

# the byanshi: an ethnographic note on a trading group in far western nepal

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Among the lesser known trading groups of Nepal are the Byanshi living in the district of Darchula. Close to the borders of Nepal, India and Tibet, the Byanshi make their living, trading wool, yak tails, salt, grain and other commodities across the Himalayas and over the border into Pithoragarh district and even down into the Terai. The Byanshi are part of a group of people living throughout the Kumaon hills, as well as in Humla and Bhajang.<sup>2</sup> They are closely related to other Tibeto-Burman speaking groups mentioned in Sherring (1906), Berreman (1972), Sharma (1961a, 1961b) and Srivastava (1967). These groups are often termed "Bhotiya" in the literature to distinguish them from the Khasya groups which comprise the present high castes of the hills. The term "Bhotiya" is used to describe "Mongoloid Tibeto-Burman and culturally distinct people of the higher Himalayas (Berreman, 1972:14)." Sharma mentions that in the Kumaon hills of Pithoragarh district, the Bhotiyas "claim to be Rajputs, their Mongolian features are indication of their Tibetan descent (1961b:4)." Srivastava says the term "Bhotiya" is a generic term employed to describe many groups of people settled in India, Nepal and Bhutan (1967:passim). We mentioned this merely for the sake of avoiding confusion, for the term "Bhotiya" should denote Tibeto-Burman groups and not be confused with the term "Bhote" which is a Nepali term for people specifically of Tibetan descent living in Nepal.

These "Bhotiya" groups, including the Byanshi of Darchula district, are analogous to the Tibeto-Burman speakers of the more familiar areas of the hills of Nepal such as Magars, Rais, Gurungs and so on. The language of the Byanshi (and the Sauka in general) is a Tibeto-Burman language, not a dialect of Tibetan. The Sauka, like other "Bhotiya" groups claim Rajput origins. When a stranger asks their caste, they invariably answer that they are Bohara Chhetri (Matwali Chhetri).<sup>3</sup> Of the four clans of the Sauka in Nepal, three (Bohara, Aitawal and Lala) are the names of Chhetri and Rajput clans in India. The fourth "clan" (Tinkari, see below) is derived from the name of a village in Byans panchayat.

The Byanshi live their lives into two separate areas. In the summer they live in their traditional homeland in Byans panchayat in the northern section of Darchula, close to Nepal's border with China. The major settlements in the area are Tinkar and Chhangru. Chhangru is a village of about 100 households, while Tinkar has about 80 households. The entire panchayat has a population of about 2,000.<sup>4</sup> In the winter, when the snows make life difficult



in the high mountains, the Byanshi with their panchayat offices, schools and some of their livestock migrate down to Khalanga panchayat, the district headquarters of Darchula district (with a population of 2800, excluding the Byanshis). For the winter months the physical area of Khalanga panchayat, therefore, contains two panchayats, Khalanga and Byans operating simultaneously, each with its own Pradhan Pancha, schools and government offices. Byans panchayat is then a migrating panchayat.

#### Byans Panchayat - Summer Home

In March and April, when the snows melt in the passes, the Byanshi move north generally over trails through India to the town of Sitapul where they cross the Mahakali river and ascend to Chhangru and Tinkar. The trip takes 8-12 days for man to walk, but takes 15 days when driving sheep. General household goods and food are taken on this journey. There is a road from Darchula bazar to Chhangru and Tinkar via Nepal, but this road is quite difficult compared to the longer, but easier route through India. The Nepali road goes through Rapla; which is a panchayat with a large population of Byanshi. Since Rapla lies at about 7,000 feet, it is possible for these Byanshi to live here all year around.<sup>5</sup>

On crossing the Mahakali at Sitapul one follows the Nampa (Tinkar) river (10,000 feet) to the northeast. On the northern terraces above the Nampa river, at an altitude of 11,000 feet lies the village of Chhangru. Above Chhangru are the two villages of Tallo Kangwa and Mallo Kangwa. These two villages contain the goths of Gunjyal and Garbyang peoples, who live in India but own land in Nepal. Following the Nampa river to the northeast one reaches the check post at Ghaga, the confluence of the Nampa and Tinkar rivers. Following the Tinkar river, one climbs to an altitude of 13,000 feet to reach Tinkar village. Previously there were two passes to Tibet, the Lipu pass (Lipu la) and the Tinkar pass (Tinkar la), but now only the Tinkar pass is accessible, since the Indians have closed Lipu pass to trans-Himalayan traffic. Tinkar pass reaches an altitude of 20,000 feet and is considerably more difficult to traverse than Lipu pass, which was the main route to Taklakot (Purang). All trans-Himalayan trade goes through the Tinkar pass route.

Two types of houses are found in the Byans area: mud-roofed houses and slate-roofed houses. A mud-roofed house has a flat roof made out of compacted soil known as kamasa. This type of house is called sa (:soil) chim (:house). The slate roofed house is called ungchechim (ung: stone). Aside from the roof, the houses have essentially the same arrangement. The lower portion of the house is a cowshed, known as a dar (a cowshed outside of a house is called ra). The main door of the house can face any direction. There are windows in each room and veranda and small courtyard (: chayangpang) are placed in front of the main door. Both men and women enter the house through the main door, there are no Byanshi man sewing grain into sacks (karkha) for transport on sheep back.



separate entrances. The second floor is the main living area. The hearth (: milin) is centrally located. There are two types of hearth: one (jangthar milin;) is an iron hearth, commonly found in many places in Nepal, but much larger allowing it to accommodate three or more cooking pots at the same time; the second type (sa milin;) is the clay hearth which is quite common in western Nepal and contains a separate section for boiling water. It is "L" shaped with the fire at the base of the "L" and a smoke hole which allows the passage of smoke out of the house at the top of the "L". The hearth is not sacred and any touchable group can sit at the hearth of the Byanshi. Grain may be kept in any room of the house except for the main room. Grain is kept in a vinjim or large wooden box, the various types of grain are kept separately within the home. The kitchen (rasso) is always in one of the rooms of the main house. Other rooms (wherever possible enough to give grown-up children each a separate room) are found in a Byanshi house. If there are not enough rooms, a separate bed at least is given to each member of the family.

