps (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 287). What is nowadays sold as 'shawl' often includes smaller pieces that technically would be considered *scarves* ('European size'). Actual *Kashmiri* shawls tend to be bigger in size.

<sup>10</sup> Kashmiri shawls were largely consumed in England, France and America, cf. AHMAD NAIK, 2010-2011: 500.

or robes of honour (*khillat*) to be passed on to (future) officials (ZUTSHI, 2009: 422). After Kashmir had held a virtual monopoly on the shawl wool trade from Ladakh and other regions in Central Asia (ibid.: 426), the British East India Company (BEIC) imposed a monopoly on the transportation of Kashmiri shawls to Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (MASKIELL, 2002: 36). As both employees of the BEIC and travellers now brought home Kashmiri shawls for their relatives and friends (ibid.: 37), this period may have marked the beginning of acquiring Kashmiri shawls as souvenirs. The ensuing drive to ‘conquer’ knowledge on shawl-making was an expression of a proceeded British imperialism in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century India (ZUTSHI, 2009: 426).

Kashmiri shawls have, especially from Western perspectives, long been shrouded in immense symbolism. The word ‘cashmere’ derives from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century English spelling of the shawls’ geographical home, and was popularly connected to exotic luxury<sup>11</sup> in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain (MASKIELL, 2002: 28). Bearing a fairy-tale status in then-contemporary English writing (ibid.: 38), the shawl was celebrated for its exquisite softness, delicacy and warmth (ZUTSHI, 2009: 425). It was similarly received in France. Brought along ‘from the East’ by Napoleon’s campaigns, the Kashmir Shawl emerged as a cultural fetish that evoked oriental fantasies (HINER, 2005: 77). Following Empress Joséphine, who had assumed the role of an early trend-setter (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 301), every fashionable lady required a *cachemire* to signal her standing among the bourgeoisie of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the sense of BOURDIEU (1984), the Kashmir Shawl became an indicator of distinction, and the correct use of it<sup>13</sup> an indicator of class (HINER, 2005: 78 f.).

The appeal of the Kashmiri shawl was not only due to the ‘intenseness of its materiality’ (ZUTSHI, 2009: 425), but also to the romance and mystery surrounding its foreign origin (AHMED 2004: 91). The Kashmir region, still cherished for its ‘picturesque landscape’ (IMAAAN ASHRAF ET AL., 2016: 1228), was portrayed as an exceptional and beautiful contrast to the hot, dusty and amorphous lowlands of Hindustan: a place ‘distinct within the British Empire’, Kashmir was presented through its ‘most celebrated commodity’, the Kashmir

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<sup>11</sup> This practice has also been comprising the usage of the term ‘cashmere’ to name toiletries such as talcum powders (ibid.). Current examples include the perfume *Cašmir* by Chopard that—according to the parfum distributor *Douglas*—would ‘whisk you away into the mysterious world of the orient’, or a hand lotion by the brand *Dove* that promises a ‘cashmere-feeling’ on your skin.

<sup>12</sup> As an illustration of the shawl’s high reputation, the *Journal des Dames et des Modes* recalls when in 1833, ‘a young man [...] dived into the Seine to save a drowning woman, deposited her on shore, then swam back to the middle of the river to rescue her Cashmere shawl’ (WERTHER, 1983: 8).

<sup>13</sup> Being a symbol of feminine virtue, a *cachemire* was not to be worn like an ‘open curtain at a bedroom window’, but had to be properly wrapped around one’s shoulders (HINER, 2005: 82).



Shawl, that was seen as a ‘concrete material manifestation of the region’s beauty’ (ZUTSHI, 2009: 429-432). Like many other Indian handicrafts, the shawl was considered a ‘living antique’ (MASKIELL, 2002: 41) from the ‘unchanging East’ (ZUTSHI, 2009: 434) that was ‘untouched by modernity’ (ibid.: 439). Its notable presence in paintings and novels, such as Charles White’s *The Cashmere Shawl: An Eastern Fiction* (1841)<sup>14</sup> demonstrated the British woman’s right to own it (ibid.: 433).

As a reaction to the popularity of Kashmiri shawls, British and French textile manufacturers started to copy them (MASKIELL, 2002: 43). British imitations began to appear as early as 1777, with the Scottish town of Paisley becoming the primary British imitation centre (ZUTSHI, 2009: 423 f.). In the 1820s and 1830s, Paisley’s products were still known as ‘Thibet shawls’. Soon after, British-made shawls with the ‘Indian pine’ pattern<sup>15</sup> started to be called ‘paisleys’ (ROTHSTEIN, 1994: 14). The industrial production of imitation shawls was a matter of patriotic pride: imitated shawls were high-handedly proclaimed as modern equivalents of their ‘primitive Kashmiri counterparts’, retaining ‘some of the grandeur associated with their oriental cousins’ (ZUTSHI, 2009: 433-435).

Generally, European manufacturers were as keen to pirate designs from each other as from Asia itself (MASKIELL, 2002: 48). It was French designs and production that came to dominate the shawl trade in western Europe and the United States before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (ibid.: 44 f.). French shawl designs were even woven by artisans in Kashmir, and influenced a wide range of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Kashmiri and Kashmiri-imitation shawls (KARPINSKI, 1963: 121-123). However, not least because European manufacturers could not obtain sufficient amounts of the highest-quality *pashm*, European mass-produced textiles were not able to successfully compete with *Kashmiri* shawls in terms of the sensual characteristics of the fabric (MASKIELL, 2002: 42 f.); the genuine Kashmir Shawl was always valued the most (HINER, 2005: 78). As a new development, it became an acute issue to verify Kashmiri shawls’ authenticity<sup>16</sup> (MASKIELL, 2002: 47 f.). ‘Authentic cashmeres’ (*de l’Inde*) and their

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<sup>14</sup> In his writing, White used the shawl as a narrator on its journey from ‘the hair of the underbelly of a peacefully grazing shawl goat to fleece in the markets of Yarkhand, to yarn woven into an exquisite shawl in Kashmir, to the shawl making its way through kingdoms in British India’ (ZUTSHI, 2009: 430).

<sup>15</sup> This pattern is what THOMAS referred to by the ‘teardrop with a curled tip’ mentioned in the entry quote to this work. Allegedly, this shape reaches back to the Mughals who used it as a stamp that was formed with the outer side of their hand while forming a fist.

<sup>16</sup> The anxiety about authenticity also became a topic in novels like Balzac’s *Ferragus* (1833) (HINER, 2005: 81 f.). Other early novels ‘starring’ the cashmere shawl include Balzac’s *La Cousine Bette* (1846) and Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869) (ibid.: 84-90).

reproductions (*français*) were the measuring poles in this hierarchy (HINER, 2005: 89). Moreover, the much more affordable imitations marked the decline of the Kashmir Shawl as a luxurious item reserved for the elite (ibid.: 79-82).

Once around 80 percent of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century shawls produced in Kashmir and exported to Europe had been going to France, the trade faced a major drawback with the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. Moreover, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British strive after military and political power in the Subcontinent impaired the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Indo-Iranian market for Kashmiri shawls. Along with general problems on the supply side, epidemics, famines (notoriously in 1834) and internal political problems forced Kashmiri weavers to migrate south to Punjab, where, however, the procurement of raw materials proved to be difficult (MASKIELL, 2002: 48-50). It was during the Swadeshi ('independence') movement starting in 1905, which was first propelled by Bengali leaders and later by Gandhi and his supporters, that the shawl-industry began to flourish again (AHMAD NAIK, 2010-2011: 502). After the import of British-made cloth had heavily affected the Indian handicraft sector, it became a key reason for Indian nationalism (BAYLY, 1986: 285). During this movement, artisanal manufactures were transformed into national symbols (VENKATESAN, 2006: 67). Post-independence (1947), India and Pakistan both claimed Kashmiri shawls as their indigenous commodities, and promoted their sale in Europe and the United States (MASKIELL, 2002: 52). In the words of ERIKSEN (2004), the shawls became integrated into 'larger projects of nation-building'.

While *pashm* had largely been supplied from Western Tibet, the vast shawl-producing industry was located in Kashmir. After the extension of China's rule over the country in 1950, the trade along Western Tibet's borders suffered heavily. Due to an increased demand for *pashm*, the Kashmiri shawl industry now turned to eastern Ladakh for its raw material (AHMED, 2004: 89-93). Additionally, Kashmir began to import *pashm* from other areas, mainly Nepal<sup>17</sup> and Mongolia (ibid.: 101 f.). Kashmir, where the raw material is converted into yarn (cf. JAITLEY, 2009: 147), is still said to be the place where the finest pashmina shawls are woven (IMAAAN ASHRAF ET AL., 2016: 1227). In India, the bulk of the Ladakhi and imported *pashm* goes to Kashmir, and smaller amounts to the states of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh for further processing (AHMED, 2004: 97). Besides this, Tibetans who have been living in Ladakh's Changthang area since the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959 have begun to sell

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<sup>17</sup> However, 'Nepali pashmina' was said to be Tibetan in most cases, and to merely be traded through Nepal.

*pashm* to Chinese traders (ibid.: 91). China now dominates the international market for raw cashmere, followed by Mongolia, Iran and countries of the Pamir region (cf. SINGH, 2016: 77). Furthermore, in spite of their name, cashmere goats<sup>18</sup> do not solely live in the Kashmir region anymore, but are also kept on big farms in China and Mongolia, and even in Australia, New Zealand and Scotland. The Changthangi breed native to the high plateau of Ladakh, however, is known for growing the finest *pashm*.

Overall, the craft production of Kashmiri shawls has been rendered more and more opaque due to complex chains of dealers, wholesalers, exporters and retailers (cf. SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 305). Kashmiri shawls as such keep ‘going global’ in that they have increasingly been sold to (and in) new areas of demand. Nowadays, these were particularly said to include areas ‘where the new money is’<sup>19</sup>, such as the Middle Eastern countries and Russia. More and more often, they are marketed by so-called super stockists in Kashmir, i.e. wholesalers supplying international customers with shawls on a large scale. As a conceptual orientation, it is helpful to consider KNOWLES’ approach to the nature of globalisation at this point. To Knowles, it is the ‘constant emergence of new trails, new routes, new configurations and articulations of social and material fabrics’ that forms the ‘elusive and *mutating substance of globalization*’. What would stretch these things beyond the local and render them global was ‘a chaotic patchwork of movement on different scales’ that was ‘anything but robust and stable’ (KNOWLES, 2015: 240). In essence, the field site of Mamallapuram can be grasped as one such trail. Moreover, while the purchased pashmina shawls set out on their journey to other (international) places from here, the local Kashmiri shawls’ business is affected in many ways by movements that can be called ‘global’. The next chapter is going to provide a more in-depth introduction to the field site.

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<sup>18</sup> Nowadays, there are about 20 subtypes of cashmere goats.

<sup>19</sup> As stated by a respondent.

## 2. Welcome to Mamallapuram

The small town of Mamallapuram, an artistic centre of the ancient *Pallava* dynasty, is particularly famous for its temple complex (*Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram*) that was erected in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century, and since 1984 is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mamallapuram<sup>20</sup> is a popular destination for tourists travelling through South India, and also known as a traditional centre for the art of stone carving.

Over the last decades, the town has become an international melting pot. A ‘kingdom of Backpackistan’, as referred to by the *Lonely Planet India* (2011: 1002), its streets are spangled with colourful advertisements for restaurants, travel agencies or massage offers, and frequented by an unusual mix of people. You will encounter young travellers in loose fluttering hippie-style clothes alongside elderly tourist couples who, protected by tropical hats, unhurriedly stroll from shop to shop. You will also see local residents making deliveries to shops and restaurants, as well as schoolchildren walking home. While sensing a light sea breeze, you may see people doing yoga on rooftops, get an impression of Tamil pop music when passing *Babu’s Café*, or recognise the album *Buena Vista Social Club* being played at *Le Yogi*<sup>21</sup>. This will be blended with some dogs’ barking, construction noises from near and far, and some hooting in between. Mamallapuram is a bustling, yet fairly quiet place—not exactly pretty but rather loveable, people keep returning to ‘Mahabs’, some of them dozens of times. In addition to its visitors from countries such as France, Germany, Great Britain, the USA, Russia, Australia, Italy and Spain, Mamallapuram is increasingly frequented by groups of Indian tourists who, prior to enjoying a Kingfisher beer in the evening, are likely to be encountered enjoying ‘selfie sessions’ in front of *Krishna’s Butterball*<sup>22</sup> or *Arjuna’s Penance*<sup>23</sup>.

Mamallapuram’s tourist hot spots are in a straight line along the *East Raja Road* (‘main road’), the beach-side *Othavadai Street* and the more quiet side road called *Othavadai Cross Street*. When walking along either one of these streets, you will soon notice that nearly every other shop is a ‘certain kind of shop’. It will have some colourful clothes and hand bags hanging outside, dangling from the canopy roof. Inside, behind the display windows, you will see jewellery stands holding massive necklaces and earrings. However, the shops’ glass doors,

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<sup>20</sup> Mamallapuram is named after the epithet of a *Pallava* king and literally means ‘town of the great wrestler’.

<sup>21</sup> A well-known restaurant in Mamallapuram.

<sup>22</sup> A huge granite rock resting on a stony incline at the town’s heritage complex.

<sup>23</sup> A massive open-air rock relief depicting a scene from the *Mahabharata* epic.

totally covered in carpets, scarves and printed wall hangings, prevent you from taking a glimpse into the interior space. Men are sitting on plastic chairs in front of their shops, chatting with their neighbours, watching videos on their mobile phones, and some are smoking an occasional cigarette. Yet at the same time, they are attentively observing whoever walks by. They are waiting for customers. The shops have names such as *Shahi-Hamdan Oriental Crafts*, *Jewel Mount*, *Sultan Art Gallery*, *Shining Palace*, *Tibetan Hut* or *Treasure Trove*<sup>24</sup>. ‘Hello, would you like to have a look inside?’ is what you are likely to hear next. This is an invitation into a Kashmiri shop.

While Kashmiri shops are found in many tourist places throughout India, Mamallapuram has a very high density of them; I counted 42 when doing my fieldwork. As well as shawls, the densely packed, yet tidy shops, offer carpets and handicrafts made of papier mâché, silver jewellery, bronze singing bowls<sup>25</sup>, light silk scarves, bronze statues of Hindu deities or miniature paintings depicting Mughal scenes. These products are not only from Kashmir, but some also come from Jaipur (and Rajasthan in general), Ladakh, Delhi, Tibet and Nepal. With very few exceptions, such as shops located in big hotels, e.g. the *Ideal Beach Resort*, Kashmiri shops are concentrated in the three above-mentioned streets. These literally form a ‘commercial ecosystem’, to put it in JULES-ROSETTE’S (1986: 43) words, and are surrounded by the homes of local residents—normal life goes on in Mamallapuram, too.

