

## Unpacking Ruling Classes of India: Caste, Culture-making, and Kashmir


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***Abstract:** The recent amendment in article 370 of the Indian constitution has led to a renewed focus on the socio-cultural and economic relationship between Kashmir and India. A wholesome understanding of these relationships requires a fundamental knowledge of the very entities being referred to here: India and Kashmir. What is India made up of and how do different parts of its makeup relate to the occupation of Kashmir and its people? The current paper addresses the latter two aspects by following the discourse on culture-making institutions in India. It does so by highlighting the functioning of textile production in India, its historical development post-independence, and its role in the political projects of occupation and control. Further, the paper problematises concepts such as consciousness, community, and appropriation in the context of culture-making and their import in a society based on the principles of caste.*

*The paper uses quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate aspects of representation and historical participation in culture-making in general and textile production in particular, and how those correspond with values, cultures, and social structure of regions forcefully subsumed into the political entity called India.*

**Keywords:** Fabindia, Raw Mango, Cultural Production, Caste and consciousness, Textiles and caste, Kashmir, Indian State Apparatuses, Fashion industry and caste

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Administered, controlled, occupied—these are some of the adjectives that have been used to describe the nature of the relationship between the Indian state and Kashmir and its people. By now, there is sufficient literature from within Kashmir that has, systematically and historically, built the case for using these conceptual categories to best describe this relationship<sup>1</sup>. The Indian occupation of Kashmir has been repeatedly understood as control exerted through the instrument of coercion by military and paramilitary forces (Parrey, 2013; Junaid, 2018) as well as through legal-political manoeuvring (Wani, 2019). Much of the analysis of this relationship presented so far is framed in terms of the critique of the state and its policies with respect to Kashmir and its people. A crucial question that emerges each time one mentions the Indian state is: what or who is the Indian state? Most common answers to it may get lost in the circular maze of the Indian parliament. How do we, then, develop a more concrete understanding of the Indian state so that its constituents and their composition can be made clearer? Poulantzas proposes that the state should be considered neither as a specific institution nor as an instrument, but as a relation – a materialised concentration of the class relations of a given society (cited in Therborn, 2008, p. 34). Following that framework, it is imperative to draw upon the structure of social relations and social groups that constitute the societies in India and Kashmir and chart out how the process of the occupation of Kashmir is sustained. This essay is an attempt to review the process through which an Indian imagination of an occupied territory in Kashmir is materialised, curated, and commodified through the control of crafts and arts.

In order to make the above propositions clearer it shall help to focus on two aspects of the state: state power and state apparatus. Citing from the Marxist theory of state Althusser (2008, p. 15) emphasizes that a distinction be made between the two; state power is expressed in the content of state policies and is exercised through the state apparatuses (Therborn, 2008, p. 35). Simultaneously, Althusser (2008, p. 17) makes a further distinction between repressive state apparatus (RSA) and ideological state apparatus (ISA). While RSAs include the government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons etc., some examples of ISAs are educational apparatus, political apparatus, cultural apparatus (literature, arts, sports), communications apparatus (press, radio, television) etc. In India, their functioning can be witnessed in the way the Indian education system, cultural institutions, legal and political systems have worked together to develop perceptions among Indians about Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) being a part of India while using institutional power to keep the land, resources and people under forced occupation. In this essay, I intend to explore the dual role of Indian textile design houses as part of the cultural state apparatus in reproducing relations of occupation and exploitation in the occupied territory of Jammu & Kashmir and within India, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> See Parrey, 2010; Junaid, 2018; Zia, 2019.

To move away from abstraction and locate the above-mentioned theoretical postulates in empirical reality I shall take the example of a design house called Raw Mango and its campaign titled 'Zooni'. In early October 2019, Raw Mango, a luxury brand of hand-woven garments for women made headlines for rather dubious reasons. The Instagram page of the brand appeared with its Kashmir collection on October 2, 2019. There was a series of highly exoticized and intense orientalist images of women wearing exquisite hand-woven garments in deep shades of reds, lined with golden brocade. The models appeared to be posing on a boat in a waterbody in Kashmir and in a wedding-room mediated by a see-through tulle curtain. The collection was titled 'Zooni', after the memory of the last indigenous queen of Kashmir—Habba Khatoon. Within a few hours of the collection launch there was enough uproar on social media that forced the PR team of the brand to pull down the public posts. Those voicing their protests had a number of issues with the campaign including that of cultural appropriation of an occupied territory and the lack of agency of Kashmiri subjects therein<sup>2</sup>. There was enough back and forth between the supporters of the brand and those opposing it. Some pointed to the benevolent intent and nature of the campaign and its managers. The Indian director of the campaign, Avani Rai, has been hailed as a 'Kashmir-sympathiser' who had urged people in the past during the government's harsh treatment of Kashmiris to 'consider' their pain instead of just appreciating the beauty of the Kashmiri landscape. However, after this campaign came to light, she also drew the ire of netizens, mainly Kashmiris, who criticized this entire project. The idea behind this paper is not to look at Raw Mango or the director of the campaign in isolation from the society they come from; instead, the events and individuals shall help explore the idea of the state, social structure and ideology in a region mired in claims and counter-claims by groups arranged hierarchically in a social and political sense.