In Byans panchayat, houses in villages are located with an eye to avoiding the avalanches which plague the area. In Byans, rains are rapidly followed by snow and avalanches are common, killing animals and men and damaging the houses. More than the location of wood and water, the avoidance of avalanches is paramount. Houses are located so that there is jungle between the snows and the houses. The forest acts to break up the force of the avalanche. In addition, the houses in Chhangru and Tinkar are built close together below inverted "Y"-shaped ridges which deflect the force of the avalanches to the right or the left, never allowing the avalanche to come directly down on the village. Since the forest land is held by individual Byanshi households, some have begun to cut the wood for their own use. The cooperative organizations (see below) have not yet been able to control this and it poses a danger to the continued existence of the villages.

The agriculture of Byans is based primarily on bitter buckwheat, though sweet buckwheat, naked barley (uwa), beans (matar), small-grained wheat (napal), cauliflower, cabbage (bandakopi) and potato are grown, as well as a cash crop of radish which is sliced and dried and taken to Tibet for barter against salt.

These are not, however, the staple crops. For the Byanshi, agriculture is clearly subsidiary to trade. The staple grains of the Byanshi are wheat and rice which have been traded for other commodities in the lower hills.

Agriculture and husbandry is mainly looked after by the women, since the men are occupied with trade. The women of Byans have a traditional organization known as leba. All Byanshi women are members of this organization. The fodder areas are collectively owned by the village and since the months from Jeth to Srawan are the time for hay growing, it is important that cooperation between



villagers is obtained to ensure a good crop. A woman is selected by the members of the organization and after discussion with the other villagers, she fixes a date for the beginning of the collection of the hay. Anybody collecting hay prior to the fixed date is fined, and since the hay collection must be accomplished in a short time all members of the leba including daughters who have married out of the village are requested to return and give a hand. Hay is collected day and night during this period for winter storage. The ploughing and sowing are done by male Tibetan refugees<sup>6</sup> in the months of Jeth (May-June) and Asar (June-July). Labourers get three meals per day, and one nali (2 pounds) of buckwheat as a daily wage. Ploughing is done either with yak, dzoba (jopu - Bys.) or tolba<sup>7</sup> in teams of two (jopu are most common however). Harvesting takes place in the months of Asoj (September-October) and Kartik (October-November). Women do most of the harvesting. Crops are stored either inside the house (in vinjim, see above) or in a pit (kin : Bys.) and since there are no insect pests in that area, grain can be stored indefinitely.

Land is called re (Bys.) and is not well terraced since there is no way of irrigating the land. To obtain water for household consumption, it is necessary to descend to either the Nampa or Tinkar rivers and carry the water on the backs of animals using plastic jerry cans. See Appendix I for a detailed agricultural calendar.

Of greater importance than agriculture is animal husbandry. Animal husbandry is the backbone of trade in the Himalayas, for without animals, sufficient goods cannot be carried to make trade profitable. Table 1 below contains a census of the domestic animal population of Byans panchayat.

#### Domestic Animals in Byans Panchayat

Table 1

Pure bred	Yak ( ♂ )	-	8
	Dromu ( ♀ )	-	2
First cross	Jopu ( ♂ )	-	125
	Jomu ( ♀ )	-	30
Second cross	Tolba ( ♂ )	-	90
	Tolbini ( ♀ )	-	30
	Cattle ( ♂, ♀ )	-	200
	Horses	-	40

Mules	-	150
Sheep	-	1500
<u>Chyangra</u> (goat)	-	400

Pure breeds and jopu are used for transport of goods over the Himalayas. Jopu have been seen as far as Dhap panchayat (south of Darchula-Khalanga about 3,000 feet in altitude), but yak seldom travel below 10,000 feet. Tolba are not strong enough for long distance transport, but are used for ploughing, along with the jopu and from time to time the yak (cows are used in milk production and for manure). Horses, mules and the sheep and goats are used for transport. It has been estimated that a flock of 200 sheep can carry as much as 2.23 metric tons, carried in small bags (karkha: Bys.) harnessed to the backs of the sheep in pairs. Sheep and goats can be used on smaller trails as well as at low altitudes. This is particularly important in trade within Darchula itself, where trails are narrow and larger animals cannot pass.

Dairy goods are consumed within the community for the most part, since the Byanshi are heavy tea drinkers and make churpi (a dried yak milk cheese). This supplements their diet. Yak have ritual usage as well, since the yak is considered to be the holy animal of Kailash, this will be discussed below. Some Byanshis will eat yak meat as well, but they believe that one should not eat yak from one's own village.

Mules are quite valuable, since a single mule can earn as much as 2000 rupees in transport fees per year. A mule can carry more than two maunds (74.64 kilograms) at a time. Mules are sometimes used for riding, but never for ploughing.