While Mamallapuram constituted the site of fieldwork, there is a larger frame to the field as such, including economic, geographical, historical, political and social aspects that will be outlined in the next chapter. Prior to a description of the methodical approach, the following section will introduce the respondents and provide results pertaining to the fieldwork context.

## 2.1 Kashmir, Respondents and ‘the Business’

*‘Before, you came to us. Now, we follow you.’*

The handicraft sector has long since constituted an important economic branch in Jammu and Kashmir (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 287). Scarcely a decade ago, an estimated 425,000 people in the then state were engaged in it, with 300,000 of them occupied in the pashmina industry alone (ibid.: 304). Kashmiri handicrafts are not restricted to shawls, but also include carpets,

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<sup>24</sup> These were not necessarily shops pertaining to the fieldwork’s sample.

<sup>25</sup> Devices used for healing and meditative practices.

jewellery boxes and candle holders made of papier mâché, traditionally embroidered clothes, wall- and door hangings as well as woodcarvings. Respondents estimated that presently, around half of the population<sup>26</sup> was engaged in the making and selling of at least one of these crafts, of which the shawl was reported to be the best known beyond the state border (cf. *ibid.*: 287).

By contrast, the Kashmir region has also been known for its ongoing political struggle ever since India's partition in 1947. The ensuing dissolution of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir as of 1846-1947 under the East India Company Rule and the British Raj has made this a highly disputed area. Split into Indian-, Pakistan- and Chinese-administered territories<sup>27</sup>, the region has been a political plaything of several powers (especially India and Pakistan) and facing war<sup>28</sup> and violence, which has led to many residents now favouring independence. Skirmishes still occur across the Line of Control (LoC)<sup>29</sup>. Attacks and clashes between Indian soldiers deployed in the Indian-administered part and the local population are often followed by turmoil and impairment of infrastructure, such as blocking roads or damages to radio masts. Resulting curfews and the unstable political situation in general have been severely detrimental to the local economy, including its previously-flourishing tourism (*ibid.*: 304). The suspension of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August 2019, the latter of which had been granting Kashmir its own constitution and administrative autonomy by the Indian constitution, and the former states' re-constitution into the two union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in 2019 was followed by the Kashmir lockdown until April 2021, and represents one of the latest serious political events occurring in Kashmir.

After militant riots escalated during the Kashmir insurgency in 1989 (*ibid.*: 305), many traders were forced to look for alternative workplaces. Hence, the Kashmir conflict poses a major reason as to why so many Kashmiri traders have set up businesses outside of their home state. Apart from reasons to seasonally leave Kashmir that are linked to the conflict, there has been a general migration to areas where traders expected good business opportunities. Consequently, it was in the late 1980s that the first Kashmiris came to Mamallapuram, which had then just begun to develop as a popular international tourist destination. Thus, while once

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<sup>26</sup> As per the CENSUS OF INDIA (2011), Jammu and Kashmir's population was, including Ladakh, at around 12.5 million people in 2011, and projected to be at 14.7 million people in 2019.

<sup>27</sup> While India claims the Pakistan-administered part Gilgit-Baltistan and the Pakistani semi-autonomous territory Azad Kashmir, as well as the Chinese-administered parts Aksai Chin and Shaksgam, Pakistan claims the Indian-administered part Jammu and Kashmir with its Muslim majority.

<sup>28</sup> The territorial conflict on Kashmir led to the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1947, 1965 and 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Military control line dividing the Pakistan- and Indian-administered parts of Kashmir.

‘the whole world’ had come to Kashmir to buy Kashmiri crafts (ibid.: 291), nowadays ‘the world’ passes by shops in places like Mamallapuram—a situation that was described by a respondent who said that now it was *them*, the traders, who followed the stream of tourists (see entry quote to this chapter).

Respondents included ten main conversation partners from nine shops (two of them, who were brothers, co-owned one shop). Out of these, seven people were shop-owners and three were employed shop assistants (‘salesmen’). All respondents either came from or from near Kashmir’s summer capital, Srinagar<sup>30</sup>. Their ages ranged from 26 to 45 and the average was 34. The time they had already spent in Mamallapuram ranged from three to 20 years, with an average of twelve years. Five of them were married and had one to two children. While three of these five families were living together in Mamallapuram, the family members of the other two married respondents had remained in Kashmir. The families of the five unmarried ones were all living in Kashmir. Of the five unmarried respondents, three were living alone in Mamallapuram and two lived with their employee.

The respondents’ personal backgrounds were rather diverse. Six of them came from families who had worked with the Kashmiri handicraft business for at least one generation. Out of these six, two were able to do needlework on shawls, or craft papier mâché themselves. While exporters and dealers in Kashmiri handicrafts are generally rather well-off, the four respondents who had not traditionally been engaged in the business came from rather poor families, two of which made a living from farming. Another respondent had previously worked in the software business. While respondents by and large cherished their profession as traders, not all of them had wanted to be in the business originally, but would rather have become a doctor, engineer, pilot or chef. Another one had dreamed of becoming a teacher and reported to now ‘teach tourists about Kashmir’ instead. Either before or intermittently during their time in Mamallapuram, seven respondents had worked in Kashmiri handicraft shops in Goa, Pondicherry, Bangalore, Kochin, Delhi and Leh, as well as in a handicraft showroom of a shopping mall in Chennai. Most respondents started to engage in the business directly after finishing school, usually at the age of 16. One of them went on to study business administration. Many Kashmiri people who run shops to sell Kashmiri handicrafts during the winter then pursue other businesses during summer. For instance, three respondents were owners of small hotels in Srinagar.

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<sup>30</sup> Srinagar is Jammu and Kashmir’s capital from May to October. Its ‘winter capital’ is Jammu (November-April).

Relationships between the sellers in Mamallapuram ranged from friends or allies ('I trust him very much') to foes ('don't go there, he is not good'). Some respondents were distantly related to each other, and it was common for shopkeepers to employ younger brothers or cousins as salesmen. The overall competitive atmosphere on site was often paired with mistrust, even fights were not uncommon. However, occasional quarrels seemed to be surpassed by a certain cultural code of conduct, including values such as honour, respect ('he is older than me, I don't smoke in front of him'), trust and solidarity. When somebody fell ill, for instance, people would stick together, take the sick to the hospital and offer their help. Most respondents were entangled in a strict system of lending, giving, taking and sharing, whether it be money, advice, food, child care or other favours. Being highly integrated and well-connected socially was perceived to be normal and, in effect, provided security and created pressure both at the same time. Furthermore, shopkeepers were organised into a local union that served as a communicative platform for business related issues, but was also called upon to settle disputes. The social organisation of the Kashmiri community in Mamallapuram strongly resembles the system of *respeto* and *compadrazgo* that CANT (cf. 2018: 67) describes in her work on labour relations in Mexican artisanal workshops: ultimately, it is these very principles that put the respondents into a 'socially dense context' (ibid.: 70), and 'make' their community.

In general, respondents' first priority was social relations ('will you go to [the] shop if your father is sick?'). In this sense, all of them were not 'earning for [themselves] like the European people do'—which would be seen as very selfish—but had 'a whole family to take care of' behind them. While this responsibility again put them under pressure, the business was often seen as something to be grateful for precisely because of its benefits for these social relations and their positive outcomes, as illustrated by a respondent:

'I love this whole business. When I sell this [shawl], I can buy rice and vegetables. With the money I can support my family and make them happy. I receive their blessings. With their blessings, I can achieve anything. The shop is at the centre of all. It is all connected. I invest in happiness.'

The importance of social values seemed to also be given in regards to the interaction with customers. Overall, respondents were proud about their 'very good connections to tourists', whether in Mamallapuram, Kashmir, or elsewhere. Some assumed that in Mamallapuram, this was also due to the fact that most tourists were 'foreign' to the place, too, which was reasoned to be a base for some kind of mutual understanding (given the tense political situation, hardly any Kashmiri would identify himself as being Indian in the first place). The Kashmiri business



was closely tied up with guidelines on how to interact with tourists, which were pertaining to a wider concept of how Kashmiris are and do (or *should* do) business. The base of these interactions was supposed to be mutual respect and trust. Referring to the former, one respondent drew a parallel to pashmina shawls, namely that trust was ‘like needlework’: it would ‘take a long time to build it’, was ‘finely stitched and fragile’, and would ‘break’ when not handled with care. Such infringements could happen from both sides, whether it be a seller who cheats or a customer who ‘doesn’t respect the value’ of a shawl, or even steals from the shop. The much-heard phrase that one could ‘also pay later, even in years’ suggested another value held high among Kashmiris being present in the business, namely some form of what SAHLINS (cf. 1976) has termed ‘generalised reciprocity’.

During its early years, the Kashmiri business on site was doing so very well that sellers reportedly ‘didn’t even have time to eat lunch’, attracting up to 72 shops a few years ago. On top of the high competition, the numbers of tourists visiting Mamallapuram has been shrinking—a combination of factors that has been causing economic hardship for the sellers, and led to the number of shops to drop to 42 by the time of fieldwork.

Explanations for this development included a change in tourism trends (‘nowadays, Thailand, Bali and Sri Lanka are more popular than India’) and, referring to the Delhi rape case of 2012, the overall unsafe situation for women, including female travellers (‘people got scared’). Others mentioned the bad economic situation in Spain and Italy (countries from which many more tourists used to come) that prevented people from travelling to India as much as they used to. In terms of demand, shopkeepers believed that due to the large variety of products, people would not know anymore ‘what to take’. Others reported a certain material saturation that prevented customers from shopping in the way they used to (‘people already have everything’). Furthermore, they assumed that many of the shawls that they used to sell in their shops would be sold online nowadays. Notwithstanding, in order to ‘survive’, some shopkeepers ran online shops as well. Given the recent improvement of the political situation in Kashmir and its tourism sector recovering a little, more and more Kashmiris have started to settle back or seek to open shops in more frequented tourist locations in India, or even abroad. In this sense, all respondents knew traders who had opened shops in places including Thailand, Singapore, Dubai, Russia, Hungary, Austria or Argentina.

Apart from economic pressure, respondents reported to generally feel comfortable in Mamallapuram. Things appreciated included the international exposure (‘you make friends and get knowledge about the world’) and the personal growth experienced through being ‘far

away from home'. As compared to hectic big cities, sellers enjoyed the quiet nature of the place. This fact served to enable them to do business the 'Kashmiri way', since you could 'sit down and talk'. Most respondents were striving for sustainable business relationships and were confident that 'people [would] come back then'. This approach was seen particularly by those owning shops, whereas one respondent who was employed as a salesman preferred to 'keep business and friendship separately' as otherwise, the phone would 'keep you busy all the time'. Nevertheless, simple purchases often turn into a business relationship, or even a long-lasting friendship. Many respondents shared stories about their personal connections to tourists over years, some of whom even were in town during the time of fieldwork.

Despite the benefits of the business on site, all respondents had strong sentiments for Kashmir in common, and missed both the place as well as their family members and friends ('in reality, every Kashmiri wants to be home'). An identification with their place was omnipresent—a fact that was presumably further intensified by their seasonal migration context. Relationships to locals were mostly peaceful and cooperative ('Tamil people are very good'). However, fights occasionally occurred with them as well—over shops, rents and sometimes even women. Moreover, Kashmiris in Mamallapuram at times saw themselves confronted with hostility, not being accepted as Indians, and facing allegations of being 'Pakistanis, Muslims, or terrorists'.<sup>31</sup>

## **2.2 Conduct and Reflection of the Fieldwork**

The empirical data on which this thesis is based was gathered during a six-week-period of fieldwork from October to mid-December 2018 in Mamallapuram, using the methods of semi-structured and biographical interviews, participant observation and informal conversations. In total, 40 conversations took place with ten main conversation partners, ranging from a minimum of three to a maximum of six visits to their shops, with an average duration of between 90 and 120 minutes. The number of 'sample shops' (nine) corresponds to nearly a quarter of the Kashmiri shops in Mamallapuram (42). This quantity was sufficient to gain a solid overview and, as every rapport needed to be well established, a higher number of respondents would not have been advisable.

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<sup>31</sup> Reservations against Muslims are not uncommon in many parts of India. A similar observation was made by VENKATESAN (cf. 2006: 72) while working on Muslim mat weavers in Pattamadai in southern Tamil Nadu.

Further data was collected through talks with two young shop employees responsible for shop maintenance ('workers'), one of the respondents' fathers, the wives of two of the respondents, a 15-minute telephone call with a popular shawl wholesaler in Kashmir and an extended discussion with a former shop owner who now runs a houseboat business in Srinagar. Around 70 per cent of conversations with respondents were conducted in English and the remainder in Hindi.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, 15 international tourists from eight different countries<sup>33</sup> were asked about their spontaneous associations with Kashmiri shawls. Although these encounters—in order not to overstrain the scope of fieldwork—had to be time-restricted, they were beneficial in gaining additional perspectives on the overall reception of Kashmiri shawls.

While eight of the ten respondents were completely new to me, I already knew two respondents and their shops from visits to Mamallapuram in 2010 and 2013. During these stays, I had visited another two of the nine sample shops, one of which the owner and another one of which the employee had changed in the meantime. These pre-existing connections, even if loose, were helpful in establishing rapport. Generally, approaching the respondents turned out to be fairly easy and may possibly have been facilitated by the weather conditions during the first days of fieldwork, when streets were just starting to fill up with tourists. Heavy monsoon showers, thunderstorms and related power cuts had turned Mamallapuram into an unusually dull place. Likewise, the locals, shopkeepers included, seemed especially receptive to social gatherings, to enliven this gloomy atmosphere.

At the beginning of making each new acquaintance, I clearly explained my mission, making it plain that I was not a 'buyer', and guaranteed absolute confidentiality. Some respondents were initially puzzled because, according to them, 'all information about shawls' was 'already available on the internet'. When clarifying that I was interested in *their* views and experiences, they seemed to be pleasantly surprised. Focusing on shawls was regarded as a 'great and right decision', a 'wonderful way to promote Kashmir' and to 'give people an idea about [their] place'. Overall, reactions about making shawls a topic of a thesis were vastly positive. Only one respondent (who was relatively new to the business) was perplexed at first, wondering why I had 'studied' and could do 'extraordinary things', and was now 'stuck with pashmina shawls' instead. However, as our conversations progressed, the same respondent told me that 'actually', he himself had become 'much more interested in shawls' by then.<sup>34</sup> All

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<sup>32</sup> While the respondents' first language is Kashmiri, all of them know Hindi/Urdu as a second language.

<sup>33</sup> These included England, Germany, Russia, France, Switzerland, Ireland, USA and Spain.