In the current section Raw Mango's existence in the cultural trajectory of India is traced back to the way institutionalisation began in the newly independent Indian union. The first decade of independent India witnessed the formation of institutions that started systematising control over artisans across states that came under the Republic of India. Most of these had Brahmin-Savarna women at the helm. For example, the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) was established in 1952 under the chairpersonship of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (Singh, 2010); she was also behind the formation of Central Cottage Industries Emporium and Crafts Council of India. In 1956, another Savarna activist Pupal Jayakar founded the National Crafts Museum and later in 1984 she went on to start the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). As part of the newly devised democratic set-up these organizations were initial steps on the part of the ruling caste members to systematise and control the labour of the artisans in different Indian states. Before this, artisans had mostly existed in client-patron relationships with local power holders such as kings and *jagirdars*. Alongside these government or public institutions, private organisations such as Fabindia came into being through similar channels of social relations. The case of Fabindia is

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.thepolisproject.com/handover-your-agency-zooni-by-tabish-rafiq-mir/#.YMcyIWaA4-Q>

particularly important and can be considered as a precursor to understanding newer organisations like Raw Mango.

Fabindia was established in 1960 by an American entrepreneur John Bissell. It functioned as an export house in the first one and a half decades of its formation. John Bissell came from Connecticut, USA to work at the All India Handicrafts Board as a Ford Foundation sponsored advisor. The Ford Foundation was helping Indian Handicrafts Board in standardising craft practices in India by sourcing out ‘experts’ and designers to the third world so as to explore merchandise for export mostly to the developed countries. John Bissell entered the Indian cultural scene through political stalwarts like Lakshmi Chand Jain. He soon realised the social and physical separation between the ‘craft’ production units and distribution networks in the changing politico-economic order and decided to explore the business opportunity therein. He developed his network among the elites in New Delhi and continued an almost anthropological exploration of the world of artisans and weavers throughout the country starting in the late 1950s. Radhika Singh (2010) provides a glimpse of it in her book on the rise of Fabindia:

*At that time there was a group of committed women working in cottage Industries who were also part of the social elite in Delhi. Among them were Prem Bery, Teji Vir Singh and Bim (Bimla Nanda, John would get married to her a few years later)... Bim was an integral part of the Punjabi community that had made Delhi its home after partition. It was a small world in those days for the educated middle class in India. Everyone knew each other by kinship or by association. By default, John became the centre of a very interesting symbiosis comprising the American diplomatic and international aid community, the government administration and their beneficiaries (the craftsmen and artisans), and the network of Punjabi clans that formed the social fabric of the city of Delhi (p. 16).*

It was not by coincidence—as Radhika Singh (2008) too states—that John was at the centre of this web of social relations. He had entered Indian society through particular social networks that wielded control over resources and labour of the artisans. In Delhi it was primarily Punjabi Khatri, Brahmins and Kayasthas among other Savarna<sup>3</sup> castes who were at the helm of various private and public institutions. John also came from an upper-middle class family in the USA that was steeped in its own class relations and that is how he came to be associated with the Ford Foundation.

Individuals such as John Bissell, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Pupul Jayakar were part of the cultural state apparatus that came to crystallise determinate social relations by assuming a material existence, efficacy and inertia over a period in time and which to a certain extent became

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/web/groups/6770.html>

independent of state policies (Therborn, 2008, p. 35). Most of the capital invested by John in his business venture came from his own family and friends. Fabindia or John Bissell did not even completely own the means of production. The production units were composed of family-owned looms of artisanal castes or castes that were involved with handloom work as one of the multiple sources of earning a livelihood and thus just about sustaining on different kinds of patronage and local markets. Fabindia took control of the distribution networks by introducing themselves as ‘consultants’ who would provide suggestions to the artisans on colour and design schemes suitable for the urban and western palette. Most of the time these designs and colour schemes were already a part of the family-based oral repository of the artisans. The role of the consultants was to draw out from the producers the items specific to the needs of their consumers, an aspect that requires further exploration. Sometimes they also intervened by providing capital for the raw material which was mostly the main issue artisans faced due to their low purchasing power. In other cases, Fabindia would work with the regional elites who would function as the link between itself and the artisans.