Byanshis use dogs for herding sheep and goats and hunting kasturi (musk deer), in addition to guarding the house and flocks. Sheep and goats (both called mālā in Byans) are used in wool production and manure production as well for transport. A man's wealth is often determined by the number of sheep and goats he has. If a family does not own sheep and goats, they may ask another family to use part of their flock for a period of time for manure production. The new family must look after the animals and give 4-5 days of free labour in return. The senior male member of the household is in charge of the sheep; it is the men that shear the sheep and make the bags (karkha Bys.) used for carrying loads. The sheep are sheared in Kartik (October-November), as well as in Chait and Baisakh (March-May), when the Byanshi are in Darchula-Khalanga. Wool is used for making carpets, chutak (a large blanket), shawls, mufflers and sweaters.

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A Byanshi man harnessing a jopu in Darchula-Khalanga.

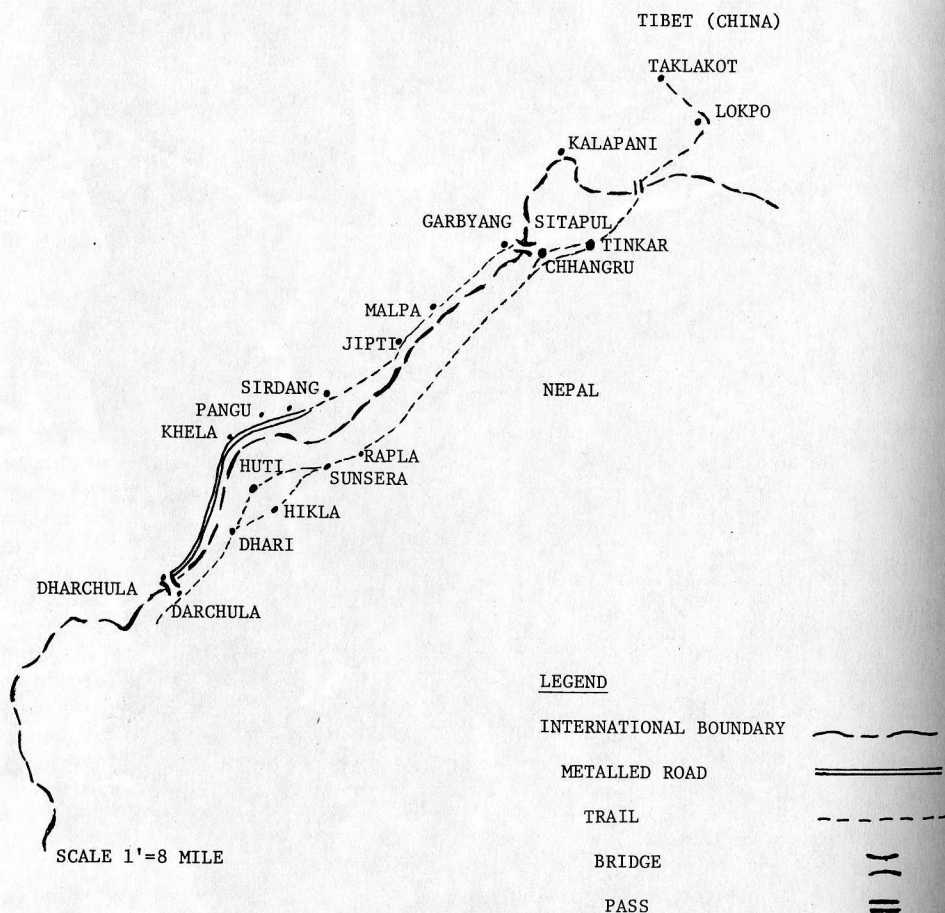




Most important, is that husbandry supports trade. The Byanshi are still permitted to trade with Tibet, like the people from Humla. Taklakot is still an important market place for the Byanshi, and Tibetan salt, borax, yak tails, sheep and goats are carried from Tibet. Since Chinese currency is needed to purchase goods and currency is not easily available, the barter system is still used. Below (Figure 1) is a map of trade routes and the most common markets between Taklakot and Darchula. When trading with Tibet, the Byanshi always use routes which go through Nepal. They bring grain (mostly rice and wheat), unrefined sugar, clothes and medicines. The price of goods are fixed by a Chinese market representative and goods must be traded through him. Transactions are made as soon as possible.

TRADE ROUTE BETWEEN DARCHULA TO TAKLAKOT

Fig. 1



No fixed member of the family is necessarily a trader. Any clever family member, with good business sense, be he an elderly man or the younger son, can be the family trade representative. When the Byanshi go to Taklakot, they take the whole family with them, except for few who remain to look after the agriculture. Upon arrival, people (usually lineage members) settle in a particular locality called a kheda and the men go off to trade.

After the harvest, the Byanshi prepare to return to Darchula-Khalanga. After storing the grain, the group returns via the Indian route, leaving behind Tibetan refugees to watch over the yak and the houses and possessions which cannot be carried down. Sheep, horses, mules, jopu, tolba and cattle are all brought down to Darchula-Khalanga.

### Darchula-Khalanga

Darchula-Khalanga is the district headquarters of Darchula district. It lies at an altitude of 3,000 feet next to the Mahakali river which is border between India and Nepal. A steel suspension bridge connects it with Dharchula, a hill town on the Indian side of the Mahakali. From Dharchula one can get bus service to Askot, Pithoragarh, and all major cities in northern India as well as to the rail head at Tanakpur.