<sup>34</sup> On a critical note, this case points to the fact that anthropological interest expressed through fieldwork potentially influences the positions of respondents, and thereby the field as such.

in all, respondents were very helpful and, even more so, after becoming convinced that I was serious about my work, they expressed the concern that they wanted me to ‘get good knowledge about shawls’. For instance, they suggested going to those shopkeepers who they themselves felt were very knowledgeable (‘from him you can learn a lot about shawls’). Some of them lent me books, or shared websites related to the topic.

Prior to each visit, I prepared a set of questions which I kept in mind, while saving the most important ones in my phone. If necessary, these could quickly be looked up when respondents received a phone call or attended to customers. When the volume of customers in the shop permitted it, which was actually quite often, conversations often lasted for hours. They either took place sitting at the jewellery counter or cross-legged on the floor (‘Kashmiri style’), and were usually accompanied by sharing saffron and milk tea, or snacks such as Kashmiri walnuts. In return for the many cups of *chai* (tea), I frequently brought along biscuits, *pakorās*<sup>35</sup> or fresh juices. Occasionally, we had lunch at the shop, or would study books and brochures about how shawls are made. The shops proved to be a good location for conversations and spending time with respondents in general. The confined space provided a convivial atmosphere that facilitated exchanges that were friendly, relaxed, trustful and at times also jocular in nature. Furthermore, it offered the opportunity to witness the shawl trade first hand.<sup>36</sup> While in the shop, I was frequently called upon to translate for German, French, and Spanish tourists. At other times, I was allowed to assist in re-arranging shawls and jewellery or asked to guard the shop during busy moments (‘you will watch this part while I take care of this customer’). All in all, respondents were very open to talking. Speaking about shawls also had a positive response because the questions would ‘make [them] think’, and ‘encourage [them] to stay in [the] business’. Frequently, respondents literally got lost in the subject and, after hours, apologised for taking so much of my time—which, on the contrary, was obviously greatly appreciated on my side.

During the conversations and visits to the shops in general, I neither used a recording device nor took notes. So as not to give respondents the feeling of being ‘researched’ but to keep the conversations natural and smooth, I formulated most questions in an open way, and

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<sup>35</sup> Fried vegetables in a mantle of dough.

<sup>36</sup> Among others—to once more highlight Mamallapuram’s international character—it was possible to discreetly observe sellers’ negotiations with several single travellers from Italy, Ireland, France, Germany and Australia, two groups of Russians on a spiritual journey, three Belgian women on a biking tour through South India, a Malagasy woman with her French boyfriend, an American couple, a British Mum with her Jamaican husband and their little son, an Indian couple on their honeymoon, and two girls from Latvia.

opted instead to rely on my memory as a method of documentation. After visiting the shops, I rushed to find a quiet place to straight away capture the newly gained information and jot down the questions that had just occurred to me. Usually, it was a centrally located and rather quiet tourist café that, probably unknowingly, provided me ‘shelter’ to do so. My phone turned out to be an important research device here, too. In order not to look as though I was working, thereby arousing the interest of passers-by, I typed all the information in my phone, instead of using the laptop. After reaching my accommodation (a room at a small hotel off *Othavadai Cross Street*), I transferred and secured the data into an electronic field journal. Interactions with respondents took place on a day-by-day basis, although less often on Fridays, which was their ‘mosque day’, and my ‘day for interim evaluations’.

As it spared me from otherwise probably having been under observation as ‘the outsider’, it was a fortunate situation to blend into the crowd of tourists in the town. In an attempt to move around inconspicuously, and to minimise the risk of jealousy arising, the sample shops were also chosen in a way that they were at least out of sight from each other. Nonetheless—word spreads incredibly fast on the streets of Mamallapuram—soon most of the shopkeepers had come to know to which shops I had gone. Luckily however, I did not face significant problems during my fieldwork.<sup>37</sup> Major ‘incidents’ were limited to situations such as when, as reported by a respondent, an elderly Kashmiri man came into his shop and expressed concern about ‘that lady’ (me) who was ‘going to so many shops and spent so much time there’, and whom he concluded must be doing ‘huge business’. However, when the same respondent informed him that I was ‘just a student who wants to learn about Kashmiri shawls’, he was satisfied.

Over the weeks of fieldwork, the relationship to respondents developed into a quite friendly one. While those who were about my age or not much older referred to me as a ‘friend’ or even ‘sister’, elder ones at times said I was ‘like a daughter’ to them. My interest in shawls (and Kashmir in general), which had also been formed through visits to Kashmiri shops in other places throughout India<sup>38</sup>, was often perceived to indicate a deeper connection (‘we are

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<sup>37</sup> Likely, the unproblematic nature of my field stay might also have been due to the discretion I constantly tried to evince, which may have been even more crucial being a woman. In this instance, in order to prevent rumors of potential romantic connections to sprout, I avoided visiting shops in the later evening, and apparently earned a ‘reasonable standing’ for always wearing long dresses and scarves, instead of tank tops, and never be seen drinking or smoking ‘like many tourists’. For more information on impression management while conducting fieldwork, consider e.g. BERREMANN (2007).

<sup>38</sup> These places included Pondicherry, Kovalam, Varkala, Mumbai, Lucknow, Puri, Kolkata, Delhi, Jaipur and Srinagar itself.

from the same family’, ‘you are like Kashmiri’). When necessary, we helped each other out in everyday things, such as borrowing umbrellas during rainfall, changing money or exchanging medicines when ill with a temperature. Quite regularly, I also took care of a respondent’s two-year-old daughter, taking her to the playground, or bringing her home to her mother. Furthermore, I was invited for lunch at three of the respondents’ homes. However, to maintain a ‘productive balance’ between proximity and distance (cf. HAUSER-SCHÄUBLIN, 2008: 42) and not to become too socially engaged, I tried to limit the contact to regular visits to their shops.

Although a typical anthropological fieldwork context does not exist, it is probably a rather unusual approach to do participant observation and conduct interviews with sellers *in* their shops. However, as indicated above, this approach turned out to be suitable, and allowed insights which could not otherwise have been gained. Although it might be easy to think that some respondents at least hoped to do business with me (which, certainly, cannot be entirely excluded), I firmly stress that this was *not* the impression I received. In addition, this became apparent in frequent phrases used by respondents such as ‘I am not telling this to customers, but to you I feel like I have to tell this’, or in a situation during which a new employee had referred to me as a customer and was almost told off by the shop owner (‘customer to nahīn, *friend* hai’<sup>39</sup>). Especially after having got to know each other quite well, respondents even seemed unsettled when I spontaneously *did* want to buy something from their shops (‘please don’t feel like you have to buy something, it will make me feel bad’). Rather, small purchases were welcome on Saturdays: marking the beginning of the week according to the Islamic calendar, making sales of any kind on this day was seen as auspicious.

Based on the field journal, which by the end of my fieldwork comprised around 60 pages, I first wrote an evaluation report of around half the size, grouping the data into broad categories. Apart from information about the field context, these included, for instance, the ideas of the ‘sellers’ relationship to the shawl’, ‘real shawls vs. fake shawls’, and ‘Kashmiri business’. The evaluation report was then refined into an essay that included a draft of the argumentation. As next steps, further literature was consulted, collected in a database in the form of a document and assigned to the pre-existing categories. During the arrangement of empirical and non-empirical data, which was more time-consuming than initially assumed, it showed that these categories were not completely clear-cut, and demanded frequent re-evaluation. I found it helpful to work with movable index cards whose shifts resulted in several

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<sup>39</sup> ‘She is not a customer, she is a *friend*.’

novel combinations and links within the material, and gave rise to further interpretations. Ultimately, the orders resulting from this led to the final structure of this work. All in all, the process resembled a sequence of composition (fieldwork), de-composition (analysis) and re-composition (writing). Especially the last two steps enabled an analytical distance from the data collected. This helped me to reflect on my own study, and access it from different practical and theoretical angles.

### 3. 'It is Our Product'

While some respondents were especially fond of items made of papier mâché, silver jewellery or bronze statues, it turned out they *all* loved Kashmiri shawls. They stated that they shared a 'special bond' with them, felt 'very related' to them, and expressed to 'respect them so much'. Pashmina shawls were classified as the most valuable, and the special commodity in the shops. They were considered luxurious, prestigious, royal and precious items, and seen as nothing mundane that you could 'make easily and get anywhere'. Many had been fascinated by the procedure of shawl making since early childhood, and shared memories of how uncles and aunts would 'sit together in the living room, with their backs bent, patiently doing embroidery'. Witnessing the shawl being made was reverently said to 'melt your heart'. The resulting products were seen to embody a long time's 'hard work and emotions' of *their* people. The deep appreciation for the tedious production process was especially evident and, to underline this, it was stated that the 'true value' of the product was only known by 'those who make it'.

Kashmiri shawls were cherished for having a 'long history behind them', and as Kashmiri handicrafts were called their 'culture', respondents considered their affection for them as 'natural'. The shawl's strong local rootedness was not only explained by referring to the fact that they were necessary to keep you warm during the cold Kashmiri winters, but especially by highlighting the fact that pashmina shawls played an essential role in Kashmiri weddings. For example, when leaving her parents' house to meet her husband, the bride wears a naturally coloured pashmina shawl over her face. The latter would constitute an obligatory requisite, as told by a respondent: 'The make-up can be unfinished, the jewellery can be unperfect, but the shawl *has* to be there.'

Even to doing business in general, many respondents felt a natural connection and referred to the shawl trade as something 'cultural' that was in their 'blood' and 'DNA'. Some were able to give a talk on every single piece, and were so enthusiastic about its particularities that they didn't keep their eye on the time while proudly presenting them. Those with a strong interest in shawls agreed that when selling a pashmina, they could become 'very bold', with the words 'coming out of the mouth naturally'. Even though parting company with these shawls would, at times, almost 'break their hearts', pashmina shawls were something that respondents were 'loving' to sell. Apart from the financial gain, a sale would fill them with 'deep happiness'. Sentiments about Kashmiri shawls travelling round the world included feelings of pride and being 'overwhelmed', and seeing others wearing them was reported to



be ‘a very good feeling’. There was a strong consensus among all respondents that they enjoyed being famous for this ‘art’ that they liked to ‘show to the world’.<sup>40</sup>

Kashmiri sellers in Mamallapuram seemed to be connected to ‘their’ shawls by a relationship one may call personal. They felt utterly offended when customers would look at these disrespectfully, openly doubt whether the shawls on offer were ‘real’, or bargain excessively. Some respondents shared stories of tourists who obviously overstepped the boundaries in this regard and got thrown out of the shop: where respect gets overstrained, even Kashmiri hospitality ends. By contrast, respondents appeared to feel well-regarded when people sincerely valued their products, which was especially evident in the case of shawls. Customers’ interest in the shawls and their backgrounds made sellers react as if a personal compliment had been paid to *them*.

The ascription of meaning to Kashmiri shawls, as described and articulated by respondents, seemingly pertained to two interconnected realms that may best be outlined as ‘handmade production’ and ‘cultural heritage’. Relating to the present case study, these fields of interest will be further elaborated in the following two chapters.

### 3.1 The Spirit of ‘Handmade’

Handmade Kashmiri shawls require a complex production process. Its first step is to collect the wool and *pashm*. Usually, this is done during the month of June (AHMED, 2004: 94), by combing and shearing the goats (or, in the case of wool, the sheep). Male goats can yield up to 300 grams of *pashm*, and the female ones about 200 to 250 grams (ibid.: 91).<sup>41</sup> After cleaning and freeing the raw material of unusable threads, it gets spun into yarn. This task was said to be done almost exclusively by women. Next, the bundles of yarn will be dyed, apparently by using colours of natural origin. After weaving the material into a shawl, the latter will be embellished by embroidery and needlework, the threads for which usually consist of silk. Mostly, the designs<sup>42</sup> for this work consist of flowery patterns that are finely stitched

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<sup>40</sup> In this instance, one respondent proudly declared that ‘even the shawls of Hillary Clinton’ were Kashmiri.

<sup>41</sup> It was repeatedly emphasised that in Kashmir and Ladakh, the animals would not be harmed during this process (‘people live with them’). However, there are numerous sources and articles reporting on cruel conditions in cashmere goat farms; less in Kashmir itself, but much more in China and Mongolia (consider e.g. ORF, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> For more information on designs, which are usually provided by master weavers (IMAAN ASHRAF ET AL., 2016: 1234), consider e.g. RIZVI & AHMED (2009).

on the shawl, or done via crochet work. This embellishment is not obligatory; some pashmina shawls are also left plain. Previously, the steps of embroidery and needlework were mostly carried out by men. Nowadays, they are also done by women (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 290). Among these women are many the Kashmir conflict has left widowed, and girls who earn some ‘extra money’ with it. While weaving often takes place on looms gathered at sites run by a local proprietor, embroidery and needlework were said to primarily be done in private homes. As many of those engaged in embroidery and needlework engage in agricultural work during summer, these steps often constitute seasonal labour pursued during the winter months.

Generally, respondents’ accounts suggested that the production of shawls in its wider sense not only (re-) produced social relations but, passing through the hands of its makers, would ‘imprint’ them with their culture. As such, it was a strong consensus among all respondents that shawls needed to be valued and treated with care. This desideratum is neatly captured by the Kashmiri saying *tah karūm, shah banāwath* (‘fold me well, and I will make you a king’), reminding of LATOUR’S (2005) idea that things are able to have agency, too. Similarly, respondents were sure that if a person was already beautiful, wearing a Kashmiri shawl would make them ‘even more beautiful’. The socio-cultural attachment to handmade Kashmiri shawls and their ensuing equipment with some sort of ‘spirit’ was almost lyrically illustrated by a Kashmiri friend who used to be in the shawl business and, on hearing about my study, wanted to ‘share a line’ that goes like this:

*Pashmina shawls have a soul  
within their knots ...  
embedded by  
girls of Kashmir who sing  
and listen to music  
while weaving it*

While respondents commonly spoke of the ‘art of shawl-making’, it was especially the popular steps of embroidery and needlework that were not referred to as ‘production’, but *art*. An exception was made in the case of *Kani* shawls, a famous pashmina shawl type originating in the *Kanihama* area in Jammu and Kashmir. Here, the art was seen as already ‘brought in’ by the extremely difficult weaving process, requiring the use of several small shuttles to create fine patterns that pervade the whole piece.

Generally, as opposed to a craft, art was seen as something you ‘form in the mind’: as such, it was not seen as anything to produce, but to *create*. Finalising embroidery and needlework can take years, and the preceding idea seems to be especially ‘made material’ in

a shawl type known as *Jamawar*. These shawls are so densely covered with decorative work that their base colour is hardly visible anymore. To emphasise the dedication this meticulous work requires—*Jamawar* shawls can have up to 6,000 stitches in every square centimetre (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 290)—it was referred to as being the artist’s ‘eyesight’.

