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Nepalese Pashmina

Pashmina is a high quality textile that has received global recognition for being a well-made luxury good. Pashmina is another word for a very fine and high quality cashmere wool that is used often to make shawls in Asian Countries like Nepal, India and Pakistan (Shakyawar, Wanic and Kadama, 2014). In countries such as Nepal, pashmina has historically been one of their main imports but due to challenges such as competing less quality products, has lost its popularity and in effect has largely affected the economy of Nepal (Prevot, 2011). Currently a major challenge that has arisen is the decrease in raw materials being produced within Nepal which has forced companies to import them from countries like China, when in reality there is lots of opportunity and potential for both the people as well as producers for the materials to be grown right in the country of Nepal (Kathmandu, 2014)

The high altitude regions of the Himalayas in Nepal, India, Pakistan and Tibet are home to the domestic goat known as the Changthangi/ Pashmina goat (Shakyawar, Wanic and Kadama 2014, 1). Due to the extreme weather in these regions this particular goat grows a full winter coat . Uniquely the wool on the Changthangi is extremely fine and completely straight and free of crimping which makes it an ideal material for textile work. Changthangi wool is three times better at insulating than that of common wool due to its fine structure . The most valuable part of the wool is the undercoat which is extremely soft and most commonly used when making well known Pashmina products (Shakyawar, Wanic and Kadama 2014, 1). The wool of the goat is harvested once a year after the winter in late spring (598). This time period is lucrative because

this is the time of year when the under coat becomes loose from the hair follicles and is only being held in by the outer coat of the wool (Ganai, Misra and Sheikh 2011, 598). From here the wool is gathered, sorted and washed with water (no soap) to clean off dust and dirt (Sunrise Pashmina). The wool is then combed to loosen and separate the fibers, and then rubbed with paste which consists of a mixture of pounded rice and water (Sunrise Pashmina). This step is necessary to toughen the wool before spinning into yarn (Sunrise Pashmina). A study examining the quality difference between hand- spun, machine-spun and blended pashmina shawls, concluded that hand-spun shawls were found to be “dimensionally stable and superior in quality” (Shakyawar, Wanic and Kadama 2014, 6). This finding is important to note when examining the potential benefits that the promotion of Pashmina products would have for the local producers in Nepal.

The farming families in the mountainous regions of Nepal would benefit from all the advantages of raising these goats, not only from the potential benefits of the pashmina wool, but the overall benefits of owning livestock. Changthangi goats have an average milk yield from 170 to 500 ml a day, which is a benefit to a family to maintain healthy calcium and protein levels especially if the family is hit with a period of famine or loss of crops (Ganai, Misra and Sheikh 2011, 597). Milking the goats is an easy task for children to maintain as well as women are the most likely to be tasked with the job of weaving the pashmina which is financially beneficial for women who are limited to house work and child rearing by cultural norms. Although male goats have higher wool production having both male and female goats improve the overall welfare of the family (Ganai, Misra and Sheikh 2011, 598)

The use of pashmina has an extended history of use by the ancient people of Nepal, but more recently pashmina experienced an economic boom through the global market during the

late 1990s (Prevot 2011, 11). At the peak of production Nepal had exported “\$103 million worth of Pashmina” in 2000 (Prevot 2011, 12). At this time the pashmina industry was employing around 60,000-70,000 people. This infatuation by the Western world drew the attention of countries such as China who also wanted to tap into this market. The production of knock-off pashmina shawls that were being produced and sold for a cheaper price caused confusion of the difference in quality and thus caused this luxury item to be lumped into the same category as everyday scarves (Prevot 2011, 12). As of 2011 only about 10,000-15,000 Nepalese people were employed in this industry and the pashmina exports had dropped to approximately \$18 million in just 10 years (Prevot 2011, 12). With a desire to become competitive again the pashmina industry in Nepal has suffered with issues of overproduction and insufficient quality control (Biggs 2005, 1840). Another major problem that Nepal has faced when exporting to Western world is the high percentage of import duties that is imposed on textile and pashmina goods. In the early 2000s America terminated their duty-free arrangement that that had with Nepal on these goods and implemented a 15% tax to all Nepalese garments (Pakistan Textile Journal, 2012 and Economist Intelligence Unit: Country ViewsWire, 2004).

Export potential to Canada

There is an opportunity for the Nepalese pashmina industry to expand its exports further into Canada. Tapping into the Canadian market of luxury items is where the Nepalese need to aspire to. It has been noticed that a major trend growing in the Canadian community is the interest in authenticity and quality in the product being purchased (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2010, 15). Although the following data is derived from a Canadian consumer study on food decisions, it can also be applied to the attitudes towards most goods being purchased by Canadians. A consumer interest in Canada towards health, environment, a need to be different

from the mass crowd, authenticity and a every growing desire for smaller markets versus mass markets makes Canada a perfect country for the Nepalese pashmina industry (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2010,15). As a popular Nepalese pashmina producer says “We sold our first shawls personally to dignitaries from the West on Ambassadorial entourages. Today, the winds of change have brought us friends who sell it to self-respecting denizens of beautiful hinterlands, our seamstresses and weavers see on TV” (Everest Pashmina).

Another issue faced by the pashmina industry is the confusion by consumers in labelling terminology because pashmina is technically cashmere and is labeled so. It has been identified that by branding Chyangra pashmina on products as well as marketing the name in relation to the quality of Nepalese quality has resulted in an increase in sales says Ratna Shakya who is the President of the Federation of Handicrafts Association of Nepal (FHAN) (Kathmandu, 2014). On top of this the Nepal Pashmina Industries Association is attempting to increase product recognition by registering “Chyangra pashmina brand in 41 countries including major export markets like the US and Europe” (Kathmandu, 2014). Expanding their brand in to companies such as Spencers Pashmina (<http://www.spencerspashmina.com/>) who identifies the importance in quality of pashmina, who have a relationship with selling to Canada, can help further their sales without damaging their reputation.

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