### **The implications of preserving ‘community’ in a caste society**

The *About* section on the Raw Mango website reads that ‘the brand is rooted in craft and community and it continues to create conversations in textiles, culture and politics’. The assertion needs to be analysed in the light of the socio-political arrangement that facilitates the production process through which the ‘craft’ is produced in its materialised form. If Raw Mango is rooted in politics and if textile making is a political process, then the obvious questions should be: who is cultivating the fibre for these fabrics, who is weaving them together, who is stitching them, who is dyeing them, whose stores are they being sold at, who is consuming them, what do they represent, and who is laying claims to them as their own or worse still as ‘Indian’ textiles? These enquiries need to be placed in a historical context and it may help to turn to Fabindia again, for it was one of the first ‘private’ organisations that delved into similar craft/art-oriented practices as Raw Mango.

Throughout the period of its continuing existence, Fabindia, through its public statements, has emphasized its community-centric approach and its focus on weavers and artisans who constitute these communities and churn out commodities for the company year after year. However, even though organisations such as Fabindia, Raw Mango and many others have grown by leaps and bounds the state of artisans throughout the country has deteriorated (All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association [AIACWA] 2017). As an organization Fabindia was so well-entrenched in the market and in the political and social circles by the Emergency years of 1975 and 1976 that it did great business even after restrictions such as the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) were imposed by the Indian government on the export trade. In 1975, Fabindia accounted for sales worth \$716,000 with a profit of \$81,000. Between January and June 1976, sales reached as high as \$525,000 with pending orders worth \$600,000 (Singh, 2010, p. 89). In

1976, it was still a non-resident/American company and as per the new Indian law no commercial organisation was allowed to function which had more than 40% shares with non-Indians. As a recourse, later in 1976, John Bissell started an Indian company named Fabindia Overseas Pvt Ltd in the wake of the reforms by the Indira Gandhi government. He gathered support from members of the existing ruling classes/castes of whom he too was now a part, also through affinal ties. The shares were never distributed among the weavers and artisans who were the primary workforce for Fabindia but among the Savarna elites with whom John Bissell found closer social and class relations. All of it, though, was planned and organised in the name of the artisans, who, he was worried, would be left unemployed if Fabindia shut down its business in India (Singh, 2010). The rhetoric of ‘good intent’ is essential for the ruling apparatus and its everyday mechanics, so as to give it a form that can conceal its essential character. As part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR), Fabindia explored the option of share-holders cooperatives but that did not fit well with its business model.

It needs to be noted that ‘community’ and its protection became the key phrases in the very beginning of the formation of the Republic of India. John Bissell, the All India Handicrafts Board and other representatives of the ruling classes have constantly referred to the need to protect the ‘community of artisans’ and have actually worked towards ‘preserving’ the barely sustaining communities in a subsistence state for more than seven decades now<sup>4</sup>. While on the one hand, the members of the cultural state apparatus have worked towards keeping caste intact by sustaining the conditions of its perpetuation, on the other these social actors have strengthened the communities they represent by multiplying the capital through appropriation of the labour of working classes and through continuously widening the distance between the producer class/castes on the one hand and the distributor and consumer class on the other, for the circulation of capital always takes place within closed community or caste networks in India.

The USP of most of the textiles sold by designer brands in India is that they are hand-made; however, whose hands are making them remains willfully suspended in the imagination of the consumers and onlookers. As the CSR activities of these brands showcase time and again, these artisans are poor looking people who need to be supported; but the question remains who are they? What social groups do they come from and what social groups are represented by the designers on the other hand? The answers have been sought through quantitative analyses of the profiles of the designers as well as the artisans. A detailed compilation of the profiles of the design houses was carried out by drawing upon an exhaustive list of some of the most sought-after designers in India (See tables 1.1 and 1.2). The list comprises data on 271 design houses which was collected from some of the aggregator websites. The data was collected on indicators including the state (city) in which the design house has been registered, the names of the proprietor(s), their caste locations, and whether they have brought out or are working on a project in Kashmir. Most of the narratives

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<sup>4</sup> See AIACWA 2017 report.



as informed by the content analysis of the interviews of some of the top designers suggest that there is a pattern, almost like the omnipresent paisley motif, emerging from these stories; they all seem to draw inspiration from their grandmothers and mothers who wore the kind of fabrics they are trying to experiment with in their art.

The quantitative data suggests that nearly 82.3 percent of the design houses are owned and run by Brahmin-Savarna castes across religions. The caste identities of around 13.3% of design house owners could not be confirmed, either because of missing information about the proprietorship or the lack of information about the social profiles of the design house owners. Around 3.7% of such design houses were owned or run by non-Savarna designers/ businesspersons.

