

By promoting the illegal trade in shahtoosh you are fuelling the slaughter of thousands of chiru on the Tibetan Plateau. You also help destroy the lives and families of the brave guards whose job it is to protect these animals and who - along with the chiru - are gunned down by poachers.

Shahtoosh

the illegal trade

Shahtoosh: the illegal trade (2006)

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MYTHS ABOUT SHAHTOOSH

Do not be fooled by myths and rumours spread by dealers to soften the brutality involved in the illegal trade of shahtoosh. Today every shawl seller knows that the Tibetan antelope or chiru is killed and skinned to obtain raw shahtoosh wool.

Shahtoosh dealers are committing a crime, and by buying shahtoosh, so are you.

MYTH

- Shahtoosh comes from the ibex/ snow goose/ an exotic goat
- Fur shed naturally by the chiru gets stuck on thorn bushes and is collected by nomads
- Shahtoosh is, or can be, collected from chiru bred in captivity
- Shahtoosh wool can be sheared from chiru without killing the animal
- There are such large herds that killing a limited number of animals will not affect the chiru
- Chiru are killed in China - it's not India's problem or responsibility
- We are not the only people who create a demand for shahtoosh
- Shahtoosh is legal in Jammu & Kashmir
- Banning the trade will create hardships for weaver families in Kashmir

REALITY

- Shahtoosh is the under wool of the Tibetan antelope or chiru
- Virtually no bushes are found in the steep, snowy and windswept areas where the chiru live for this to be possible
- Down the ages, there have been many attempts to breed the chiru. None have succeeded
- Shahtoosh is the under fleece and can only be obtained by killing the animal. The female chirus' skinned bodies are left to rot, and their new-born freeze and starve to death
- Chiru populations have plummeted by 95% in the last 30 years. Poachers either machine gun chiru or kill entire herds by driving through them in trucks with logs sticking out of the sides
- It is the demand from India that leads to the slaughter of chiru; just as the demand from China leads to the poaching of India's tigers and leopards
- Almost all shahtoosh is spun and woven in Jammu & Kashmir. As long as there is a demand for the shawls, and weavers are willing to work with shahtoosh, chiru will continue to be killed
- Shahtoosh is completely illegal in Jammu & Kashmir and all other states of India. It is illegal to cross Indian borders with shahtoosh - raw or woven
- There are alternatives and most weavers already work with other wools such as Pashmina



Don't be misled by people who profit from the shahtoosh trade. Empower yourself by knowing the law.

The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (which applies to the whole of India except for Jammu & Kashmir), as well as the Jammu & Kashmir Wildlife (Protection) Act, list the Tibetan antelope or chiru in Schedule I. This accords it the highest degree of protection throughout the country.



Thus, hunting, trade or possession of the animal or its derivatives and parts is forbidden throughout India. The law applies to shahtoosh shawls, fragments and even raw wool.

India and China are both signatories to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), which has prohibited all international trade in the Tibetan antelope or chiru since 1979.

The penalty for buying, selling or attempting to buy or sell shahtoosh is punishable by a minimum prison term of three years, extendable to seven years, and a mandatory fine.

WHAT IS SHAHTOOSH ?

Shahtoosh or 'toosh' is the very fine under-fleece of the Tibetan antelope or chiru (*Panthelops hodgsonii*). The only way of obtaining raw shahtoosh wool is by killing and skinning the antelope. Shahtoosh cannot be sheared off like other wool. The length of the fibres obtained by shearing is too short to be spun into yarn. The only way of getting fibres of a suitable length is by killing and skinning the animal, and plucking shahtoosh from the pelt.



WHERE IS THE CHIRU FOUND ?

The chiru is an endangered species, found on the remote Tibetan plateau and in the Xinjiang and Qinghai provinces of western China. They live at 12,000-16,500 feet, where the average annual temperature is -4°C and severe blizzards in summer are common. The population of chiru in India are migratory, and there are too few of them (about 200 animals) to be a source for the shawls.



WHY CAN'T CHIRU BE DOMESTICATED AND BRED IN CAPTIVITY ?