At this point, it is revealing to take a theoretical excursus into the distinction of ‘arts and crafts’—a phrase that according to MARKOWITZ (1994: 55) we have become fairly accustomed with. This theme also recurred in the names of Kashmiri shops in Mamallapuram (cf. chapter 2). Further, it was printed on many business cards that you’re likely to be handed after visiting a Kashmiri shop, containing phrases such as ‘dealing in ancient arts and crafts’, ‘exporters and dealers in Asian arts’, ‘crafts cave’ or ‘house of unusual arts’. While respondents cherished the whole process from *pashm* to shawl, they seemed to particularly value the above-mentioned ‘artistic’ steps. Their perspectives regarding the nature of arts and crafts mirror MARKOWITZ’ insight that we assume this pair of terms to be similar, but also distinguish its components from one another (ibid.).

At the centre of this approach lies what MARKOWITZ has called an opposition of a utilitarian versus a contemplative dimension: usually independent of utilitarian functions, artefacts would qualify as art objects because of their special aesthetic character (ibid.: 57). Further, as in the case of paintings, art objects would require an interpretation in a way that ‘responding to pots does not’ (ibid.: 67). According to MARKOWITZ, the practice of embroidery seems to be located ‘in between the categories’: usually classified as a craft, its products are often representational and thus *do* call for an interpretation (ibid.: 61). In this sense, embroidery (likewise needlework and handmade patterns in general) on Kashmiri shawls may—as embroidery on other textiles such as the traditional Norwegian dress *bunad*—be grasped as a kind of ‘handwriting’ (ERIKSEN, 2004: 29). The latter again may, even if not properly ‘understood’ by consumers, still be attributed with aesthetic qualities. In light of the juxtaposition as formulated by MARKOWITZ, Kashmiri shawls—being useful, beautiful, carefully made and overall a bearer of tradition (ibid.)—seem to embody both utilitarian *and* contemplative aspects.

In addition, the explanations of sellers in Mamallapuram made abundantly clear that art was not only something ‘special’, but of a value *superior* to that of crafts. One may thus ask with MARKOWITZ what lies behind the tendency to privilege the ‘semantic character’ of art (ibid.: 67). To MARKOWITZ, this idea is likely founded in the Cartesian heritage of a mind-body-dualism which posits the opposing substances of spirit and matter (ibid.: 68). Further,

we might ‘value the mental over the physical’ due to what philosopher Alison Jagger calls ‘normative dualism’, a paradigm that according to some theorists originates from the historical division of manual from mental labour (ibid.). In line with this thought, AHMAD NAIK has recalled the British medical officer H.W. Bellew who visited Kashmir in 1873-74, and mentioned how ‘their shawls and embroideries [...] exhibit proof of wonderful delicacy but tell of no active expenditure of muscular force’ (AHMAD NAIK, 2010-2011: 497). Given its various attributions by both sellers and tourists alike, one is tempted to conceive of the shawl as an object that in many ways *combines* spirit and matter, giving rise to question this ‘ontological division of the world’ (cf. KEANE, 2003: 410).

As has been indicated before, not all shawls sold as ‘Kashmiri shawls’ are entirely handmade; many of them are fabricated on a large scale at production sites outside of Kashmir. These ‘factories’, as referred to by respondents, would group all production steps from spinning onwards in one location, and very often employ thousands of workers. In an attempt to distance himself from the mechanised production, a respondent explained that Kashmiris would not know how to operate ‘these machines’. While pointing at a handmade embroidered wool shawl in his shop, he said they would only know how to do ‘*this*’. All respondents praised the ‘special touch’ in handmade shawls which they believed machines were unable to generate. ERIKSEN has found the same in the case of *bunads*, out of which those resulting from industrial mass production were—using Mauss’ Polynesian term for the ‘soul’ of an object—‘said to have no *hau*’ (ERIKSEN, 2004: 29).<sup>43</sup>

To equip them with the desirable ‘handmade touch’, some computer-printed imitations of *Kani* shawls for instance now include machine-made embroidery. However, respondents found these new designs ‘horrible’ since they no longer looked as though they had been ‘made by a person’. While machine-made shawls obviously *could* be ‘very beautiful’, sellers found that as compared to handmade ones, they were always ‘something different’. Insights as such call upon the ‘irregularities and slight variations pertaining to handcrafted work’ (cf. HENDRICKSON, 1996: 113), and furthermore link to HARVEY’S conviction that uniqueness and particularity are crucial to the definition of ‘special qualities’ (cf. HARVEY 2002: 95). Thus, in the case of the handmade Kashmiri shawls on offer, even the ‘deep tension between the singularity and the commodity’ (cf. APPADURAI, 2006: 19) can be overcome by the fact that

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<sup>43</sup> For another account of the ‘alienating effects of mechanization’ consider e.g. Bunn’s work on Kirgiz felts (cf. BUNN, 2000: 182).

technically, in the sense of SPOONER (1986) and HENDRICKSON (1996), every handmade shawl is already ‘singular’ by virtue of its mode of production.

### **3.2 Kashmiri Shawls as a Cultural Heritage**

Although not listed as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, Kashmiri shawls and their production clearly qualified as eligible by the sellers. Whether officially recognised as such or not, the problem of cultural heritage—which is more of a political than an academic term—carries with it a set of questions. This would first include the basic consideration of when things ‘count’ as heritage (BENDIX, 2015: 180). Subsequently, it is of interest who ‘owns’ a certain tradition (or practice), the right to define it and to protect it from infringement and, where applicable, to benefit from its commercialisation (ERIKSEN, 2004: 20). In addition, it is important to ask how claims to property and concepts of justice used in negotiating the share in a cultural asset are being formulated (BENDIX, 2015: 180).

A first approach to cultural heritage is the idea of distinction, which generally serves as a logical groundwork for (collective) identity. One group of people may be distinguished from another on the basis of its culture and, according to GIRKE & KNOLL (2013: 9), particularly by its cultural heritage. Culture again comprises many forms, including practices, traditions and even material objects. The latter, as held by SCHNEPEL, can be classed as heritage as soon as they are considered characteristic and distinctive for a group, and seen as an important part or expression of their specific identity (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 25). As became evident in the preceding two chapters, Kashmiri shawls are not merely valued as ‘finished things’, but cherished for all they signify in the sellers’ eyes, including the process of making them and their historical and socio-cultural entailments. In SCHNEPEL’S sense (2013: 29), Kashmiri shawls appear as a ‘concrete abstraction’ of (Kashmiri) culture, symbolising it as a ‘material representative’. In addition to its cultural references, respondents described the shawl-making industry as a ‘fundamental backbone of Kashmiri business’ that was reasoned to provide a sense of ‘Kashmiri unity’. When listening to their accounts, it even seemed as if making shawls (and handicrafts in general) had been an invariable amidst the political trouble that Kashmir has been facing during the last decades.

Another important approach to cultural heritage lies in its proprietary aspects. In this regard, GIRKE & KNOLL (2013: 9) highlight that compared to the rather neutral-sounding term ‘history’, ‘cultural heritage’ was an affective denomination as it would imply a proprietary

dimension that, virtually being a natural law, was hard to question. Against this backdrop, cultural heritage would ‘legitimize claims, generate and stabilise social coherences, and naturalize the present by referring to a past’ (ibid.). Usually, the priority of ownership pertains to those who originally produced the respective practice, tradition or thing referred to as heritage (cf. ROWLANDS, 2005: 269). To be precise, the art of shawl making is not solely of Kashmiri origin, but was reported to have been brought to the region by the Persian mystic and scholar Shah-i-Hamadan in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (cf. chapter 1.2). Additionally, its origins include outside influences (consider e.g. the early French design influences) and skills imparted by passing travellers (JAITLY, 2009: 148). Respondents shared that nevertheless, ‘every Kashmiri’ would consider the art of shawl-making as ‘Kashmiri’ and explained that after having been taught the ‘pashmina weaving’, more and more local people pursued the craft—with the simple consequence that over the years, ‘it became [their] culture’.

Phrases like the preceding one hint at another vital dimension of the problem of cultural heritage, namely its close entanglement with nationalism in its wider sense. Although culture is not necessarily confined to the borders of nations, the latter have ‘cultures that define them’ (HENDRICKSON, 1996: 177). In this regard, objects that assume the form of cultural property, heritage and art would frequently be subsumed in projects of nationalism (MYERS, 2011: 55). Taking these thoughts further, MYERS holds that art’s incorporation into nation-building and the establishment of a national identity would draw on an idea of Romantic nationalism, assuming a characteristic national spirit or ethos. This ‘spirit’ again would be ‘objectified materially in the cultural forms of the national subject’. The movement of these very objects through time and space would contribute to the ‘production of nations’ (ibid., 2011: 30).

When transferring these considerations to the present case example, it is salient that respondents do not view Kashmiri shawls as an Indian, but distinctively *Kashmiri* handicraft. Probably, this vehement differentiation is exacerbated by the tense political relationship between the Indian nation and the now union territory of Jammu and Kashmir (cf. chapter 2.1). Nevertheless, in their essence, MYERS’ ideas apply. As sellers further considered the trade in Kashmiri handicrafts (and shawls in particular) *their* business, many found that only Kashmiri people should be engaged in it. Moving on to what BENDIX has called a ‘share’ in a cultural asset, it was telling that one respondent (who was not capable of doing any of the production steps himself) mentioned that he felt ‘proud to sell a pashmina’ because it was *his* art. Generally, it seemed that in order to have a share in Kashmiri shawls as a cultural heritage, one in the first place needed to be Kashmiri. In the second place, you needed to have a personal connection to them, which was given here by the business context. Apart from notions of such

‘lawful share’ in the product, it turned out that especially those respondents whose relatives were or had been engaged in it—or who simply had an interest in the tradition as such—felt close to the craft. Both of these factors especially applied to the people who owned shops. Overall, the sellers’ perspective on Kashmiri shawls being a cultural heritage has surely been influenced by the political dimensions of the term.

Another field of interest relating to cultural heritage is its commodification. According to GIRKE & KNOLL, it is the very shift from ‘history’ to ‘our heritage’ that allows commodifying artefacts on a large scale since in order to market something, it has to be owned—even if only by claim (GIRKE & KNOLL, 2013: 9). It is notably within the framework of tourist reception and consumption that cultural goods on offer are likely to be attributed an increased importance by their ‘owners’ (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 32). Their commodification, and one shall add, ‘marketisation’ within this context may lead to what SCHNEPEL introduces as ‘nostrification’, meaning that goods produced for the touristic market evolve as a part of the respective participants’ culture that they consider authentic (ibid.). In this sense, the co-occurrence of heritage and tourism can function as a form of cultural production, resembling a value-added industry (KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT, 1998: 149).

As previously said, Kashmiri shawls have not merely been produced for the tourist market. Hence, they do not qualify as a thoroughly ‘tourist commodity’. Nevertheless, it seemed as if for the sellers, the touristic business in Mamallapuram not only provided a platform to market Kashmiri products, but also constituted a setting in which their ideal value could be articulated, negotiated, and even increased. Overall, the involvement in the business with shawls promoted the acquisition of knowledge and interest in them, intensifying an awareness that they were something ‘really special’. Examples include one respondent saying that prior to being in the business, he had not felt a bond with pashmina shawls, but now had ‘fallen in love with them’. A similar statement was given by another respondent who used to ‘only *sell* the shawls’ but now had ‘learned much about them’, and consequently developed a strong connection to the product.

It becomes apparent that essentially, both SCHNEPEL’S idea of nostrification and KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT’S notion of the value-added industry apply in the present case. In some way, culture becomes a resource and, given its perceived status as a cultural heritage, commodifying and selling Kashmiri shawls appears to be capable of fostering Kashmiri identity—even more so when the product is sincerely appreciated by customers. Overall, the term ‘cultural heritage’ was frequently mentioned by respondents not only during our

conversations but also during interactions with tourists—an observation that points to BENDIX’S assumption that when ideational ascriptions of values are mixed with economic interests, cultural property was likely to become part of the negotiations (BENDIX, 2015: 187).<sup>44</sup>

GIRKE & KNOLL highlight that finally, heritage also implies certain obligations. Thus, when the self-conception of a group of people is linked to certain practices, traditions, places or objects, it is fundamentally relevant to protect these from physical transformation, such as neglect, decay or destruction, and to also maintain the sovereignty over their interpretation (GIRKE & KNOLL, 2013: 9 f.). Respondents sought to meet such responsibility by ‘educating tourists’ beyond the requirements of sales talks, and highlighted the importance of selling Kashmiri shawls in general—true to the fact that the more shawls sold, the more their demand would persist, securing work for the producers, and ultimately maintaining the craft *per se*. In this regard, many respondents repeatedly highlighted how, apart from their own profit as business men, *producers* would benefit from the sale of a particular shawl, including quotes such as ‘when selling this shawl, 15 families will be supported’ or ‘with 4,000 Rupees<sup>45</sup>, they already have enough to eat for one month’. In this respect, it is important to note that Kashmiri shawls not only constitute a cultural heritage, but that along their commodity chain, many people make a *living* from them.

The former condition also becomes apparent by looking into the procurement of shawls for the shops. The vast number of shawls were bought from wholesalers in Kashmir, to whom some respondents were actually related. Additionally, four respondents bought directly from shawl-weaving and embroidering families, often giving them orders as well. Some owners were also selling pieces that had been woven or embroidered by members of their *own* families. Respondents highlighted that as it were ‘quick and easy purchases’<sup>46</sup>, the business with wholesalers was very important for them. However, it was reported to be a ‘very good feeling’ to buy directly from producers and support *them*. Others mentioned that in order to

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<sup>44</sup> In this spirit, the ambiguity of this work’s subtitle (‘dealing with cultural heritage’) is intended, and meant to show that the problem of cultural heritage does not only represent an issue the sellers are concerned with amidst the business context, but also constitutes an asset that is commercially *dealt* in.

<sup>45</sup> Purchase price for a particular piece shown by a respondent.

<sup>46</sup> Individual approaches of respondents varied here, too. Thus, as an anecdote, one of the respondents—who considered himself to be ‘very picky’—explained that ‘the most difficult thing in [the] business’ was ‘not the selling, but the *buying*’: as such, when negotiating with his wholesaler, the latter had to reportedly ‘waste at least two hours and two packets of cigarettes’ with him before he [the respondent] would ‘take the shawls’.



‘give the artists a chance to invest’, they would regularly pay them in advance. Overall, it appeared to be a moral imperative to ‘respect’ the producers and their work (cf. chapter 3).