So, even though these designers got their artistic inspiration from their grandmothers and grand-aunts, who are the people that were actually involved in the production of the yarn, the colouring, and the weaving of these fabrics back then? The answers can be sought in the figures produced by the Handicrafts census conducted during the 11<sup>th</sup> plan (2007-12). It reported that of the existing 68.86 lakh artisans involved in the handicraft sector 52.5% belong to backward classes, 20.8% are scheduled castes and 7.49% belong to scheduled tribe groups (AIACWA, 2017). It is also well established that in the Indian subcontinent these occupations tend to be hereditary in nature. Thus, what emerges from this data is a picture illustrating a continuing extraction of services of the Bahujan and Adivasi social groups by the Brahmin-Savarna castes over multiple generations, cutting across gender boundaries.

<b>Design house ownership</b>	
Community	Number
Brahmin-Savarna (82.3%)	223
Caste location unknown (13.3%)	38
OBC (3.3%)	9
SC (0.4%)	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>

Table 1.1

<b>Distribution of design houses based on location</b>	
Delhi (NCR) (66.4%)	180
Mumbai (11.4%)	31
Hyderabad (4.1%)	11
Kolkata (4.1%)	11
Ahmedabad (2.9%)	8
Jaipur (2.2%)	6
Bengaluru (1.1%)	3
Other (7.8%)	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>

Table 1.2

It needs to be mentioned here that the social structure in Kashmir follows a caste-like pattern, which may have specific differences from other South Asian regions but the rules of endogamy, restricted access to resources and such apply to social groups defined as per their caste. Interestingly, the data suggested that a significantly large proportion (66.4%) of the design houses/designers are based in and around New Delhi. The data doesn't just confirm the symbolic significance of a city but also informs about the region that functions as the power centre in a supposed federal democracy.

Another interesting aspect that emerges from the quantitative analysis of the activities of the fashion/ Indian textile industry is the continued focus on Kashmir as a referential resource as well as a material resource for luxury and non-luxury textile goods. The data suggest that of the existing pool of Indian designers included in the analysis nearly 30% have kept Kashmir as the theme or focus of one or more of their projects. This focus on Kashmir as a source of cultural-material value has only increased over the past two years since the abrogation of article 370. It underscores the continued efforts, more so after the intensification of Kashmiri assertion for self-determination, by the ruling caste/class members towards claiming the occupied territory along with its resources through endeavours that are referred to as primarily artistic in nature.



In the wake of a gruesome militant attack on a military convoy in February 2019 in Pulwama, Kashmir there were a series of measures by governmental as well as non-governmental bodies to re-assert their control over Kashmir. The editor of the online fashion magazine—The Voice of Fashion—Shefalee Vasudev wrote an urgent appeal to rescue the artisans of Kashmir from this war so that their talents could be harnessed:

*“...it is right inside the fearsome innards of a pulverising terrorist attack on a region and a country that its soft power, its artisanal soldiers, the non-warring, yet equally injured and harmed people also risk their moral and might” (Vasudev, 2019a).*

The emphasis on using crafts of Kashmir as soft power by Vasudev isn't a novel idea. The idea of harnessing soft power through the management, co-optation and control of the sphere of cultural production has been at the heart of nation-making in India and the world over. However, in the case of Kashmir it becomes all the more interesting given the way different Savarna-managed state apparatuses come together to participate in the process of strengthening the occupation. The fashion industry responded to the call by Shefalee Vasudev by trending a Twitter hashtag 'TheKashmirSeries' floated by Vasudev herself. Many of the top designers pledged to focus their energies on Kashmir and its crafts and some even launched their Kashmir projects in the months to come. It needs to be noted that the list also included a very small number of Kashmiri designers, but this only further highlights the modus operandi of the ruling classes to pre-empt the kind of objections that may arise given that there is ample discussion around cultural appropriation and representation of regions and people at the social and political margins.

Raw Mango's Zooni and many other designers' collections are extensions of this larger project of employing soft power to strengthen the cultural aspect of occupation. They have been joined by corporate houses and other culture activists such as Laila Tyabji<sup>5</sup>. On one hand, the repressive state apparatuses have secured, through the deployment of legal apparatus and physical coercion, the political conditions for the action of ideological state apparatuses in Kashmir. But it is through (ideological) state apparatuses that the reproduction of relations of production takes place, with the repressive state apparatus as the 'shield' (Althusser, 2008, p. 24), both of which are together popularly referred to as the Indian State. It needs to be noted that John Bissell, who was also exploring Kashmir to tap into the handicraft industry, was quite apprehensive of the plebiscite in

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<sup>5</sup> See, <https://thevoiceoffashion.com/watch/latest/rohit-balusha-silai-craft-and-commerce-92-00>

Kashmir. He was worried that if Kashmir separated from India it could lead to the rise of communal forces (Singh, 2010, p. 65), which would not be good for doing business.