Over the years, people have consistently failed to domesticate the chiru. Chiru are completely adapted to living at heights with harsh climates and low oxygen levels. They do not survive in areas where humans could tend flocks. All attempts to keep chiru in captivity and breed them have failed.

Even if it were possible to breed chiru on the Tibetan plateau, the raw shahtoosh wool could not legally be brought into India to be woven. Both India and China are signatories to CITES, which makes such a trade illegal.

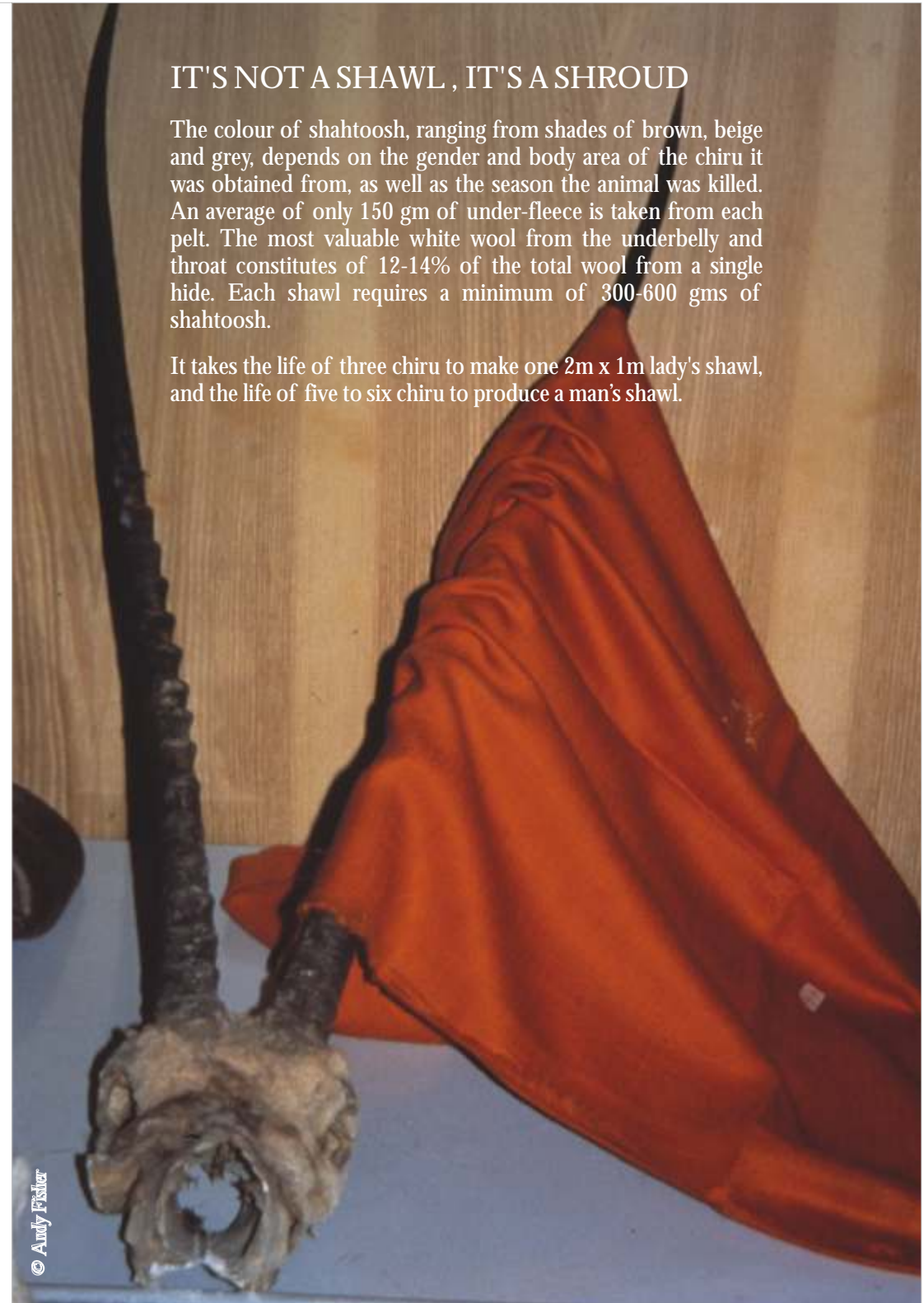
For the sake of argument, say a successful breeding centre was set up, and shahtoosh from China could reach India legally, any buyer of this shahtoosh would still be responsible for the death of the chiru that provided it.