The majority of the population of Darchula-Khalanga is made up of Brahmins, Thakuris, Chhetris, and the service castes, but during the winter months Byans panchayat occupies major sections of Darchula bazar. The Byanshi live in two major sections of Darchula-Khalanga panchayat. The northern-most section, called Banga Bagar, contains the population of Chhangru, as well as the panchayat offices and one of the schools. In the southern section of the bazar lies Tinkari Kheda, which is populated by the people of Tinkar. Both groups now live in permanent stone houses of quite a large size (with guest rooms, kitchens and most often slate roofs), though prior to 1964 the Byanshi lived in small goth - like structures where they could keep their livestock and from which they could organize their trade expeditions.

In 1888 A.D. there was a dispute between the Byanshi and the Nepali castes over the land in the present Dethala, Dhuligada and Khalanga panchayats. The Byanshi claimed that since they came from a high altitude area, they needed land on which to spend the winter. Since this land was the traditional winter home of the Byanshi, they felt that they should continue to spend their winters there. The Nepali castes, however, felt that since they had been planting on the land for long time, and the Byanshis came only in winter, that the Nepali castes should have right to land throughout the year. This dispute continued until 1904, when the Prime Minister (then Chandra Shumshere) gave a sanad to the Byanshi which said that for the six months when the Byanshi lived in this area, they would be allowed to remain there and utilize the land, while for the remaining six months, the Nepali castes could raise their crops on the

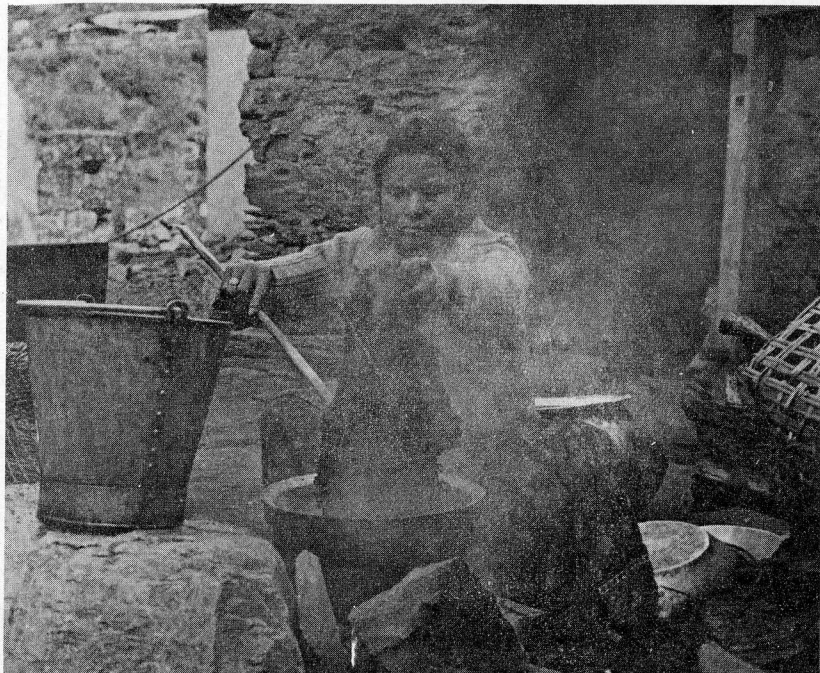
land. Tax would be paid, however, by the Nepali castes. This situation continued until the implementation of land reform in 1964. Disputes continued, however, since when a Byanshi came to Khalanga, he would erect a stone fence to contain his livestock, build his small house and courtyard. While he was in the hills, the Nepali castes would plough up the courtyard, as well as the rest of the land in the compound and run irrigation ditches so close to the houses that it was necessary to repair them each year. When the land reform office opened, both the Byanshi and the Nepali castes filed claims to the same land. Feeling got so high that a minister was sent on special deputation to settle the dispute once for all. The minister decided that the land under dispute would be given to the Byanshi in return for cash payment and the Byanshi would then take over responsibility for paying the land tax. This occurred in 1968 and the Byanshi began to build permanent houses in Khalanga.

The life of the Byanshi in the winter is quite different than their life in Byans. In Darchula-Khalanga, agriculture is of no importance. The men's time is spent spinning wool and trading, while the women dye and weave wool into colourful carpets, (dan: Bys.) shawls, sweaters and other woollen goods. In addition, the women make an alcoholic beverage from rice and sometimes from other grains, which is sold in small shops throughout the panchayat. Unlike the case of the Thakalis, the Byanshi men run the small tea-liquor shops. These liquor shops demand a high consumption of wood (as does the dying of the wool). It is for this reason that the Byanshi send men with jopu every morning to collect firewood. The Nepali castes as well find the Byanshi to be willing buyers for firewood each day. A man in Dhap panchayat, for example, might spend one day cutting and collecting firewood and then take that wood to Darchula-Khalanga, three hours walk to the north the next morning to sell it to the Byanshi for five rupees a bundle.

Throughout Banga Bagar one finds stone fences built around empty fields. Upon rising the next morning, one might find those fields transformed to a centre of activity. In the early morning, a sheep-train has returned and the sheep can be seen quietly grazing as the men remove the bags of grain from their backs. Even in the winter, when the pass to Tibet cannot be traversed, the Byanshi continue to trade throughout the middle hills and the Terai. In a remote village like Sipti, in Marma in eastern Darchula, it is not unusual to see one or two such sheep-trains go through in a day on their way to Bhajang or Darchula-Khalanga. Salt is traded (as well as gur, cloth and sundry goods) from village to village in barter for grain, even in the most remote places of the district. This is all short-distance trade and sheep that have returned even from long journeys are seldom kept idle when short-term trade is possible.