In a podcast interview conducted earlier this year, Shefalee Vasudev discussed Raw Mango's Zooni campaign with its owner Sanjay Garg wherein he clarified that he doesn't find any contradiction between his Kashmir campaign and love for his country, India. He says that sometimes people call him a nationalist and that is fine (Vasudev, 2021). Garg's honesty in this instance is important in the sense that it does not conceal or try to hide his relationship between how he looks at his involvement in the entire process of culture-making and using it to his advantage. He says he could as well have been an activist if not a designer, someone trying to raise social issues through his art, and someone whose heart is in the right place and has the best 'intentions' as far as his involvement with his work is concerned.

### **The role of 'Intention' in Cultural Production**

“Good intention” is a hall pass through history, a sleeping pill that ensures the Dream.

~ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

An aspect that has returned to occupy the discursive space in culture-making post the Raw Mango campaign is the issue of 'intent'. In this specific case, the intent of the members of the coloniser state has been referred to as a significant aspect without which the context of the campaign may be lost on the consumers/onlookers, and can turn into—as they claim—a misrepresentation/misinterpretation. As per the defenders of the clothing brand, in the wake of the campaign conflict, the good and otherwise intentions of the Indian ruling class need to be placed in perspective in order to understand what they are aiming at viz. to showcase the beauty, arts and textiles of Kashmir. The assertion relates to a close degree with the idea of consciousness of the people who are involved with distribution and consumption of the product and not necessarily its production.

Thus, one way of approaching the issue of cultural representation by individuals and organisations such as Raw Mango is to consider the idea of the consciousness which claims to look at Kashmir, its people and its culture in a 'different' light. That is to say, with a sensitivity towards the culture and politics of the milieu in which the products have emerged from. But the primary question remains: can any production process take place without considering the social relations out of which the material or intangible cultural products have emerged? For example, what kind of social/class relations have led to the emergence of a prominent brand like Raw Mango that represents and caters to the “emancipated” Savarna woman by draping them in the finest hand-woven Indian textiles? Further, how do these brands relate to various other state apparatuses including the repressive ones? A closer observation shall inform that there is almost a nil degree of separation between the functionaries of ideological and repressive state apparatuses. The castes that manage and benefit from the control of means of production also control the occupied

territories by their control of state power. In fact, there is a further diversification of the roles of the members of the ruling classes. The liberal and conservative subject-positions are but a further division of duties at the horizontal level. One can observe within the same family individuals holding ideologically opposite views yet sharing and plugging into the resources which go beyond material wealth and include caste networks or otherwise ironically defined as networks of ‘merit’<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the caste mode of production (Kuffir, 2013b) proves to be different from capitalist mode of production for the nature of capital itself can have various transformations and unlike capitalists the control of means of production lie in the hands of Brahmin and allied castes. In that sense it is analytically useless to deploy a phenomenological approach to understand questions which are rooted in the social structure and existence of a people. People can and do hold all sorts of conflicting representations without changing the conditions of their social existence (O’Laughlin, 1975, p. 348).

There is a need to look beyond Raw Mango and the campaign that drew flak from various sections online. Every year some or the other designer announces his/her collection which is either inspired by Kashmir or is paying tribute to Kashmir<sup>7</sup>. In fact, Raw Mango is not the first brand to focus on Kashmir for “inspiration” or representation or, in other words, to utilise Kashmir as a resource. In 2016, the designer brothers Shantanu and Nikhil recreated pellet-gun-victim-looks in launching their collection titled ‘Kashmiriyat’. Pellet guns were used extensively and indiscriminately to clamp down on the Kashmiri protestors after the murder of the Kashmiri freedom fighter Burhan Wani by the Indian paramilitary forces. The commodification process in such overtly commercial ventures is relatively easier to be defined and can be easily located in the commoditized market. But what is even more significant is to relate it to the structural factors that facilitate the process. Should the designers under discussion be analysed in their individual positions as conscientious subjects or vulgar commercialists with a unique subject position on Kashmir and its people? A substantialist position limits it to individuals and the interaction between them; however, a study of structural relations (Bourdieu, 1983) helps form a larger picture that can locate the social agents in the web of social relations. The production of beautiful textiles from such design houses are inextricably linked to the marginalization of the lower orders and occupation of territories such as Kashmir and other struggling nations such as the north-eastern states. In the words of Marx (1859), ‘it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness’. Extending Marx’s idea to the realm of culture O’Laughlin (1975)

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<sup>6</sup> For example, See the case of the Indian anthropologist Saiba Varma’s work in Kashmir and the controversy it led to when it was discovered by some anonymous Kashmiri scholars that she is the daughter of a retired RAW (Research and Analysis Wing, the foreign intelligence agency under Government of India) official who was one of the key figures in carrying out various operations in Kashmir. It is a telling example of the way the upper caste Indians cutting across gender and religion can assume any subject position on the political spectrum. For more on this see Tahir, 2021 and @Settler\_Scholarship, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> See Tarun Tahiliani, Kashmir collection at India Couture Week, 2017. Ashima and Leena, The Reversible Shawl, Autumn Winter Collection, 2018. Rohit Bal, Guldastah, trans-seasonal collection, 2019.

contends that cultural representations exist only when they are socially organised; consciousness is always subsumed in existence and is never autonomous from it (p. 348).