**Remember, shahtoosh cannot be sheared,
it can only be plucked from the body of a dead animal.**

IT'S NOT A SHAWL , IT'S A SHROUD

The colour of shahtoosh, ranging from shades of brown, beige and grey, depends on the gender and body area of the chiru it was obtained from, as well as the season the animal was killed. An average of only 150 gm of under-fleece is taken from each pelt. The most valuable white wool from the underbelly and throat constitutes of 12-14% of the total wool from a single hide. Each shawl requires a minimum of 300-600 gms of shahtoosh.

It takes the life of three chiru to make one 2m x 1m lady's shawl, and the life of five to six chiru to produce a man's shawl.





FASHIONED FOR EXTINCTION

Historically shahtoosh has always been a rare commodity.

Occasionally, the nomads who killed the animals for meat would collect its fur. This would be bartered or sold and eventually reach the State of Jammu & Kashmir, which was a known weaving center for luxury shawls such as Pashmina and Jamawar. From Kashmir, traders would take shahtoosh shawls to wealthy clients throughout India. The land trade routes via west Asia to Europe were closed for many centuries. It was only in the eighteenth century, with the advent of European colonization, that the shawls reached Europe.

Up to the 1950's and 1960's the trade was restricted. Abdul Wahid Radhu, in the 1950's book *Islam In Tibet*, wrote "Our trade involved...pashmina and shatush .. the fine material and shawls which are usually called "Kashmiri" are made from material not native to Kashmir properly speaking but to Ladakh ... but mainly in western Tibet." He further wrote "Shahtush ... comes from wild goats [sic], types of gazelles of high plateaus that live only in Tibet ... Moreover shahtush has only ever existed in relatively small quantities on the market."

In the late 1980's European fashion houses and their wealthy clientele spurred the demand for shahtoosh. This, in turn, had a domino effect in India, where people began to believe that wearing a shahtoosh shawl would put one in the same rung as royalty and old, landed or 'khandani' families. It became a status symbol.

Most of the demand for shahtoosh in India comes from the *nouveau riche*. It has become a 'must have' dowry item.

Unfortunately, it remains so !



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THE KILLING FIELDS

In the past, nomads of the Tibetan plateau trapped and killed antelope for meat. However, it was very difficult to kill the fast-footed animals in their vast home-range (650,000 sq km) with its harsh terrain and climate. The huge chiru herds remained secure.

A sudden upsurge in the demand for shahtoosh in the 1980's coincided with the opening up of the Tibetan plateau for mining. Remote areas saw an influx of poor miners, who were eager to explore new ways of earning an income.

A further tragedy occurred when the poachers discovered the breeding grounds of the chiru. At that time, Dr. George Schaller, an eminent wildlife biologist, noticed mass killings of entire herds, which locals said had never happened before.

Conservationists were able to correlate the upsurge in chiru poaching with the escalating demand for shahtoosh. DNA tests on shahtoosh shawls, new and historic, proved conclusively that every single shawl had been woven from chiru wool, and that the wool had come from dead animals. Arrested poachers and traders confirmed this fact.

The killing continues. Hundreds of chiru are machine gunned from moving vehicles. Most of the slaughter takes place in winter when the chiru develop a thicker layer of under-fleece, or in early spring when the females are calving *en masse*. The mothers' skinned bodies are left to rot, and the new-born are left to freeze and starve to death.

In the early 1900's, Captain C. G. Rawling noticed herds of upto 20,000 in one place. Today few herds of even 2,000 can be found.

THE FIGHT TO SAVE THE CHIRU

Many people have given their lives to save the chiru. In 1992, Sonam Dhargye formed a volunteer group, the "Wild Yak Brigade", in Kekexili. They vowed to protect the chiru and natural resources of the Kekexili region. In a year, the Brigade made 12 patrols of Kekexili and captured poachers on eight occasions.