Long-distance trade is practised as well. Figure 2 below gives a schematic representation of Byansi trade in Nepal with routes through India and markets in Tibet. Note that the Byanshi travel





Top: Byanshi woman dying wool used in the making of carpets.

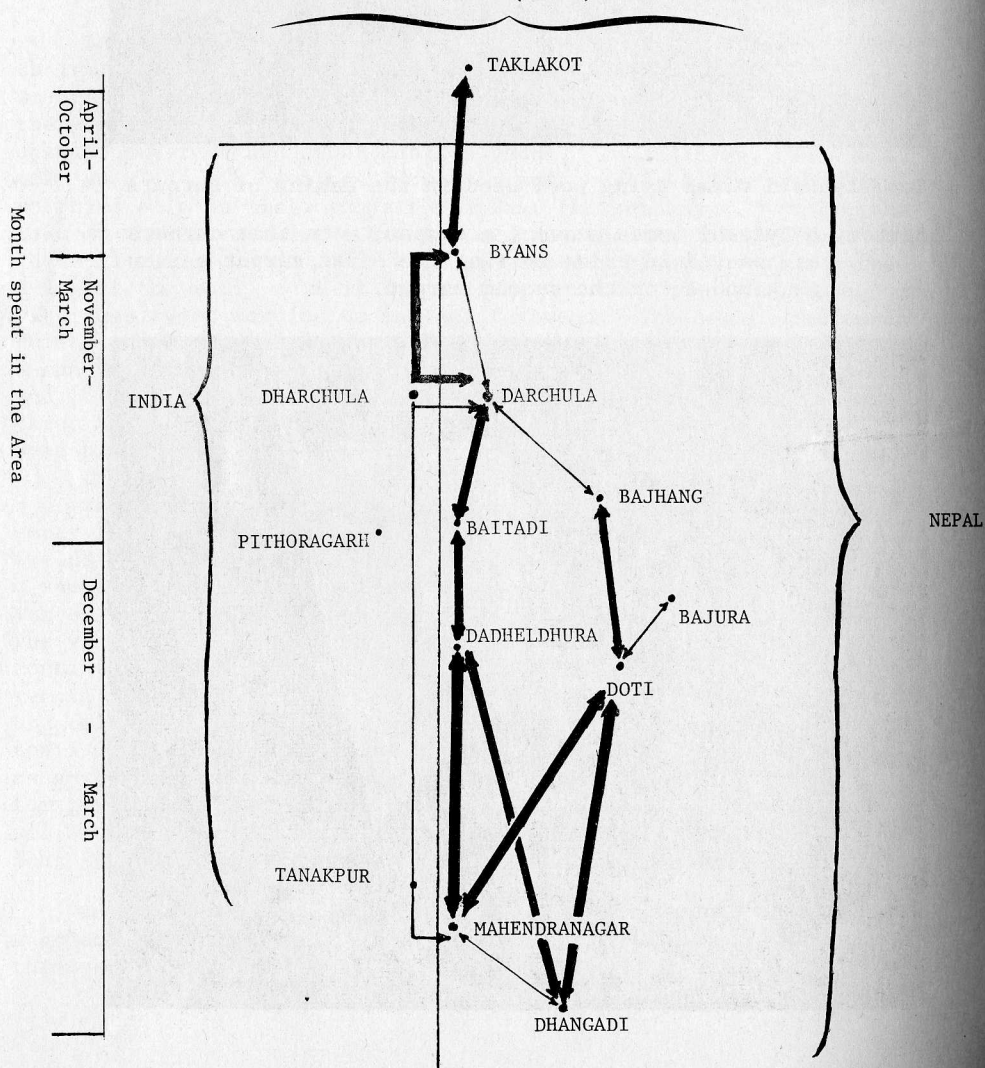
Bottom: A Byanshi woman weaving a carpet, note that carpets are woven in pairs so that the first carpet serves as a model for the second carpet.



as far east as Doti and as far south as Dhangarhi or Mahendranagar. This trade is primarily moved with sheep, goats, mules and horses. Sheep are used on the smaller secondary trails, as they can travel on very rough roads. On travelling between Dhangarhi and Darchula, the anthropologists encountered many such flocks transporting goods. Between Patan in Baitadi district and Khalanga-Darchula, many kheda were encountered, often filled with smiling Byanshi and their sheep. The Byanshi were often seen sewing the day's haul into bags for transport on the sheep.

Fig. 2

SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF BYANSHI TRADE AND THE  
MAIN TRADING CENTRES  
TIBET (CHINA)



In addition, the Byanshi transport goods for others as well. From Mahendranagar to Dandeldhura is a journey which takes 6 days for the loaded flocks. It costs a shop-keeper 50/- rupees per maund (37.32 kilograms) for transport. Goods are transported between Mahendranagar, Doti and Bajhang as well. Jest (1974) has noted that there are permanent settlements of Byanshi running retail establishments in Chainpur in Bajhang as well.<sup>8</sup> In many ways, the Byanshi are beginning to organize both the wholesale and transport of goods by members of a single caste group. It may be noted that some Byanshi have moved to Mahendranagar and may begin to act as import agents as well in the Terai. This resembles a proto form of the kind of trade network presented by the Thakali (see Manzardo: 1976).