Within limits imposed by the general nature of the state, it is especially probable that the class character of its diverse (state) apparatuses will vary with the link between the tasks of the apparatuses and the concerns of classes rooted in the mode of production (Therborn, 1976, p. 41). Thus, it is imperative to bring to fore the kind of concerns Raw Mango and the classes/castes it represents and caters to, as well as those of the classes/castes it extracts from are defined/emphasized upon in terms of their form and content. It is not by sheer coincidence that such design houses, which can also be ranked further in terms of their revenue figures and symbolic as well as cultural capital, are predominantly owned, managed and run by Savarna caste members<sup>8</sup>.

The concerns of the members of the fashion industry may seem to be avowedly inclined towards the aesthetic and creative aspects of the trade, however, they continue to reproduce their social and material contexts from which they have emerged. The way these processes materialise are a product of caste relations, cultural-material appropriation and in the case of ‘Zooni’, also the occupation of a people and exploitation of their material, cultural and intellectual resources. Like other designers, Raw Mango works with a number of artisans in different textile towns who have entered into almost contractual relationships with the brand. In most of the cases these artisans produce textiles specifically for the brand. In return the brand claims monopoly over the products of labour of these artisans, almost owning their ‘craft’. Its rootedness in community, as discussed above, also needs to be understood in the way an Indian establishment repackages traditional power equations and deploys them to reproduce the caste system that is at the very base of its existence. Interestingly, the idea of community and its fetishization is a significant characteristic of the way “handicrafts” are marketed and sold to the connoisseurs. The exchange-value of the products is impacted tremendously by their association to ‘traditional’ processes which are rooted in traditional structures. Akin to reification, it works towards developing a romanticised idea of a struggling lot that is in a mutually beneficial relationship with organisations such as Raw Mango. In the Indian subcontinent the existence of the artisans has mostly been defined by patron-client association which follows an almost predictable caste-based schema even in the most modernist settings. Kuffir (2013b) has emphasised the inter-dependence and plurality of this exploitative network invoking Ambedkar’s words that caste never exists in the singular, they always exist in the plural. The designers understand that well. In an interview, Raw Mango’s Sanjay Garg says that his collaboration cannot simply stop at the weaver, but that he ‘worries (sic) about the *kumhaar* (potter), the *lohar* (ironsmith), the glass maker or bronze maker or a *chooran wallah* (roadside condiment seller)’ (10 Years of Raw Mango, n.d.). The Indian ruling caste members are well-aware of their place in the hierarchy as well as that of others and their possible use in the kind of

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<sup>8</sup> See table 1.1

occupational activity they are a part of. However, Garg's "worry" about these occupational groups goes back, almost in a circular fashion, to the idea of intention with which we opened this section.

### **The Dissonance between Cultural Capital and Cultural Production**

The ruling classes are also defined, among other aspects, by their wide access to various forms of resources. This access is facilitated, as has been discussed above, through division of various domains into state apparatuses. Therborn (1976) describes it by focusing on the state apparatuses and their inextricable relationship with the society: 'the state apparatus feeds back into society contribution to the regeneration of the class relations that formed it. It does this by reproducing the state-society relationship inscribed within it, and by structuring the way in which the things done by the state are actually performed' (p. 45). How do cultural organisations, NGOs, design houses reproduce the state-society relationship and how do they structure the ways of the state? One of the most pertinent factors is the role of the forms of capital that are at play in the kinds of performances and processes such organisations dabble in. Such processes are closely linked to the reproduction of the material existence of the socio-political structure which is based on asymmetrical relations between the occupier and the occupied. The occupier class creates and fuels various avenues which function towards constructing an othered representation, commodification and dependence, and in turn, strengthen and extend the occupation through seemingly benevolent but deeply insidious practices. These performances and processes have dual roles for the ruling castes/classes—the strengthening of occupation in the occupied territory, as well as the reaffirmation and regeneration of the dominant caste and class relations in their own society. Thus, it should not seem contradictory when individuals in their capacities as artists, academicians and activists, work towards representing or 'discussing' the occupied territory and its people, and at the same time, score well with the occupier state and its apparatuses too. Raghu Rai, the celebrated photojournalist, is but a case in point. He has been duly awarded by the "state" agencies, among others, for his work which involves his famed photographs of Kashmir and Kashmiri subjects. Raghu Rai's aesthetic authority as a photojournalist on the occupied region has been unofficially passed on to his daughter Avani Rai, who also happens to be director of the Raw Mango campaign. All forms of capital in a caste society are passed on within the lineage or in the relatable caste. Resources, territories and cultural items are marked by the ruling class members for their reproduction as the controllers of the means of production. In that respect Kashmir becomes a source of artistic employment for the entire Rai clan and many such Savarna families in India. It may not come across as ironical that the same photographs can be consumed, auctioned and reproduced as coffee table books and neatly framed solos for the class/caste of people who constitute the groups that have the most to gain from the occupation of the region, either as direct influencers of state policies or as benign critics of the occupation, or simply as "art critics". Apart from producing a warped representation of the region and its people, they reinforce power in its symbolic form, as "art". Furthermore, the distinction between patri-lineage and matri-lineage with respect to inheritance of resources falls short of usual anthropological explanations of strict

