

THE SHAWL MANUFACTURE OF THE PANJAB

AMRITSAR is the great entrepot for the commerce of the Panjab. It deals with all the principal marts in India. The immensity of its transactions can be judged from the amount realized by the imposition of the Octroi or the duty of $1\frac{1}{2}\%$ on imports for local consumption or re-exportation which is about 3 lacs per annum. The value of the annual imports and exports is estimated at 2 and $1\frac{1}{2}$ crores respectively. The leading trade is the manufacture of *pashmina* or shawl-wool into cloths of various descriptions. This manufacture was introduced into Amritsar long before the establishment of British supremacy in the Panjab, and about the time when Maharaja Ranjit Singh was extending his sway over the whole of the Panjab. The *pashm* or wool is imported from Tibet via Rampur and Kashmir. The *pashmina* fabrics are either plain uni-colored cloth called *Alwan*, *Malida*, &c., which are made up into cloaks and articles of European apparel either plain, or embroidered with silk, or else are woven into shawls, the thread being previously dyed and wound off expressly for the purpose. The shawls in which the pattern is produced in the loom are the most valuable: in others the pattern is produced on a ground-work of plain-colored *pashmina* by embroidery with the needle and fine *pashm* thread: such shawls are called *Amlikar*, as opposed to *Kannikar* or loom-woven. The *pashmina* work is almost exclusively done by Kashmiri Musalmans. Soon after the manufacture was instituted there were about 300 shops

established in Amritsar in which *pashmina* work was carried on, and shawls to the value of Rs. 30,000 nearly were manufactured in the city. Besides this, *pashmina* work to the extent of some two lacs of rupees in value from Kashmir, and about Rs. 20,000 from other parts of the hills was imported yearly into Amritsar. Part of this was sold in Amritsar and part exported to Hindustan, Bengal and Hyderabad (Deccan). Lucknow was the chief mart for export in Hindustan. Owing to a large influx of Kashmiris into Amritsar during the great famine which occurred in Kashmir in the year 1833 A.D., the number of shops increased in Amritsar to 2,000 and the yearly outturn of *pashmina* work to four lacs of rupees. Also *pashmina* manufactures to the value of about six lacs of rupees were imported yearly from Kashmir, and to that of two lacs from Nurpur, and other parts of the hills. Now there are about 4,000 looms in Amritsar each worked by at least 2 men and the value of *pashmina* work manufactured yearly is estimated at 8 lacs of rupees. The *pashmina* work manufactured at Kashmir is said to be superior to Amritsar fabric owing to the fact that the adulteration of the shawl-wool with a fine but inferior sort imported via Kabul from the province of Kirman, whence the wool is known as *un-kirmani*, is never practised at Kashmir. Indeed the Kirmani wool is not allowed to be brought into Kashmir. Another reason for this superiority is that in Kashmir the process of removing the coarse hair from the *pashm* and spinning

are done with greater care. On the other hand the scarlet color of Amritsar is far superior to that of Kashmir, the lac dye used in Amritsar being cheaper and therefore less adulterated. The Amritsar blue and green are said to be also finer than the corresponding colors of Kashmir; but whatever may be the true causes of the difference, there is no doubt that the real Kashmir shawls invariably command a higher price than the fabrics made at Amritsar. It is difficult to say whether the shawl trade is prospering or declining. Some distrust has lately been caused by the sale of shawls made of cotton mixed with wool. This is called *Garba*. These are not unoften offered for sale as pure shawls and the texture is so fine that even experts are sometimes deceived. Fabrics made at Germany are also often sold as Amritsar made *Taftas*; but whatever may be the opinion as regards the prosperity or decadence of the trade, there is every reason to anticipate a continuance of the industry, as it must be a long time before the habit of shawl-wearing common among the upper classes of Indians dies out entirely. Sales are generally effected through *dalals* or brokers, who stretch their fingers beneath the cloth one wishes to purchase and fix the price after haggling for nearly an hour, muttering now and then '*is seh*

jasti nahi deh sekhta,' &c. The broker gets commission for his trouble from the seller; but sometimes from the purchaser also. There are now some shops in the city where *pashmina* goods are sold at fixed prices without any haggling. The trade has fallen off a little owing to the discontinuance in France of the custom of giving Indian shawls as dowries in marriages; but the Swadeshi movement has given a fresh impetus to it and the loss it is believed will be recouped ere long. The price of *pashmina* piece-goods has been steadily rising since some years owing to the tightness of the labor market. The chief factor is the plague, which has played havoc among workmen in general and those employed on the shawl industry in particular. The following quotations speak for themselves:—

	<i>Present price.</i>	<i>Price in 1899-1900.</i>
Kashmiri		
Tafta	Rs. 7 to 12 per yd.	Rs. 5 to 10 per yd.
Amritsar made		
Alwan	Rs. 3 to 5 per yd.	Rs. 4½ to 7 do.
Lahori		
Dhosa	Rs. 25 to 30 per pair	Rs. 18 to 20 per pair
Malida		
Comforter	Rs. 1-12 to 4	Rs. 1 to 2-8 per piece
per piece		
Jalalpuri		
Dhosa	Rs. 15 to 18 per pair	Rs. 11 to 13 per pair

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