Another conviction pertaining to the mentioned obligations was that ideally, Kashmiri shops should offer ‘Kashmiri products only’. On the other hand, selling cheaper machine-made shawls—which are not Kashmiri but broaden their product range and are found in every shop as well—was ‘making others rich’ and Kashmiris ‘poor’. Respondents agreed that selling these pieces was like ‘putting the axe to their own feet’—not just in an economic sense, but also with a view to the future of handcrafting Kashmiri shawls in general. Nevertheless, the overall economic pressure and the fact that fewer and fewer customers would be ‘ready to spend much money on the good ones’ would force them to also keep these cheaper machine-made pieces—a dilemma that was regretted by many. Aside from the economic situation and highlighting another moral implication, it was vehemently expressed that selling a pashmina was ‘never just to make money’—and that whoever thought so was ‘not meant to be in this business’.

Lastly, in order for shawls to qualify as a cultural heritage for the sellers, they needed to be what was described as *real* Kashmiri shawls. This ‘realness’ of a Kashmiri shawl comprised, according to respondents, three dimensions: (1) its material, (2) its local origin and (3) its mode of production. Materials considered Kashmiri included pashmina, wool and *shahtoosh*.<sup>47</sup> Out of these, pashmina shawls—especially those bearing needlework—were concordantly seen as the ‘highest of all’ and classified as ‘the very, very real Kashmiri shawl’. Respondents assured that the *best* pashmina was from Kashmir, precisely from the then division (and now union territory) of Ladakh that is known for its high altitude and extremely cold winters. The combination of these factors causes cashmere goats—in order to be sufficiently protected from the freezing temperatures—to grow especially fine, long and thin fibres of *pashm* (AHMED, 2004: 91).<sup>48</sup> Raw material containing these features can best be processed into shawls of the highest quality in terms of softness, lightness and warmth.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, it was a common quote that a real pashmina could only be handmade, since its material was so fine that machines would ‘break the threads’.

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Real’ Kashmiri shawls can also be made of silk. These, however, are less popular than those of other materials.

<sup>48</sup> As an entertaining anecdote, one respondent emphasised the region’s climatic uniqueness by vowing that in Ladakh, it would get *so* cold that ‘even the dogs’ would grow pashmina.

<sup>49</sup> However, as an illustration of the increasing opacity in the procurement of the raw material (cf. chapter 1.2), respondents supposed that the vast majority of wool and *pashm* used for their shawls on offer came from Ladakh, and at the same time admitted that it was hard to ‘tell for sure’.

Additionally, Kashmir was reported to be the place where, regarding the making of shawls, people had ‘the best skills and the richest tradition’. Hence, the ‘best and the only true shawl’ would have to be made there. As long as the material was ‘real’ and the piece at least partially produced in Kashmir, partially machine-made shawls could still be called ‘Kashmiri’. This could, for instance, be thicker woollen shawls bearing machine-stitched embroidery. In this sense, categories of real and fake may not be as clear-cut as they first appear (SHEPHERD, 2002: 195). Crucially however, the ‘realest’<sup>50</sup> Kashmiri shawls have to be *handmade*.

The presented notions about the idea of real Kashmiri (pashmina) shawls suggest that in the eyes of respondents, not all shawls named and sold as ‘pashmina’ rightfully deserve this designation. This consideration will be specified in the following chapter.

### 3.3 Pashmina: Use and Abuse of a Name

Pashmina shawls are on offer worldwide. However, what is nowadays sold as ‘pashmina’ may often neither be made of real *pashm*, nor be produced in Kashmir, nor be handmade—and thereby, according to the respondents, fail to comply with the very requirements a Kashmiri pashmina shawl needs in order to qualify as genuine. In fact, many alleged pashmina shawls are blends of wool and silk, and sometimes consist of nothing more than viscose (cf. SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 305). To the wary observer, this already suggests itself when browsing some of the numerous websites selling ‘pashmina shawls’. For instance, while one website offers a ‘pure cashmere pashmina’ for as little as 50 Rupees (less than one Euro), another one charges as much as 400 Euro for it. Comparably, as its production costs are at least 4,000 to 6,000 Rupees (approximately 45 to 70 Euro), the sale of a (real) pashmina shawl in Mamallapuram starts at 8,000 to 10,000 Rupees (approximately 90 to 115 Euro). One can suppose that shawls sold below this amount *cannot* be real pashminas. In reverse, this fact can be exploited by demanding high rates to ‘make people believe it is a real one’.

In India, too, there are many imitation Kashmiri shawls on offer. When asking respondents where these ‘other’ shawls were made, the first and unanimous answer was ‘Amritsar’, a big city and industrial hub in the state of Punjab<sup>51</sup>, that has long been producing many kinds of garments. Punjab’s status as an established location for the production of

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<sup>50</sup> Term as used by respondents.

<sup>51</sup> This disclosure is also found in IMAAN ASHRAF ET AL. (2016: 1236). Another place mentioned in this regard was the city of Varanasi in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

imitation Kashmiri shawls goes back to the time of the British Raj during which, as stated by JAITLY, ‘Ludhiana<sup>52</sup> mills were encouraged to produce mechanized copies’. These posed an early threat to the Kashmiri handicraft sector (JAITLY, 2009: 148). As Punjab’s shawl-making industry progressed, its products became more and more sophisticated. To achieve high levels of softness, the pieces are treated with chemicals which, according to respondents, was ‘like technology’. In terms of the fabric’s touch, fake pashmina shawls from Amritsar were astonishingly credible imitations, requiring you to look very closely in order to see that they are not as tightly woven as handmade pashmina shawls are. This does not apply only to tourists. When considering how hard it is for sellers to differentiate real pashminas from their Punjabi imitations, a respondent first mentioned that it was ‘like asking a German’ whether they could ‘speak the German language or not’. In many instances, this may be a valid comparison. The same respondent however proceeded to say that ‘only the diamond maker’ knew ‘the shine of a real diamond’, admitting that in some cases, it was indeed difficult to tell ‘original’ and ‘copy’ apart. In line with China being known as the centre for the production of pirated goods (BRANDTSTÄDTER, 2009: 140), it was hardly surprising to hear respondents mentioning this country as a further production site for imitated Kashmiri shawls. Compared to real, soft and neatly woven pashmina shawls however (plus those imitations made in Punjab), Chinese fakes were reported to be ‘stiff’ and ‘rip off like plastic’. In general, the problem of fakes was continuously linked to mechanisation. Hence, as explained by respondents, it was ‘only with the machines’ that it became possible to achieve much higher profit margins as compared to those of expensive and labour-intensive handmade pieces.

The case of Kashmiri shawls—especially its pashmina types—serves as an example for HITCHCOCK’S insight that sometimes, ethnic groups become so closely associated with particular kinds of goods and services that others try to ‘cash in on their reputation’ (HITCHCOCK, 2000: 5). This insight has to be extended to the notion of place, as suggested by the example of the trade in Sumba textiles: the latter, as highlighted by HITCHCOCK, had little to do with the same-named island, but were cheap copies that are mass produced in Javanese factories (ibid.). Importantly however, sellers in Mamallapuram regarded ‘pashmina’ as a *Kashmiri* term that represented *their* cultural heritage. Once again drawing on the proprietary dimension of the former, it was a strong consensus among respondents that it was *their* product and *their* trade. As is the case with just about any resource, not everyone shall have equal access to it—even more so when something as sensitive as culture is at stake. In this spirit,

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<sup>52</sup> Another big city in the state of Punjab.

cultural, local forms of knowledge, such as the skills required to make Kashmiri shawls, may be conceived of as a kind of ‘inalienable possession’<sup>53</sup> that is too valuable to allow it to be given away (cf. ERIKSEN, 2004: 29).

Condemning the trade with fakes, respondents regretted that ‘so many people’ would ‘make a mess’ with the Kashmiri business: the ‘crime’, to them, was not to produce fakes as such, but to sell them ‘under [their] name’, i.e. ‘pashmina’. Apart from the economic disadvantage this ‘unfair competition’ brings with it, it was perceived to be ‘like stealing a part of [the sellers’] culture’—an expression consonant with TSING’S statement that relationships attached to cultural heritage may be very affect-laden (TSING, 2004: 29). Furthermore, respondents were worried that the frequent low quality of replicas would ‘pollute’ the ‘name of pashmina’.

So far, one may have got the impression that fake pashmina shawls are only sold by ‘others’, and not by Kashmiris themselves. Inconsistently however, this is not the case—several Kashmiri shops in Mamallapuram also stocked imitation goods. As these pieces would not sell if customers were told they were ‘from China’, sellers were challenged to ethically circumvent this delicate situation. Therefore, these pieces would commonly be introduced as something ‘similar to pashmina’, or as being of ‘different quality’. It was a moral imperative that ‘real Kashmiris’ would not cheat, and ‘telling wrong stories’ was believed to be inauspicious. However, as everywhere there were ‘good people but also bad ones’, untruths are also occasionally told, even in Mamallapuram. Notwithstanding the business reality, it was an unwritten law that selling fake pashmina shawls was ‘bad’ for the above-mentioned reasons.

Although respondents’ individual appreciation of Kashmiri shawls varied, it is safe to say that *all* of them shared a bond with them—especially those with familial ties to the business and an overall interest in the craft as such (cf. chapter 3.1). However, they also agreed with what has already been documented by some authors, namely that nowadays—not least due to the bad economic situation in Kashmir—many people without a traditional connection to this ‘rich cultural heritage’ have entered the sector, lured by the potential of ‘easy opportunities to sell inferior quality and any woven shawl as pashmina’ (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 305). Similarly, IMAAN ASHRAF ET AL. (2016: 1236) have criticised the fact that ‘these people’ would be primarily concerned about short term benefits, and not care much about the future of the craft. Those who *do* care however look scornfully on those, be they Kashmiri or

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<sup>53</sup> For more information on the idea of ‘inalienable possessions’ consider WEINER (1992).

not, who abuse the name of pashmina, and thereby contribute to what SAVASERE has called an ‘unsavoury reputation for Kashmiri traders as well as Kashmiri handicrafts as a whole’ (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 305).

IMAAN ASHRAF ET AL. (2016: 1236) have highlighted the fact that the frequent abuse of the name ‘pashmina’ at both national and international level has posed major challenges to the market situation of (real) pashmina shawls. Concordant with JAITLY’S position that the misuse of the term would ‘haunt the authenticity factor in places like *Dilli Haat*<sup>54</sup> and small-town bazaars across India’ (JAITLY, 2009: 148), its consequences have been affecting the Kashmiri shawl business in Mamallapuram, too. Sellers repeatedly complained that imitations and their varying rates had given people ‘wrong ideas’ about pashmina shawls and appropriate prices for them. Furthermore, the mass use of the term was said to have caused many to think that ‘pashmina’ was a denomination for just about any kind of shawl or scarf. Occasionally, this assumption leads to peculiar business situations—in this instance, customers looking for cheap shawls entering the shops and instantly asking sellers for ‘pash-mee-nahs’ was not an uncommon appearance. As customers can easily be tricked amidst the current market scenario (IMAAN ASHRAF ET AL., 2016: 1236), they have not only been confused, but also become sceptical in buying pashmina shawls. The sale of fakes has impaired their trust in both traders and the product itself. Consequently, ‘at least 90 percent of customers’ now ask sellers whether their pashmina shawls are ‘real’. While fully understanding the customers’ worries, excessive inquiries could easily offend those sellers *without* the intention of duping anyone, and who aspired to ‘make honest business’ instead of ‘betraying customers on their sentiments’.

It has been shown that the conjunction of cultural heritage and its commodification and marketisation raises an issue that has been resonating in the last two chapters, namely the problem of cultural property rights. Generally, ‘attempts to copyright culture’ (cf. ERIKSEN, 2004: 30) seem especially likely to occur amidst the overall increased global traffic in signs and goods (ibid.: 21). In essence, this applies to Kashmiri shawls—particularly to the pashmina types, for which there have indeed been some initiatives of protection. As an example, the popular *Kani* shawls have been granted a geographical indication by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir in 2010. This status prohibits selling shawls that were made somewhere other than in the region of *Kanihama* as *Kani* shawls. Another intervention to the problematic market situation includes the label of ‘Kashmir Pashmina’. This is a private

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<sup>54</sup> A big crafts bazaar and popular tourist destination in Delhi, run by the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC).

initiative that makes use of the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act from 1999<sup>55</sup> (cf. SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 306 f.) and certifies selected pashmina products as ‘genuine’. Kashmiri Pashmina represents a speciality insofar as conversely, most other labels are fake: against this background, it has emerged as a guideline that normally, real pashmina shawls do *not* carry false authenticating labels.

Although respondents appreciated such protective moves, they were rather pessimistic about their efficiency, feeling that the ‘forces of the market’ are too powerful, and that the Kashmiri and Indian governments’ focus on ‘politics instead of handicrafts’ is too strong. Seemingly, the current market scenario is unlikely to change in the near future. Hence, a fertile ground for concerns about the genuineness and originality of Kashmiri (pashmina) shawls—similar to that previously witnessed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (cf. chapter 1.2)—is likely to persist. As concerns mentioned point to the larger notion of authenticity, I will take a closer look at this field of interest in the following two chapters.

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<sup>55</sup> See internet source ONLINE SHOP ‘KASHMIR PASHMINA’ (2017).

#### 4. The Problem of Authenticity

Fuelled by the advent of international mass tourism in the 1970s, the problem of authenticity has been of great interest for social anthropologists for the last 50 years (cf. SCHNEPEL, 2013). While there is no fixed and all-embracing anthropological definition of authenticity (THEODOSSOPOULOS, 2013: 340), the concept generally revolves around notions of originality, uniqueness and genuineness. Being authentic, whether pertaining to practices, places, (art) objects or even people, implies that they are special and real. Commonly, these ascriptions are regarded as something very positive. Carrying forward the concerns about the genuineness of pashmina shawls, authenticity will be explored here with reference to objects.

When dealing with authenticity, it is crucial to consider it as a multi-faceted concept that is *constructed and negotiated* (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 32). With this in mind, dichotomies resonating in debates about authenticity—such as ‘true and false’, ‘original and copy’ or ‘traditional and modern’ (ibid.)—and the distinction of such supposedly natural distinctions are always *arbitrary* (SHEPHERD, 2002: 195). SPOONER has come to a similar conclusion, namely that authenticity does not inhere in the object itself, but is always a form of cultural discrimination projected onto it (SPOONER, 1986: 226). As defining what makes an object authentic can have a significant bearing to answer the more accurate question of what makes an object *meaningful* (MATTHEWS, 2004: 87), the concept of authenticity bears heuristic value.