divisions between the two, as can be learnt from the Rai clan's handing over of representational authority over Kashmir. In other words, it informs that gender is not an absolute category on its own and its operationalization depends upon the nature of material wealth that is at stake within a family, clan or caste group. But more importantly, it cannot be reduced singlehandedly to these individuals alone. The frequent surfacing of such conflicts and the investment of Brahmin-Savarnas in them is a reminder of the kind of caste-based social relations that actually constitute the occupation. In fact, most of the soldiers that fight the war against the members of the occupied states in real time may not actually stand in contradiction with the majority of the occupied population, in terms of class and caste lines. The limit to their power is defined by physical force and violence; however, it is the ruling castes/classes of the occupier regime that determine where, how, and how much the epistemic, cultural and other forms of violence will be utilized in order for the occupation to change forms and *appear* benign, almost helpful, to the cause of the occupied<sup>9</sup>. However, it needs to be reiterated that it is from the ideological state apparatuses of the occupier nation that the repressive state machinery derives the primary rationale for its rule.

A cultural product that has come into being through the deployment of occupied region as a referential resource and as the source for bestowing "authentic" cultural value to the product, either by utilizing the occupied geography or through usages of material culture, helps in looking at another form that occupation takes. The oft repeated statement that these products will help the economy, culture, politics, social relations and even people of the occupied region need to be located in the way that power is concealed in a benevolent form. This power is exercised on the occupied masses as well as in the marketplace of conflict, which, by default, is controlled by the ruling classes cutting across regional, religious and national boundaries. Thus, academic research projects, documentary cinema, art projects, developmental projects that emerge out of activities of the ruling classes/castes constituting the ideological state apparatuses of the occupier state, prove to be signifiers of a relationship marked as much by the imprint of colonialism as of class, irrespective of the professed intentions. It is not by coincidence that most of such cultural products emerge under the patronage of the members of the ruling castes/classes in India and its occupied territories. In other instances, it is global capital that is at work. The trajectory of these products in their respective markets is telling of the kind of socio-cultural ecology they are a part of. A cultural product will gain currency based on the kind of association it comes to have with the members of the ruling castes/classes. Bridget O'Loughlin (1975) puts it succinctly when she contends that 'it is not the intentionality of production that defines human activity, but its rather necessarily social character' (p. 346).

On my first visit to Kashmir in 2010 a young girl summed up as well as bared the underlying meaning and implications of the very existence of Indians in Kashmir when she said: 'near and around Srinagar you can visit Mughal gardens, take a Shikara ride in the Dal Lake, see the Saffron

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<sup>9</sup> Take for instance, the above discussed case of the work of the Indian anthropologist Saiba Varma in Kashmir and emphasis on its 'benevolent' nature on the discourse around it.



fields in Pampore and on Friday you can go and witness stone pelting in Downtown (Srinagar)'. Apart from a reminder of the degree of closeness between tourism and the violence of occupation it conveyed how normalcy is extracted out of this violent coexistence. Her words suggested how a war can be packaged and sold as a hardbound coffee-table photo book, as installation art composed of the stones collected from the site of confrontation between paramilitary soldiers and protestors, or as a sequined red *pheran* as demonstrated in Raw Mango's 'Zooni' project. In fact, the war and conflict bestow the products with increased market value as they not only signify the forbidden and exotic geography, but also constitute the often-veiled assertion of the power of the ruling classes enshrined in the commodities or more precisely in their distribution and consumption. Thus, war and beauty become at par with each other as consumables.

The portrayal of the Kashmiri subject and her wares, textiles and artefacts in disjointed, almost museum-ised and curated contexts brings a semblance of control and a sense of achievement to the viewers and users. The textiles and artefacts deployed this way are emblematic of the opposite of what the majority of Kashmiris are trying to achieve, that is, to constantly reiterate their political dissociation from the Indian union and right for self-determination. The usage of artefacts and textiles in such specific contexts facilitates the materialisation of fantasy and helps sustain the colonial obsession of keeping the territory and its people under control at any 'cost'.