On 18 January 1994, the group came upon 18 poachers with about 2,000 chiru skins. Sonam Dhargye was killed during the encounter. He was only 40 years old. His brother-in-law Dakpa Dorjee took over the leadership, and in four years, the group arrested 250 suspected poachers and confiscated 3,717 skins and pelts of various animals. On 8 November 1998, Dorjee was found dead from a gun shot at his home. He was 47.

Unfortunately, after Sonam and Dakpa's death, the Wild Yak Brigade was disbanded. An award winning movie "Kekexili: The Mountain Patrol" has recently been made on their courageous story.

TIGER BLOOD ON SHAHTOOSH SHAWLS

The illegal trade in tiger bones reached India in the mid-1980's, after tiger populations in China had been decimated by the demand from traditional oriental medicine manufacturers based in China. India's wild tigers were then targeted as their new source of supply.

Raw shahtoosh wool is smuggled out of Tibet into India and Nepal. The two illegal wildlife trades connect at the borders. Shahtoosh smugglers often exchange and barter raw wool with traffickers from India smuggling tiger bone, penises and other body parts, as well as bear gall bladders, leopard and otter skins. The Indian traffickers sell the wool in Srinagar, in Kashmir, and the tiger bones and other body parts make their way to China.



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The demand from China and the Tibet Autonomous Region is wiping out the tiger, leopard and otter populations in India. But our demand for shahtoosh is wiping out the chiru from China too.

By buying shahtoosh, you are contributing to the disappearance of two of the world's most endangered species.

STOP THE SHAHTOOSH TRADE !

DON'T BUY SHAHTOOSH !

ALTERNATIVES TO SHAHTOOSH

Shawl weaving was first mentioned, though obscurely, in the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Atharvaveda. It is said that cashmere from Kashmir was renowned even in the times of Emperor Ashok (3rd Century BC). However, Sultan Zain-ul-Abdin (1420-1470) is credited as the initiator of fine shawl weaving in Kashmir; the pashmina shawl that we know today is a legacy of that period. The earliest documented evidence of shawl weaving is found in the literature of the Moghul Emperor Akbar (1556-1605). Akbar himself was a connoisseur of Kashmiri shawls and provided immense patronage to the craft, encouraging weavers to experiment with various styles and motifs. Kashmir has since become a center for some of the worlds' finest shawls and embroidery. It was not shahtoosh but pashmina and jamawar shawls that brought Kashmir repute the world over.

PASHMINA: India's high-quality wool shawls are made from pashmina or cashmere (which is graded, premium-quality pashmina). The wool comes from a domesticated goat, *Capra hircus*, which is found in the arid Himalayan plateau at an altitude of 12,000-14,000 feet. Unlike the chiru, which is a wild and endangered species, it is a domesticated animal whose wool can be shorn or combed out annually. The quality of pashmina varies widely. The wool collected from pure strains of high altitude herds, particularly from Mongolia and China, are the finest. A high-quality pashmina shawl can pass through a ring as smoothly as a shahtoosh.



Pure pashmina shawls are woven with pashmina wool. Silk pashmina shawls are woven in silk and the weft is woven in pashmina. The most common combination is 70% pashmina and 30% silk. These mixed shawls are largely woven in Nepal.



JAMAWAR: Jamawar is essentially a trade name for woven or embroidered Kashmir shawls that use intricate paisley motifs and patterns. The jamavar technique was first documented in Kashmir in the 15th Century during the rule of Zain-ul-Abdin. Patterns in these early jamavars were created using weft threads of various colours that did not run the full width of the fabric. Rather, they were woven back and forth in small areas to create intricate, tiny color blocks. Jamavars became fashionable among the European aristocracy in the 18th Century. Because of the costly weaving technique, the patterns often covered just the edges and ends of the shawls. The intricate motifs began to cover larger portions of the shawls after the invention of the Jacquard loom in the 19th Century.

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CONTACTS

We urge people who have information on anyone involved in this illegal trade of shahtoosh, to contact the following organizations. It is only with your active support that this cruel and destructive trade can be stopped. 169 countries are signatories to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). The aim of CITES is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. The CITES website gives the contact details of the relevant enforcement authorities:

http://www.cites.org/common/directy/e_directy.html

Other organisations that work to stop the illegal trade in shahtoosh are:

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