Particularly in the case of handicrafts—according to its very denomination—the idea of authenticity seems to be closely linked to their manual mode of production. It has been shown that in the case of Kashmiri shawls, this link becomes especially relevant amidst an overall tension of handmade versus mechanical production (cf. chapter 3.1). Consistent with this point, authenticity appears as a predominantly modern phenomenon that evolved as an issue when with the emergence of ‘mechanically produced clone-commodities’, people began to distinguish between the contrasting ideas of uniqueness and an easy replaceability (SPOONER 1986: 226). Such opposition of the authentic as something unique and the imitation as something mass-produced was also highlighted by HINER (2005: 83).

Objects considered to be authentic are often perceived to radiate what BENJAMIN (1968 [1936]: 221) has described as a certain kind of ‘aura’. Relating to BENJAMIN’S approach, APPADURAI holds that especially the aura of art and art objects would be close-knit with art’s originality, and ‘jeopardized by modern reproductive technologies’ (APPADURAI 1986: 45). In essence, the ‘spirit’ of handmade Kashmiri (pashmina) shawls constitutes one such

(constructed) aura. However, APPADURAI also states that copies, forgeries and fakes do not exactly threaten the aura of the original, but try to *partake* in it (APPADURAI, 1986: 45). This is precisely what the preceding chapter has demonstrated, namely that offering something as a pashmina shawl which *is not* made of pashmina (and thus is not handmade) is a ‘marketing ploy’ aiming to claim a connection to the Kashmiri shawl and hence its favourable associations of oriental luxury and mystique (ZUTSHI, 2009: 422), as well as to its extraordinary quality in general. It is perfectly possible that something original can even gain significance *because* of the existence of copies or, as held by SHEPHERD, that the circulation of the fake was required for terms such as ‘authentic’, ‘original’ and ‘traditional’ to make sense (SHEPHERD, 2002: 194). By the same token, an increased demand for cheaper copies of local art would be capable of increasing the value of distinctive and authentic art by establishing a market-driven category of ‘real’ (ibid.).

While chapter 3.2 and 3.3 have dealt with respondents’ conception of a ‘real’, thus authentic Kashmiri pashmina shawl, the following sections seek to ‘add the other side’ and consider the ideas of tourists. By and large, the applied categories pertaining to the notion of ‘authenticity’ did not essentially differ. Much rather, respondents and tourists attach different *meanings* to the respective criteria, and therefore have different motivations for assessing them as important. However, although most tourists agreed that real Kashmiri shawls needed to be handmade and be from Kashmir, they placed an especially large emphasis on the ‘realness’ of the *material* (naturally, this is also based on the fact that nobody wants to pay a high price for a thing whose material is, in monetary value, worth less). Apart from the concept’s above-mentioned notions of originality and uniqueness, there are several qualities perceived to make an object ‘authentic’, specifically a *handcrafted* one. The ideas that follow are general ones, and yet consonant with the accounts and behaviour of tourists in Mamallapuram who were interested in ‘real’ pashmina shawls. Furthermore, they correspond with respondents’ reports on their experiences in sales conversations with tourists, and will generally help illustrate the multi-faceted nature of the concept.

A comprehensive analysis on the topic has been provided by LITTRELL ET AL. (1993) who content-analysed the accounts of 385 American tourists regarding the authenticity of craft souvenirs. Recurrent themes included a craft’s cultural and historical integrity that were connected to notions of place, age, an idea of pristine simplicity<sup>56</sup>, workmanship and material (ibid.: 197). A further mention was that craft objects should ‘have a story behind [them]’ (ibid.:

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<sup>56</sup> Replacement of the authors’ potentially misleading term ‘idea of the primitive’.



205). Consumers do not usually search for authenticity in the product only, but also in the unusual social and cultural conditions under which it was made (ibid.: 200). Often, this includes a certain geographical point of origin (ibid.: 205). Referring to the criteria of age, SHEPHERD provides the example of the Great Wall of China, where not only the age matters, but also its physical ‘thingness’ (SHEPHERD, 2002: 192). By comparison, the fact that pashmina shawls are produced again and again suggests that the notion of age here links to their history, and to the traditional skills required to make them. At the same time, this would once again confirm the idea that cultural heritage has its roots in the past (cf. chapter 3.2).

Once more, the notion of simplicity usually implies the approach that objects are produced without the benefit of tools and technologies found in other realms (HENDRICKSON, 1996: 106). In her work about the presentation of Mayan handcrafted products in US mail-order catalogues, for instance, HENDRICKSON found that the lack of technological sophistication in production methods would emphasise the very idea of the so-called ‘primitive’ (ibid.: 107). This effect might be even stronger when the products are ‘visually complex’ and of aesthetic appeal *despite* their ‘simple’ production (ibid.). LITRELL ET AL. have also shown that in defining authenticity, tourists often emphasised ‘the authentic’ by referring to a high quality of raw materials and aesthetics, as well as to the idea of a very time-consuming process required to manufacture the respective craft object (ibid.: 205). Supporting the notion that authenticity often means ‘truth to material’, MARKOWITZ further highlights that while craft objects may be mere things, their substance would give them dignity and value (MARKOWITZ, 1994: 64).

When taking into account the case of Kashmiri pashmina shawls, it is obvious that they meet the mentioned criteria for an object’s authenticity. The next chapter will elaborate why authenticity has been especially covetable during touristic trips, especially when it comes to the sale and purchase of ‘cultural objects’.

#### **4.1 Tourists’ Desire for the Authentic**

Tourists in Mamallapuram described Kashmiri shawls as being expensive, soft, warm, noble, cosy, thin, of superb quality and with beautiful colours and designs. An authentic and real Kashmiri shawl, to them, had to be from Kashmir, and preferably be hand-made. In addition,

respondents frequently emphasised that when looking for shawls, customers mostly wanted to have something ‘ethnic’, ‘cultural’ and ‘special’<sup>57</sup>.

Reportedly, this was especially true for European (and also American) customers who constituted the vast majority of visitors to the shops. Kashmiri shawls were said to very much suit the ‘European taste’—and to most respondents, it was especially ‘the Europeans’ who greatly appreciated the ‘art’, particularly French and Italian customers. While the latter were said to ‘enjoy the old things’, most Indian tourists in turn were reported to much rather be interested in the newer shawl types that, for instance, have ‘fancy designs and sparkly stones’. Besides this, they were said to often ‘shop differently than the other tourists’, and would prefer to buy ‘branded things at the mall’. The above-mentioned attributions of ‘ethnic’, ‘cultural’ and ‘special’ appear as being congruent with the idea of authenticity as it has been described in the previous chapter.

When dealing with the topic of authenticity in a touristic context, it is important to consider tourists’ desires (BUNN, 2000: 185). Following up on the question as to what authenticity means, one also has to ask *why* it is important (ibid.: 192). On a general note, SPOONER held that due to our ‘social experience of ever-increasing complexity’, authenticity has more and more become an increasing issue in modern life (SPOONER, 1986: 226). LITTRELL ET AL. (1993: 199) saw the latter as being set in a time that is widely characterised by alienation and meaninglessness, and assume that it is these very conditions that would cause people to look for *special* things. When investigating the question of why authenticity is especially important in tourism, one often stumbles over MACCANNELL’S (1976) much-cited book *The Tourist: A New Theory of The Leisure Class*. MACCANNELL was among the first social scientists to emphasise how much a romanticised authenticity, at best unaffected by modernity, is the object of tourist desire (THEODOSSOPOULOS, 2013: 343). Moreover, he saw the fundamental premise of tourism to be a quest for the sacred amidst the challenge for meaning pertaining to the ‘secular modern world’ (MATTHEWS, 2004: 87).<sup>58</sup> To HITCHCOCK,

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<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the ‘mini-surveys’ with tourists showed that while all older ones knew about the Kashmir Shawl (and about Kashmir itself), the younger ones had fewer associations—up to not knowing anything about the shawl at all. In this regard, a young woman assumed that Kashmiri shawls were ‘some hippie thing’.

<sup>58</sup> Although these considerations (which, on a critical note, appear Eurocentric) are applicable in the case example, it is necessary to keep in mind that the search for authenticity, as described in this section, is only *one* motif for and during touristic journeys. Furthermore, as more than one kind of authenticity exists, the search for it always assumes different forms, and is grounded in varying motivations. To many people it may, as another example, be important to see the *real* Eiffel tower in Paris instead of its remakes in Tokyo (Tokyo Tower) or Las Vegas (Las Vegas Eiffel Tower).

such a quest would rest upon the presumption that so-called modern tourists commonly assumed the ‘Other’ of the holiday destination to belong to a world that was in many ways more complete, structured and ‘real’ than the one they lived in for the rest of the year (HITCHCOCK, 2000: 6). This idea is shared by SCHNEPEL who holds that people of so-called modern societies would therein look for the authenticity they have lost: they would not think to find it in themselves, but in the distance and such ‘Other’, in which the conditions and ways of life were perceived to be in a pristine state that has not already been ‘contaminated’ or destroyed by a capitalist world of commodities, commercial thinking, industrial modes of production and ubiquitous technology (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 31).

Among other things, it is the search for authenticity that causes tourists to acquire handicrafts as souvenirs during their travels (cf. LITRELL ET AL., 1993: 198). Further, such objects would serve as a tangible indicator of the place one has visited, as well as an evidence of having ‘found the authentic’ (ibid.). Against the background that collecting things is an important means of identity construction in the Western world (CLIFFORD, 1994; cited after PELEIKIS & FELDMAN, 2013: 310), souvenirs acquired during the unusual conditions of travel not seldom become the most valued possessions of individuals (WALLENDORF & ARNOULD, 1988; cited after LITRELL ET AL., 1993: 198). With regard to SPOONER’S (1986) work on the authenticity of Turkmen carpets, LITRELL ET AL. state that authentic souvenirs can contribute to feelings of self-conceptual uniqueness (ibid.: 200). However, as indicated above, it cannot be granted that tourists *always* search for authenticity in particular; some might already be satisfied by acquiring something simply ‘nice and beautiful’, and others are possibly driven by the desire to covet a mark of ‘Otherness’ rather than having a sincere interest in the respective cultural object and its background (SHEPHERD, 2002: 195). Even in Mamallapuram, some tourists may not deliberately be looking for authentic souvenirs (cf. COHEN, 1988: 378), and rather ‘just want to shop’. Thereby, it may well be sufficient for them even to acquire a copy. Someone who merely wishes to find a pretty shawl probably does not have an in-depth interest about its making, local origin and material. However, those who decidedly favour a *real* shawl certainly do. Moreover, the search for authenticity is probably subtle, and internalised by many customers. Whether actively looked for or not, the described qualities implied by the concepts of ‘realness’ and authenticity are most definitely *desirable* ones. For instance—although an increasing number of customers was reported to be doubtful about the

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Authenticity, when understood in terms of ‘realness’, can also refer to an object’s brand. As such, it may—for instance—be essential for some to own a ‘real’ Louis Vuitton bag rather than a replica.

well-being of cashmere goats—only few disparage a carefully crafted, aesthetic and overall useful thing such as a Kashmiri shawl, and even if they did not originally plan on buying one, may be seduced into doing so.<sup>59</sup>

Tourists wanting to buy Kashmiri pashmina shawls need to be assured of the product's genuineness, and will be even more convinced by receiving additional information about its background. Further, those who do not already know much about it need to be made *aware* of the object's special character. In any event, it is at this point that the sellers become 'active', and this domain will be presented in the following chapter.

## 4.2 (Re-) Animating the Product

The authenticity of an object is probably not much of a deal at the time of its actual production, but becomes crucial once it is for sale, in particular for tourists. For sellers in Mamallapuram (and elsewhere, too), this situation requires, to put it in APPADURAI'S terms, a 'knowledge about the market, the consumer, [and] the destination of the commodity' (APPADURAI, 1986: 42). In this sense, respondents were well aware of the tourists' appreciation for authenticity and its adjoining premises, specifically when it comes to purchasing pashmina shawls. Before going deeper into the sales interactions as such, some theoretical considerations will be provided.

The shawls on offer in Mamallapuram are, among other things, commodities. As has been highlighted by BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE (2005: 43), a commodity must have had a local meaning for the people who first appropriated and usually produced it. It would only be through leaving this original context and thereby shedding its original meaning that the object becomes a commodity (ibid.). In her popular work on the commodity chain of matsutake mushrooms from the woods of Oregon and Yunnan to markets in Japan, TSING refers to this process of 'breaking the social ties of products' as alienation (TSING, 2013: 27). Such alienation would have to be 'built in the commodity' in order for it to *become* a commodity (ibid.: 21). In her case example, this is achieved by what TSING refers to as continuous practices of assessing and sorting the commodity as it is transacted along its commodity chain. Consequently, once things have become commodities, they have been stripped of their

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<sup>59</sup> In this instance, a respondent shared an experience of a customer who visited his shop with the intention of buying a pair of earrings for his wife, and walked out with two pashmina shawls instead.

previous social identity (KOPYTOFF, 1986: 65) and are, technically, devoid of intrinsic meaning (BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE, 2005: 43).

Returning to the problem of authenticity, there seems to be a conflict, since in order to earn the label of authenticity and be distinguishable from ordinary commodities, *special* commodities *require* this very character. At first sight, the preceding thoughts suggest a contradiction between the ideas of authenticity and the commodity, and one can ask with SCHNEPEL whether commodities by definition have already lost their originality and authenticity once they enter the marketplace (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 30)—possibly even more so when the latter is far removed from the respective object’s place of origin and production. The present case of selling Kashmiri shawls 2,500 kilometres away from their ‘geographical home’ in a completely different local context in Mamallapuram would constitute one such example. Had the commodities really lost their authenticity, there would be a further problem because in order to be attractive to customers (cf. chapter 4.1), they—in this case the shawls—*need* to be what one may call ‘authentic’ (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 30). Consequently, customers need to be provided with certain information in order to *recognise* them as authentic. Thus crucially, ‘*the commodified object must be endowed with new meaning in order to motivate people to covet it*’ (BINSBERGEN & GESCHIERE, 2005: 43). This meaning would, according to the authors, be inevitably different from the one informing the thing’s original context (ibid.).<sup>60</sup>

In the globalising world, it seems to be a trend to increasingly obscure the origin and production process of commodities in circulation. However, in the case of handmade cultural objects on sale in tourist markets, it is especially relevant to make this information visible to the prospective customer. It is important to highlight the otherwise opaque commodity chain. In this sense, it was revealing to witness how sellers—even though the shawls are already overwhelming enough by simply looking at them or holding them in your hands—took measures to ‘enhance’ their special character. Thereby, as one may say, the sellers (re-) constructed the product’s authenticity. The objective in marketing pashmina shawls seemed to be to ‘animate’ and ‘enchant’ to re-evolve their ‘identity’, retell the ‘story behind them’ and share whatever made the shawls special; this both in the eyes of the sellers themselves, as well as in relation to what they anticipated that their customers would appreciate. The sellers’

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<sup>60</sup> As a further explanation of this statement consider APPADURAI’S quote that [if] we regarded some commodities as having ‘life histories’ or ‘careers’ in a meaningful sense, it would become useful to look at the distribution of knowledge at various points in their careers. Such careers, to APPADURAI, would have the greatest uniformity at the production pole, for it is likely that at the moment of production, the commodity in question has had the least opportunity to accumulate an idiosyncratic biography or enjoy a particular career (APPADURAI, 1986: 41 f.).

conviction that they could not ‘sell without words’ seemingly echoes the world of things being ‘inert and mute, set in motion and animated by persons and their words’ (APPADURAI, 1986: 4).