There is a similarity and continuity in the nature of these cultural products with respect to the relations of production that facilitate their production and distribution for the market for their consumption. The division of labour is implicit in the process of production and the occupied subjects are increasingly roped in as the tentacles of occupation branch out and spread through various local institutions and socio-material processes. It is in that context that there is a need to understand the social structure of the occupied region too, and how that is utilized by the occupier ruling class members as well as the elites of the occupied society.

In an interview, the owner of the label Raw Mango said that most of the models, artisans and crew members in the Zooni campaign were Kashmiris. There are multiple ways in which people with artistic expressions attempt to represent, showcase or simply present a narrative about regions such as Kashmir; textile production also follows a similar process. However, when analysed closely it becomes clear that representation isn't just that. These representations are always tied to traceable forces of capital that need to be converted into finer, more aesthetic forms through the deployment of the artistic apparatus. As a result, the most prized, deeply moving, almost sacred objects of that global ruling class with seemingly progressive ideals turn out to be the most "beautiful". At this point the idea of cultural appropriation also becomes a rather weak concept to explain the forces at work. The ruling sections have learnt that the existing discourse includes such a term and thus, it needs to be subverted, something Garg attempts by introducing Kashmiri models, production crew and even Kashmiri artisans for his campaign.



The division of labour is adapting to the changing political demands in both repressive state apparatuses as well as ideological state apparatuses owing to the discourse of identity politics. However, the ruling sections counter the existing identity politics to subvert its very purpose by co-opting members from the marginalised sections as well as from Kashmiri society. Thus, it doesn't come as a surprise that the Indian government appointed an Adivasi person (scheduled tribe) in 2019 as governor of the union territory of J&K. Such tactical utilizations of the marginalized identities by the ruling classes provide a classic example of the structure versus agency conundrum while the agency of individuals belonging to marginalised communities/sections may rather work against both their own community and other oppressed populations. In fact, it further exemplifies hegemony of the ruling sections that can take a number of subject positions without disturbing the status quo.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between India and Kashmir has been that of the occupier and the occupied (Junaid, 2018). What kind of relationship have Indians had with Kashmir and Kashmiris over the past seven decades? The answer to this question can be very complex. For neither Indians nor Kashmiris are homogenous entities. Each population is made up of varied and heterogeneous groups of people. Thus, it is important to take into consideration the composition of each population and deduce what strata of Indians have what kind of relationships with Kashmiris. For example, an entire host of migrant labourers from the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Jharkhand work as manual and semi-skilled workers in different parts of J&K. This does not take away from the fact that Kashmir has its own set of labouring classes that also constitute particular castes. Indian tourists mostly represent the Indian middle and upper-middle classes but that requires a separate analysis with regard to their social coordinates. Then there are Indian state functionaries who use the repressive state machinery to control and govern the Kashmiri masses. Indian soldiers come from all kinds of Bahujan as well as Savarna castes and represent the lower and lower-middle class sections of the Indian society. It is through them and their well-managed violent functioning that the domination of Kashmir by the Indian government is illustrated in its most symbolic and overt form, rendering other more insidious and hegemonic state apparatuses invisible. The Indian classes that are most invested in Kashmir, apart from the repressive state machinery, are those who govern apparatuses like communications, knowledge production, culture and trade. It may come across as misplaced to use the term 'state apparatuses' for organisations and institutions that may be defined by private ownership. However, Althusser (2008) clarifies the distinction between the public or private nature of state apparatuses: the distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which that law exercises its authority (p. 18). I reiterate his assertion that it doesn't matter whether the institutions in which state apparatuses are realised are 'public' or 'private'; what matters is how they 'function'. In fact, in order for such "private" institutions to have uninterrupted access to the territory and resources of Kashmir, the Indian government carried out

a series of amendments in article 370 between the 1950s and the 1970s. In April 1954, a presidential order passed by the then “socialist” Congress government declared that most of the provisions of the Indian constitution were applicable to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, making it economically an integral part of India (Wani, 2019, p. 192). Without these changes in the law physical access to Kashmir involved a systematic procedure in which the government of J&K had the rights over various domains including the right to grant access to travelers to its territory of jurisdiction.

Article 370 was completely abrogated on August 5, 2019 through a similar presidential order passed by the current BJP government. As soon as that happened many members of the Indian ruling classes declared in the media that they would invest capital to start off businesses in Kashmir. Interestingly, the educational and cultural state apparatuses and the people that govern it have been operating in Kashmir through the last seven decades without any interruption. Entertainment media, visual artists, handicrafts experts and others have consistently worked towards establishing Kashmir as a region that they continuously extract from. In that respect, the Raw Mango campaign is just a case in point and should be seen as a continuation of the functioning of the Indian state apparatuses in Kashmir. Without a deeper understanding of how social relations are rooted in relations of production, and of their interrelationship with the forces of production, the discourse around occupation of Kashmir will only remain limited to military excesses and the root cause of the continuing occupation will remain purposefully hidden.

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