From Poush through Chait, the Byanshi continue to criss-cross throughout the whole far-western middle hills and Terai. In their trade only the men travel, leaving the women to take care of the home and children, feed the livestock and weave. The men often return however, and men are often seen spinning wool in Darchula-Khalanga. The absence of men in the area is not particularly noticeable, though the population-flow of the traders is evident.

#### Social Organization

The Byanshi social organization is somewhat confusing. Nick Allen (N.D. see bibliography) has written an article on Byanshi kinship which has confused more than helped us. We will try to explain the clan structure as simply as possible, with apologies to the reader and leave the other elements of kinship for further analysis.

Understanding of the social organization of the Byanshi is only possible if one understands that there are two views of the system, even within the system. The Byanshi of Nepal are divided into two villages: Chhangru and Tinkar. Chhangru has three clans: Aitawal (Etuk chyang: Bys.), Bohara (Boromang: Bys.) and Lala (Lala-shong chyang: Bys.). These three clans are considered to be "sister clans" and therefore village exogamy is practised. Brides must come from either Tinkar or Sauka villages in India (such as Garbyang or Gunji). The Tinkar people are considered by the people of Chhangru to be a fourth clan with which marriage can take place.

From the point of view of the Tinkaris (Tinkarpa: Bys.) the situation is slightly different. The Tinkaris recognize the three clans of Chhangru and will intermarry with them, but they can marry within their own village as well. This is because the Tinkaris see themselves not as single clan, but rather as eight separate clans or lineages, between which intermarriage is possible. The eight clans are Nuchuchyang, Barkhar, Panglokhar, Serfyo, Leba, Yarkhar, Yetpanglo and Syantu.



Likewise both groups see the Sauka villages (in India) as marriageable clans taking on the names of their particular villages in India. Hence, when one asks for a list of clans, he might get anywhere from four to twenty depending on the village of origin of the informant.<sup>9</sup>

The clans of Tinkar are divided into two groups for the purpose of marriage: Yerpa and Pangpapa. The Yerpa, or upper level group, made up of the Nuchumchyang, Baskhar and Yetpanglo cannot marry within the group. They must marry members of the Pangpapa clans which are made up of the remaining groups.

Garbyals, the people living in Garbyang in India are likewise treated as a single clan, but they too have five separate groups which are also separated into Yerpa and Pangpapa groups for the purpose of marriage.

As might be expected with trading groups, the emphasis in Byan-shi society is on nuclear families. Within two years of marriage, tremendous pressure is put on the family, particularly by the daughter-in-law (namasya: Bys.) to break it apart. One example is the case of a wealthy Byan-shi family of three brothers. The eldest brother and the middle brother were both married, the youngest brother was not. The middle brother and indirectly his wife put pressure on the family to split up. The youngest brother was forced into marriage by the eldest brother and fission took place.

After fission however, close ties remain between the families of the brothers. Flocks of sheep may be kept together, though it is well known by all which sheep belong to which family. Money is lent between families and trading expeditions may be held in cooperation, but the families remain separate corporate entities. One interesting phenomenon, however, is the fact that three brothers might invest unequal shares in a trading enterprise. After the trip is over, each family draws out its initial investment and what remains as profit is divided equally between them.

Joint families exist only in special circumstances, for example, there is one family where the wife is a medical doctor in India and the husband is in the Nepalese army. In this case, the wife (the daughter-in-law) has encouraged the maintenance of the joint family, since she is often out of the country and her husband is on active duty. This makes it possible for the children to be cared for by their grandfather (who is still living) or the uncles and aunts of the children. There are very few cases of this arrangement.

Unlike the Thakalis, who also place emphasis on the nuclear family, the Byan-shi maintain an inheritance pattern similar to the general Hindu pattern. Thakalis can leave their property to any or all of their children, sons or daughters or they may choose

(though this is not often done) to give a share to an outsider. The Byanshis pass their property along the male line, that is to say all legal sons get an equal share of the father's property. Daughters are not given a share, even if they remain unmarried over the age of 35.

Traditionally, there were five mukhiyas (bada: Bys.), one from each of five Byanshi villages in Nepal and India. Superficially, there is some resemblance between the five mukhiya system of Byans and 13 mukhiya system in Thak Khola (see Manzardo and Sharma: 1975), with one major difference. All the land of the Byanshi, whether it be in the present Byans panchayat, in Darchula-Khalanga or in India was registered in the name of these five mukhiyas. Land revenue was paid by these mukhiyas, to the government in Tibet until about 1955, when Nepal and Tibet signed a new treaty. Traditionally, the Tibetan tax collector (thalmochi: Tib.) would be met at Tinkar pass by representatives of the mukhiyas. He would be escorted down into Byans to collect about seven thousand rupees I.C. Since the Tibetan government would not accept Indian currency, it was necessary to pay revenue in goods.<sup>10</sup> The five mukhiyas acted as representatives of the group as a whole in dealing with outsiders. They were appointed by the Nepali government and acted as representatives of the government as well. Below them were the village elders or dokpas (Tib.), though it is unclear as to what their duties were.