Selling pashmina shawls is a serious business, and one of the first challenges for the sellers is to ‘prove’ the authenticity of their material. The shawl’s special status is already evident by the way they are stored in the shops. They are not anything to just *take a quick look at* during a brief visit to a Kashmiri shop and, unlike other products on offer, they are ‘too valuable’ to be displayed openly. Kept behind the jewellery counter, carefully folded and well-protected in a bundle of cloth or in ‘magic suitcases’<sup>61</sup>, indeed, they seem to be hidden. On the one hand, storing them like this protects them from light, humidity and theft<sup>62</sup> (by the same token, colourful shawls hanging outside the shops, exposed to sunlight and dust, and bearing a tag saying ‘100% pashmina’ most definitely are *not* real pashminas). On the other hand, it serves to showcase their originality as ‘otherwise’, respondents assured, ‘people won’t believe it is a real one’.

Once the pieces have been taken out and laid in front of your eyes, you are likely to be presented with the ‘ring test’ during which sellers—in an attempt to demonstrate the shawl’s exceptional thinness—will pull one or even two pieces at once through a conventional ring with ease, then look at you, raise an eyebrow and expectantly ask: ‘You see?’ Consequently, you are invited to ‘feel for yourself the softness’, try the piece and wrap it around your shoulders, compare it with *normal* shawls, as often as you wish. Having customers touch the shawls and perceive their ‘immediacy’ and ‘tactile qualities’, to borrow some terms from HENDRICKSON (1996: 111), will in an ideal case create a connection between you and the product that would make the ‘next logical step’, the purchase, not only desirable but rather ‘natural’ (ibid.). As an additional measure to verify the genuineness of the material, sellers occasionally pull out a few of the shawl’s threads and ignite them: those easily catching fire and not smelling like burnt natural hair are at least mixed with synthetic fibres. The need to prove authenticity shows in the online business as well: for instance, website operators offering ‘pashmina shawls’ would display attributions that are meant to mark their products as ‘original works of art’ and ‘exquisite craftsmanship from an epic land’<sup>63</sup>, backed by the

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<sup>61</sup> An expression used by some respondents to point to the ‘treasure’—i.e. the shawls—inside them.

<sup>62</sup> As an illustration, a respondent said that if he kept pashmina shawls outside, his father would ‘kill [him]’.

<sup>63</sup> See internet source ONLINE SHOP ‘KASHMIR COMPANY’ (2019).

argument that ‘true luxury cannot be copied’<sup>64</sup>. However, respondents agreed that ultimately—whether in face-to-face or online business—you could only rely ‘on trust’.

To the majority of tourists, the exact origin and production conditions of Kashmiri shawls are probably unknown. To counter this, sellers provide different information in order to visualise the product’s commodity chain. When looking at Kashmiri shawls in a Mamallapuram shop, the first thing you are likely to learn is that they come from *Kashmir*. At times, this information will be garnished by attributions such as Kashmir being the ‘paradise of the Himalaya’, or a ‘heaven on earth’. Especially when you have not yet been to Kashmir, you may be shown photos of a family trip to the blooming meadows of *Sonamarg*<sup>65</sup> in spring, or a photograph of *Dal Lake* in Srinagar, capturing both *shikaras*<sup>66</sup> and the adjoining mountain range. You may even be presented with an impression of snow-covered streets during winter—probably the last thing that Mamallapuram, a place in the tropical climate zone, will remind you of. Such accounts and situations were common in the day-to-day business, and once more point to HENDRICKSON’S work about the marketing of Mayan handicrafts from Guatemala in US mail-order catalogues. In the latter, it was quite common to identify the respective product with its place of origin, thereby imbuing it with an ‘aura of another world’, and giving the potential customer a sense of familiarity with it (HENDRICKSON, 1996: 111 f.). Not least, this was—as done by respondents, too—achieved by using expressions to distance and exoticise their geographic point of origin (ibid.: 106). Connecting the shawl to its ‘home’ appeared as an endeavour to (re-) evoke the ‘*hau* of the local’, as termed by ERIKSEN in his work on *bunads*, since separating the commodity character from its cultural context would break the ‘magic spell’ (ERIKSEN, 2004: 32). Furthermore, speaking about Kashmir becomes especially relevant as you are not *in* Kashmir but in Mamallapuram: you do not see it all around you, but must *imagine* it.

HART has described the commodity as human labour embodied in goods or services that are offered to society rather than being consumed by their producer. As such, he has suggested defining ‘commoditisation’ as the progressive abstraction of social labour (HART, 1983: 40). Consonant with the considerations mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, namely to re-evoke the ‘social identity’ of the commodity, the second thing you are likely to learn when looking for (or at) a Kashmiri shawl is that they are *handmade*. Besides verbal accounts, this process was commonly made perceptible by showing tourists photos or videos

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<sup>64</sup> See internet source ONLINE SHOP ‘FASHION CLASSICS’ (2019).

<sup>65</sup> A former hill station of the British in rural Kashmir located at the old silk road.

<sup>66</sup> Small gondola-like boats used as the primary mode of transportation on the Dal Lake.

of the shawl's production. A popular footage in this instance was a short film named 'Pashmina Road'<sup>67</sup>, demonstrating the journey from *pashm* being collected in Ladakh up to finishing the shawl in Srinagar. Another measure taken by sellers that in effect gave customers a feel for the shawl's journey was to mention their close links to craftspeople, in some way appearing to *represent* them. Although sellers in Mamallapuram are not the makers of their products, this observation resembles CANT'S insight that when selling cultural objects, it was beneficial for recognised authors to emphasise their personal connection to their work (CANT, 2018: 68). The importance of highlighting 'personalizing details', such as 'the people behind the creations', and the 'touch' between them and prospective customers via handmade objects has also been demonstrated by HENDRICKSON (1996: 110-112).

Furthermore, respondents were convinced that sellers had to be *Kashmiri* and could not, for instance, be Tamil. While on the one hand, this was due to the fact that it was the 'Kashmiri people' who 'had the knowledge' about the shawls, this conviction may also be well related to HITCHCOCK'S presumption of tourists often assuming the people with whom they interact in the marketplace to have a close cultural link to the items they sell (HITCHCOCK, 2000: 4). As an artefact's authenticity is commonly linked to the perceived authenticity of the experience (ibid.), the sellers being from Kashmir itself constituted a beneficial factor in this regard.<sup>68</sup> As an interpretation, the combination of the shop, the shawls on offer and the sellers' attempts to market them constitute a rhetorical setting. Therein, the shops function as touristic contact zones (cf. SCHNEPEL, 2013: 35), serving as an interactive platform for tourists and sellers. In a way, these contact zones can resemble stages on which a certain drama is being presented—one that is tailored according to the assumed taste of the spectators, the tourists, and one that would unfold itself in frequently new interactions (ibid.: 36). When transferring this idea to the present case example, it becomes evident that the shawl is made a major requisite of this drama, which is continuously altered in relation to the respective preferences and background knowledge of the individual tourist who—during all of these interactions—actively *creates* meaning rather than passively receiving it (see also LITTRELL ET AL., 1993: 199).

What has been termed in this chapter as (re-) animating the product does not happen in an 'empty space'. Instead, it is situated in the broader field of 'Kashmiri business', as it was

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<sup>67</sup> See internet source YOUTUBE CHANNEL 'KASHMIR LOOM' (2018).

<sup>68</sup> As an illustration, consider SHEPHERD'S account that 'Chinese food served by Chinese people in a Chinese restaurant decorated to look 'Chinese' is seemingly naturally more authentic than Chinese food cooked by a Salvadoran immigrant at a fast food restaurant in an American suburban shopping mall' (SHEPHERD, 2002: 191).



commonly referred to by respondents. The business is regarded as being anything but common. Rather, in a way, it is seen as an extension of Kashmiri culture. This was, for instance, unequivocally clarified by a respondent who stated that ‘inside [his] shop, it [was] Kashmiri culture’. In effect, the shop is being made a combination of ‘culture and commerce’ (cf. PELEIKIS & FELDMAN, 2013: 310). In order to fulfil this aspiration, sellers are eager to create a friendly, intimate and homely atmosphere inside their shops. Instrumental in creating such a comfortable and communicative space was to serve and share tea, which was done by almost all respondents. On the one hand, this practice is believed to evoke ‘good karma’. On the other hand, there is an economic intention behind it, as also explained by one respondent:

‘The people come here and they have much time. They want to take something special. They want to have a good time. When drinking tea together, one becomes familiar with each other. Only then they will have the mind to buy something.’<sup>69</sup>

As a result, it is common for sellers and customers to sit together and talk and, apart from conversations linked to the products on offer, discuss topics that are not necessarily business-related—whether these concern politics, Kashmir and India in general, family members or the home country of the respective tourist. Apart from negotiating prices, the business becomes something very social. Since many customers are not used to such business practices from their home countries, the Kashmiri approach often represents something ‘new’ and ‘different’ to them, and causes them to perceive the buying as something personal, singular, and memorable<sup>70</sup>. Technically, you exchange money against a commodity but, if the sellers did a good job in their eyes, you will feel as if you have received a gift.

To further elaborate the nature of ‘gifts’ at stake in the Kashmiri shawl business on site, the next chapter will take into account characteristics of commodities and gifts in general, as well as the exchange of these two items. It will thereby facilitate a further theoretical interpretation of the insights gained during my fieldwork.

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<sup>69</sup> Offering guests a tea is a very common practice in Kashmir, too—not only in business contexts. In Mamallapuram, too, sharing tea does not necessarily point to doing business but was done whenever respondents received guests in their shops, be it owners from neighbouring shops, family members or friends.

<sup>70</sup> As a counterexample, this is certainly not what you experience during a typical visit at a supermarket, or when ordering things online.

### 4.3 The Gift(s) in the Commodity

The difference between commodities and gifts has been subject to a grand debate in anthropology (GOSDEN & MARSHALL, 1999: 172). Commodities are supposed to be alienable so that they can be transacted without leaving any lasting relationship between the giver and the receiver (ibid.: 173). Therefore, they need to be freed of non-capitalist social relations that TSING (2013: 22) refers to as ‘gifts’. To APPADURAI, the commodity constitutes a fundamental and standardised unit of the marketplace. Typically, each commodity is identical to the others. They are available to anybody, and it is of no importance who has given it to whom: the thing simply has its price (APPADURAI, 2006: 19 f.). Such accounts transmit an idea of commodities (as well as the exchange thereof) as something isolated, ‘dry’, ‘technical’, or even lifeless.

The gift in turn would constitute the exact opposite of the commodity, and be something highly personal, special, or even magical (ibid.). In this spirit, anthropologists have long described the gift—similar to art—as situated outside the sphere of commodity production and circulation, and as relating to the human subject in a special way (MYERS, 2011: 4). Contrary to regular commodities, gifts would always maintain a link to those who originally made them, and to the people who have subsequently transacted them (GOSDEN & MARSHALL, 1999: 173). Therefore, they would not ever be ‘empty’ as such. When relating these reflections to the case example, it shows that Kashmiri shawls as commodities are not completely alienated because they represent, among other things, a cultural heritage that the sellers have a *share* in: the product already bears something *personal* that one may call inalienable. Hence, it is anything but ‘lifeless’.

In order for products to become capitalist commodities, the ‘gifts’, as referred to by TSING, need to be ‘taken out’ of the commodities (TSING, 2013: 23). When *selling* the same however, it is—moreover in the case of ‘special commodities’ (cf. chapter 1.1)—the aim to *equip* the commodity again with the social (and ideal) relations it bears. This is precisely what the previous chapter has shown: (re-) animating the shawl means, among other things, to highlight the ‘gift(s) in the commodity’, e.g. the human labour and its associated emotions that the product embodies, as well as its other special qualities. Although not a typical commodity from the outset, it is made an ‘even more special one’ by dint of this process. In other words, the object is being transferred from one kind of ‘sphere’ into another one. These considerations resemble TSING’S idea that after turning objects into commodities, they can attain characteristics of gifts again (cf. ibid.: 26). As a guideline, one can stick to the phrase that the

more ‘gifts’ there are in an object—however they got there—the less it will be (perceived as) a commodity in the classical (capitalist) sense.

Another crucial aspect of the gift is that it solidifies relationships (APPADURAI, 2006: 20). This idea has also been taken up by TSING who states that gifts would place the receiver into a social field and constantly remind him of the requirement for reciprocation (TSING, 2013: 22). At the centre of the interplay between humans and objects is again an economic exchange that, to APPADURAI, creates value (APPADURAI, 1986: 3). While value in a commodity system is in things for use and exchange, value in a gift system lies in social obligations, connections and gaps (TSING, 2013: 22). During many sales interactions, the seller assumes, in a way, the form of a giver: by ‘sharing’ parts of their culture and socially interacting with tourists, the latter are indeed drawn into a social field, and—when done the ‘Kashmiri way’—there often *is* a relationship being solidified between the seller and the buyer. To put it in APPADURAI’S words, this case would provide an example of how transactions surrounding things can be ‘invested with properties of social relations’ (APPADURAI, 2006: 15). Not even money which technically ‘frees the ties’ between the giver and the receiver can dissolve this relationship. Rather, it is instrumental in establishing it. The reciprocation expected from the customer is not necessarily the purchase itself but—first and foremost—the *respect* towards the product. Moreover, a sincere appreciation of the shawls on offer is a gift the sellers receive from customers, and buying them was seen as a ‘manifestation’ of such appreciation. In effect, selling pashmina shawls seemed to result in a value creation for the sellers—not just economically but also ideally, increasing pride, cultural self-confidence and an overall sense of *kashmiriyat*: the latter, to be translated as ‘Kashmiri-ness’, is a collective term that, next to an ethno-national and social consciousness, refers to Kashmiri cultural values.<sup>71</sup>

Certainly, the interaction surrounding the purchase of Kashmiri shawls in Mamallapuram is not a gift exchange in its proper sense. Nevertheless, it bears characteristics of the same: turning the shawl into something gift-like requires a *personal interaction* between the seller and the (potential) buyer: on the one hand, the shawl is made a little gift-like *through* this interaction. On the other hand, the personal interaction in the shop—implying consultation, information, or tea—constitutes a gift in itself, and renders the transaction into something special. Overall, then, the transaction is not only about (economic) value, but also implies (human) *values*.

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<sup>71</sup> See RAFIQ SHIEKH (2015); for further information on this concept consider e.g. ZUTSHI (2004).

Further, this leads to GRABURN'S idea that for the individual owner, the importance of a souvenir would represent a memorial link with some occasion, usually one centred on a person or a place (GRABURN, 2000: 12). Shawls, once sold and brought to the customers' home countries, may not only serve as a link to the travel destination, but also point to the act of purchase itself. Whether they have been acquired as a souvenir or not, they will not only be valued for their material qualities, but also for the nice shopping experience. In this sense, the 'gifts' can remain attached to the object. At the end of a purchase, you will likely be thanked for the business and invited to come back—and ideally, the described interactions will establish a customer loyalty that is as 'durable as a pashmina shawl'.

## 5. Conclusion

Kashmiri shawls have historically been placed in a global context. In focusing on pashmina shawls and their sale, this work has dealt with the business in Kashmiri shawls using the example of the Indian tourist town of Mamallapuram. It sought to explore the importance of the concepts of cultural heritage and authenticity, and to provide insights into the nature of the ‘Kashmiri business’. As the data collected during fieldwork rely on a relatively small sample, they do not claim to be representative. However, the findings recapitulated in the upcoming sections appeared in such clarity so as to consider the ensuing problem of commodifying and marketing ‘cultural’ objects.

Unlike the case of ‘common’ commodities being sold in the market, sellers in Mamallapuram felt very connected to Kashmiri shawls—particularly to the pashmina ones, which were unequivocally regarded as the ‘most special Kashmiri shawls of all’. The stronger the sellers’ personal ties to the product, the less they defined it as an (alienated) commodity: to them, it was much more than simply a thing to sell. Against the background that usually, the alienation from a commodity’s context of production and original appropriation increases with the length and complexity of its commodity chain (TSING, 2013), it showed that in the present case, such alienation was especially limited for those sellers who had traditionally been engaged in the business of Kashmiri handicrafts. Other limiting factors included the fact that the shawls—although there are differences in size and designs—are widely used in Kashmir itself, and are often acquired through familiar production and trading networks.

Notwithstanding the respondents’ background, being in the business *increased* their personal connection to the product. Respondents emphasised that by trading pashmina shawls, you would ‘learn much about them’ and, as all their accounts suggested, come to appreciate them even more. This learning experience includes becoming more familiar with the craft, its history and production process. Furthermore, the often positive feedback from customers about Kashmiri shawls—along with all other good things that have been said and written about them throughout their global history, plus the long-term desire for pashmina shawls as a marker of socio-economic distinction (cf. chapter 1.2)—positively influenced the way respondents gave meaning to these products. It is quite likely that they referred to the shawl as being something ‘luxurious’, ‘prestigious’, ‘royal’ and ‘precious’ (cf. chapter 3) also because of these often foreign, particularly European associations. Although not everyone shared equal sentiments about pashmina shawls, *all* respondents considered them as an *art* and distinctively *Kashmiri* cultural heritage. This view was especially justified by the specifics of

handmade production and notions of local tradition (cf. chapter 3.1). In this sense, respondents literally described the shawls as ‘cultural commodities’. Being Kashmiri appeared to be enough of a reason to have a cultural share in the product, and narrations about the shawls and their tradition repeatedly drew upon notions of ethnic identity (true to the fact that it was ‘Kashmiri people doing Kashmiri business selling Kashmiri things’, this was not valid only for shawls, but also applied to the business of genuine Kashmiri handicrafts as a whole). As it was *Kashmiris* who were—as reported by respondents—the ‘owners’ of this tradition, it was *they* who should rightfully benefit from the sale of shawls designated as ‘pashmina’. Importantly, the status of a cultural heritage only applies to shawls respondents considered to be *real* ones, meaning that they had to be made of the right material, be handmade, and be from Kashmir (cf. chapter 3.2).

Amidst the tension caused by the flood of fakes circulating on the national and international market, as well as the excessive worldwide use of the term ‘pashmina’, the authenticity of Kashmiri shawls—again especially its pashmina varieties—has been a contested issue. The consequences of the name pashmina ‘going global’ have influenced and challenged the idea of Kashmiri shawls, and been upsetting the traders. From their perspective, the name has in many cases been subject to unjust commodification. In line with the finding that authenticity in handicrafts on sale in tourist markets is of major importance for tourists (cf. chapter 4.1), the current market scenario for pashmina shawls makes their being ‘real’ even more necessary. Hence, proving the shawl’s authenticity and overall emphasising its special character by providing information about its place of origin (Kashmir) and its handmade production were major approaches in selling shawls to tourists in Mamallapuram (cf. chapter 4.2). Thus, rather than obscuring the shawls’ commodity chain, traders were *highlighting* it. These approaches were embedded in a conception of ‘Kashmiri business’ that depicts how culture and economy can be connected, and that constitutes a way of trading that does not hinder, but rather *enable* human relationships. At least in the Kashmiri shawl business in Mamallapuram, the often-supposed ‘alienating force of the market’ is to be refuted also in the sense that it usually brings customers and sellers *together* and not apart. Moreover, this occurs especially in the case of an exchange of what has been referred to as ‘gifts’ (cf. chapter 4.3). Ideally, these include a personal interaction between both parties, and add to the authenticity of the shopping experience.

Essentially, the present case suggests that the concepts of ‘commodities’, ‘art’ and ‘cultural heritage’ do not necessarily constitute separate categories here. Rather, it has been shown that for the sellers, pashmina shawls as on offer in Mamallapuram represent all of these

*at once*. Therein, they serve as an account of ‘objects whose trajectories are less easily fixed in the familiar categories of classification’ (MYERS, 2011: 53).

## 5.1 ‘Culture’ by Commodification

*‘Art you cannot just do. Art you have to sell.’*

The beginning of this work presented several arguments that shed a bad light on the commodification of objects considered to be cultural (cf. chapter 1.1). While the pessimistic prospects may apply in other contexts, the case example suggests the reverse, namely that for the sellers, it bears especially *positive* effects—not only referring to the money they earn. On the one hand, the case example reflects SCHNEPEL’S insight that the touristic interest in cultural heritage can lend (local) handicrafts a new drive and create new markets for them (SCHNEPEL, 2013: 23). More than that, it shows that this interest is capable of causing, among other things, a new regional, ethnic, or national self-confidence, and of increasing pride in one’s own tradition. Producers would be strengthened in an economic, political and emotional way through the ‘sale’ of their culture, and in this process could acquire new energy (ibid.: 30). Even though sellers in Mamallapuram are not producing the shawls themselves, this applied to them as well. Rather than being ‘sold out’, in the eyes of the sellers, culture would get *spread*—which would eventually result in added value. For the respondents (and probably for many other Kashmiris, too) Kashmiri (pashmina) shawls appear to have emerged as something ‘cultural’ also *because* of their commodification and long-term history of marketisation.

Other scholars have gone further and stated that the ‘marketization of culture’ even turned out to be vital to cultural survival (FIRAT, 1995: 118-121). When relating this to the case example, it becomes evident that in the first place, the sale of Kashmiri shawls is necessary for *economic* survival—for sellers and producers alike. True to the fact that a shrinking demand would lead to a decreasing production, it was not regarded as a sin to transfer the ‘art’ of the shawl into a commodity. Rather, it was seen as an economic necessity. As agreed upon by all respondents—to demystify the entry quote to this chapter—art in the form of Kashmiri shawls should not only be made for its own sake, but was seen as something that needed to be *sold*. In the second place, the sale of Kashmiri shawls may, as demonstrated, definitely contribute to what FIRAT has termed as cultural survival (ibid.). Importantly, this line of argumentation only applies to what respondents described as *real* Kashmiri shawls. By contrast, the sale of fakes under the name of pashmina would constitute an actual example of ‘cultural exploitation’, in which the tourist demand would indeed be a major cause of the

problem. To sum up, at least for those selling the shawls, culture and commodification do not pose a contradiction. Moreover, the equation that ‘while tourism increases, culture declines’ (SHEPHERD, 2002: 188) does not hold true here.

Against the background of the doubt as to how something can be authentic when it is already influenced by market demands, another previously-mentioned problem was the concern that tourism and commodification may be a threat to authenticity. While it is true that over the years, the designs of Kashmiri shawls have also been adapted to customers’ tastes, the inherent notion of cultural heritage seemed to remain unaffected. To a certain extent, modifications in the craft might even be inevitable because, to put it in BUNN’S words, ‘as times change, work and artists adapt and evolve according to contemporary needs, or they cease to exist’ (BUNN, 2000: 192). BUNN further advocates pricking up one’s ears when approaches to authenticity ‘imply an assumption that culture is unchanging, closed or frozen’. Rather, she is in favour of recognising the ‘dynamism in culture’ (ibid.: 182).

Zooming in on the touristic context in Mamallapuram, this position is supported by SCHNEPEL who regards it as ‘natural’ that tradition, cultural heritage, social identity, ethnicity and even nationality change their forms of expression and meaning when locals and tourists meet (SCHNEPEL 2013: 24). This concerns a situation in which different social worlds are connected through the sale and purchase of shawls, posing as a ‘point of interaction’ where meaning is negotiated (cf. HITCHCOCK, 2000: 1). As such—apart from the objects itself—the trade in Kashmiri shawls should also be seen as a part of the respondents’ everyday lives, and be considered a part of their authentic culture (cf. MATTHEWS, 2004: 88).

## **5.2 Kashmiri Shawls: An Outlook**

Looking towards the future of the craft, respondents were not very optimistic—especially because of challenges at the production level. It was frequently mentioned that producers were facing a bad economic situation that has already been causing their numbers to decline—a condition that was also found by IMAAN ASHRAF ET AL. (2016: 1232). The increasing mechanisation was again and again reported as being a major threat to more traditional ways of producing Kashmiri shawls—a trend that, according to respondents, was likely to continue. Apart from the low income to be earned in producing Kashmiri shawls in general, respondents were worried that despite all the glamour attached to the final product, many craftspeople probably did not ‘enjoy their work very much’. A similar statement was made by SAVASERE



in that their work had become forced and mechanical, and no longer constituted ‘a means to express the inner self’ (SAVASERE, 2010-2011: 306). As initially stated, it has to be kept in mind that Kashmiri shawls have never been only sold locally, and have always been sold in the marketplace. Notwithstanding, it seems necessary to also explore how the debate on the commodification of ‘cultural objects’ is to be related to the sphere of production, focusing on the views of the *producers* (or ‘artists’). Therefore, as well as in order to gain a deeper understanding of their labour relations in general, more research is needed.

Given the afore-mentioned prospects, fewer and fewer young people were said to be motivated to learn the craft—the work too tedious, and the payment too low. Respondents regretted that in consequence, ‘the knowledge’ was getting lost. The slightly cynical undertone of such accounts may in fact point to a deeper concern of losing something that is dear to them. IMAAN ASHRAF ET AL. (2016: 1238) even speak of the craft ‘dying a silent death’. Respondents did not view the present situation that drastically, and were sure that ‘this art’ would never perish. Nevertheless, it was estimated that there were not many more than 100 artists left with the exceptional skills needed to embroider a *Jamawar* shawl, and it was lamented that the old craftsmen were dying off. Against this background, respondents supposed that ‘maybe already in ten years’, pashmina shawls could be antiques. Not least due to an increasing scarcity of the raw material (ibid.: 1234-1236), prices were expected to keep rising. Hence, a pashmina shawl bought today was compared to an investment or stock—accompanied by the worry that soon, few people would be willing to ‘spend much money on them’.

Looking to the future of the business as such, respondents expected many things to change. It was repeatedly mentioned that the trade would become ‘even more global’, and the increased usage of the internet in marketing Kashmiri shawls was anticipated to bring along ‘new markets’ and ‘new competition’—an assumption that is shared by SINGH (2016: 97). According to KOPYTOFF’S position that the ‘existence of a sophisticated exchange technology fully opens the economy to swamping by commoditization’ (KOPYTOFF, 1986: 87), it remains to be seen whether in the long run, cheaper imitations will be dominating the international market even more than today. However, given that the search for distinction is central to modernity (KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT, 1991: 44), the value of authentic Kashmiri shawls is likely to continue, if not even gain in significance—for both sellers and tourists alike. Consistent with the respondents’ assumption that the internet would ‘destroy human relations’, it was expected that in the future, ‘real Kashmiri business’ would become less. In other words, in standardised transactions, the gifts in the commodity (cf. chapter 4.3) are likely to fade as

well. An arising question is how in such other ‘markets’, sellers are going to relate to the product. Furthermore, one can wonder along with APPADURAI ‘how to create human relations’ (APPADURAI, 2006: 20) when there is no social interaction between sellers and buyers anymore.

By and large, both fieldwork observations and the literature consulted suggest that the heyday of Kashmiri shawls, as witnessed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular, may be over. As a major solution to problems regarding their trade, respondents suggested, whilst cluelessly shrugging their shoulders, ‘spending more’—on *real* Kashmiri shawls.

## Postscript

Subsequent to the completion of my fieldwork, the respondents cited in this work have been facing a difficult time. This has mainly been due to two events: the 2019-2021 Jammu and Kashmir lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic. Both events have strongly affected the Kashmiri business in Mamallapuram.

A week after the precursor of this revised MA thesis was submitted at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Cologne in October 2019, the divisions of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh of the then state of Jammu and Kashmir were officially made a union territory of India by the Government of India. This was followed by protests, months of curfew and the cutting of internet and mobile services in Kashmir for weeks. During this period, respondents who had remained in Mamallapuram were unable to reach their families and acquaintances in Kashmir, and supplies to shops were interrupted. When the Kashmir lockdown began, business had already been suffering, with respondents reporting again and again that hardly any tourists would visit Mamallapuram any longer. As a consequence, and in search for better business opportunities, some traders have moved with their shops to other places in India, or entered the online marketplace. Others have been getting into debt.

To make matters worse, then the COVID-19 pandemic and its adjoining entry ban, which started in 2020, have caused the tourist industry in Mamallapuram to come to an almost complete standstill. All respondents returned to Kashmir (where business opportunities were equally poor), and have been struggling economically ever since. They are only now slowly starting to return to Mamallapuram. Several shops had to close during this time.

Both events have put the already fragile business and respondents' wellbeing into an even more challenging position, and its future is once again uncertain. Very likely, for the current situation to improve, respondents would – while still remaining hopeful – further on suggest the same thing as in 2018: that customers should 'spend more' on their products.

Cologne, September 2021



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