Similar to the Thakali Samaj Sudhar Sangh (see Manzardo and Sharma: 1975) is the Gram Sudharak Samiti (Village Reform Committee) of the Byanshi. Each Byanshi village has such a committee whose function it is to reform and simplify some of the more expensive rituals and ceremonies of the Byanshi. Like the Thakali Samaj, the Byanshi Samiti acts as a marriage counsellor, to stabilize and improve marital relations. In addition, they act as moral overseers and try to change sections of traditional society which no longer serve their intended functions. The rodi ghar (locally called rangbang: Bys. see Andors: 1974 and Raipa: 1974, pp. 85-91 and Srivastava: 1953) has been eliminated because the elders claim that the institution has been adversely affected by growing education and presence of the Hindi cinema. The present rodi ghar is termed doti rangbang (meaning wrong rangbang) by the teasing elders.<sup>11</sup> The effects of the Byanshi Samiti on other institutions in Byanshi society will be noted below. A basic problem with the Samiti is that since it is organized locally, that is on the village level, the various committees are taking different actions in different villages, hence the reforms differ from village to village as a result of differential perceptions of problems and different solutions taken. This problem of local organization and lack of communication between local reform organizations has been noted in the case of the Thakali as well (see Manzardo and Sharma: 1975 and Manzardo: 1976).

Life Cycle

Upon a birth of a child, the women from the village bring local beer (sathani: Bys.), meat and other food to the mother. Up to the 11th day after child birth, the sutkeri (new mother) and child are considered to be polluted. On the 8th day after delivery a ceremony known as malengkho kormo (Bys.: lit. 'to take to the fire place') is held, where the mother and child are ritually bathed. From this point, both the mother and the child may enter the hearth area of their house, but the house itself is still considered polluted. Nobody from outside the house at this point will accept food or water from this place.

On the 11th day, all villagers are invited to attend the ceremony known as chhyosimo (Bys: lit. 'to incorporate'). In this ceremony the mother, the newborn child, the house and its vicinity (i.e. any area where the mother or child might have polluted) are sprinkled with cow's urine and jangti multi (Bys.: water in which gold or silver has been dipped). Once this has been done, the house is considered purified and people can once again accept water and food from it.

Bumo (lit. 'to carry on the back') is performed in the third month. Barley cakes are prepared and served to the invited guests. A young male child, whose younger siblings are alive and healthy is found and he is given a white turban, which he puts on and then carries the child, first around the hearth and then from the hearth to the door of the house five times. This is done to ensure the child a long life and good health and to ensure that he escapes from accidents on his trading journeys.

At six months of age, both daughters and sons are given their first rice at a ceremony called duglang chhimo. The child is fed first by a village elder, who has many of his own descendants. This is a symbolic blessing for the child to live a long life and have many descendants of his own. This is then followed by feeding by other relatives, including his own parents. Like the Hindus, until this point the child can only wear clothes made of old cloth (see Bennett: 1976).

In the third year after the birth of a son, a ceremony known as kipping kormo or sawaku kormo (lit: 'temple ceremony') is performed. Here all villagers are obliged to attend and help the household by contributing cash or food for the feast.<sup>12</sup> At this point the child is integrated into the clan and can now visit the temple.

A collective ritual known as budani thum is held on a day decided by the junko (see footnote 12). All families who have eldest male sons for whom this rite has not yet been performed must participate and take their eldest son to the temple. Villagers come in their traditional dress (turban, long coat made of cotton or silk tied with tongs-similar to the traditional dress



of Rajasthan commonly worn by wealthier Thakuris in Nepal's hills). The household involved is expected to slaughter at least five goats and to distribute puri to all the households of the village, whether or not they attend the ceremony. On the day before the ceremony, about 200 villagers go into the jungle to cut down and bring back to the village the highest pine tree found in the area. This tree is called budani boyam. The upper end of the tree is not cut, to symbolize long life for the boys and to ensure a prosperous future. This budani rite is claimed to have been brought from Tibet.

Boys taking part in this ceremony can be any age from 2 to 15 depending on when the jumko determines a sufficient number of boys have been collected to warrant the ceremony.

The Byanshi practise three forms of marriage. The oldest and most traditional form is called khusiga dami which, is a form of marriage by capture. A girl may be abducted by not only the male friends of the groom, but village elders may take part as well. After the abduction a girl is considered to be the wife of the boy who has captured her. A girl might place herself in the position to be captured by the boy of her choice. This tradition, however, is dying because it often creates problems in relations between villagers or in the case of Tinkar, between groups within the village. If a girl's parents withhold their consent, they may initiate an annulment after the capture has taken place.

The second form of marriage is called chalo or love marriage which is actually a form of elopement. If a boy and girl want to be married, but cannot obtain the consent of the parents, this kind of marriage will take place.

The third form of marriage is the arranged marriage or thochi-mo. This form of marriage is becoming most common. The marriage is always initiated by the boy, although relatives can supply information about likely marriage partners. These close relatives take word of the boy's interest to the family of the girl. The parents then ask the girl and if she is willing, they request a jumko (meeting) of the seba. At the jumko, the local bard recites the genealogies and if the village elders consider the couple eligible for marriage, they give their consent. The girl is summoned and given the news. In the meantime the boy's parents send cash (known as lakchhyap), enough to make golden earnings for the girl. If the money is accepted, the marriage is considered approved and the boy's uncle can then visit the girl's house. The girl's parents might try to set a date far in the future to get time to study the prospects of the boy. The boy's relatives will be asked to come and visit quite often. In the end, the parents of the girl give their formal consent. Once consent, is given the sayana (elders from the boys family) visit the household of the girl and bring a vessel filled with water and flowers (binti). The girl's relatives then invite all of the local villagers to consent to the marriage. Once given, the members of the girl's family and the villagers are

given yerphurko (cash, usually one rupee wrapped in cloth). A marriage feast, which sometimes goes on for a week is given to the girl's villagers as well.

If either side is financially unable to support the cost of the marriage, a fictional abduction called dekhanta dami is organized to avoid embarrassment. In this situation, an abduction is held with the tacit approval of the parents. A wedding feast can then be held later, by either the girl's or the boy's parents depending on whether or not one can financially afford it. Thochimo has been effected by the Byanshi Samiti, where the one week festival has been reduced to a feast lasting only one day. Traditionally, the betrothal of a girl was done at a very early age, but recently the high rate of divorce brought about by jari, caused by unhappy pairing has forced the betrothal age to be raised. In the Darma area (north-west of Byans in India), marriage still occurs quite commonly when the girl is less than ten years of age. In Byans and Chaudans, girls marry at anywhere from 14 to 17 years and boys from 18 to 20.

Jari (a wife running away with another man) is common in Byans, but subsequent divorce must be obtained. Levirate occurs only in the case when a younger brother is unmarried at the time of the death of his older brother. Byanshis claim to be entirely monogamous, and so a younger brother cannot marry his elder brother's widow if he is himself already married. If he is not married and his elder brother's widow has children, such marriage is obligatory if the younger brother is not married. The ghar juwain system (whereby a son-in-law becomes an adopted son in the household of his wife) is practised, but is highly disregarded.

Death rituals have always been the most exaggerated and costly ceremonies for the Byanshi. It took many days and much money to complete the obligatory rituals. Today, partly through the reforms of the Byanshi Samiti a much more simplified ceremony called sarat is performed. The older ritual was called gon.

The sarat is as follows - before death, a man is not taken from his house. If death occurs at night nothing is done until the next morning when the dead is bathed and placed on a bamboo pallet called dandi sin. All the mourners take turns carrying the dead, with the eldest son taking the first turn. It is considered auspicious to carry the dead. When the news of the death is heard in the village, the villagers each bring a piece of wood for the cremation. A man carries incense at the head of the procession and he is followed by a group of people who carry a piece of white cloth about thirty to forty yards long. Members of the procession also carry dal, bhat and water to feed the dead during the cremation. The dead is always cremated at the river, where a four-walled roofless stone structure is erected. Fire for the cremation is always brought from the home of the dead. The firewood contributed by the mourners is brought into the structure through a door which is built so that it faces to the east. The wood is arranged

and the dead with his face toward the east is placed upon pyre. Ghee and sirkanda (sandalwood) are placed on the pyre as well, along with the personal possessions (carpets, clothes etc.) of the dead. The eldest son and then the nearest agnates give water to the dead. The dead's table, knife and other utensils are thrown around the cremation ground. The fire is set and all parts of the dead are burnt to ashes. After the cremation the mourners bathe in the river, and then return to the house of the dead where they are given incense. This ceremony resembles the standard ceremony of the Hindus with a few modifications. In keeping with this a Brahmin priest may be asked to officiate at the death ceremony. A Byanshi priest or sahyaktami, however, is most often used. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the Byanshi priest is preferred by the younger members of the Byanshi society, indicating some resurgence of the old ways. On the day following cremation, the bones and ashes which remain are brought to the house of the dead and kept outside in a raised place where they cannot be touched accidentally. Later, the ashes are taken either to Hardwar or Kasi in India or Kailash or Mansarovar in Tibet. Sarat is performed on the 11th day, but it may be postponed if death occurs during a migration or trading expedition. On sarat a feast is held and if neither a Brahmin or Byanshi priest is hired, kirtan (chanting religious verses) is done for this whole night. Gahut (cow's urine) is sprinkled to purify the house. If a priest is hired or Tibetan Lama is present, they are given a gift: money, rice and sometimes cloth. The clothes of the dead are given to his uncle (mother's brother) with the exception of his traditional Byanshi dress (in the case of the wealthy man). The traditional dress is highly valued and as such it is auctioned to the highest bidder and the money goes to support the widow.

The traditional gon ceremony is for the most part similar to the sarat, except for the fact that sahyaktami must be invited and in the funeral rite a yak which has been decorated must be sent from house to house and often to houses in other villages. On the fourth day it is then released.<sup>13</sup> Due to the high cost of yak and the low number of yaks in Byans (at present, there are only ten in Byans panchayat), this is a rather expensive proposition. A male yak is released if a man has died, a dromu (nak: Bys.) is released when a woman dies. Since this is so expensive, the tradition is dying out, but sometimes (it is reported) the yak is substituted with a Tibetan lamb. Equally expensive is the tradition of feasting which often went on for days (usually three to six). This custom was so expensive that it could often spell financial ruin for poor families. A system has been developed through which the house of the dead is helped through contributions, usually of five rupees and one nali (4 mana) of rice from each family in the village. If rich households did not accept these contributions, the action is socially condemned. Each house is expected to contribute and each house is expected to accept. The feast has been brought down to only one day. This situation is similar to the one reported for the Thakali in Manzardo and Sharma: 1975, where Thakalis actively set out to cut down the lavish funeral expenses customary to their group. In



the gon ceremony, the other features of the sarat remain the same, including the cremation inside the roofless stone structure.

Death brings together not only members of the village and agnates from nearby villages, but also the daughters who have been married into other clans return and take part in the ceremonies and are considered to be polluted because of the death. Women must remove their jewellery and ornaments except for the silver bangle (bala: Nep.) worn on the right wrist. The women also let down their hair.<sup>14</sup>

When a mother dies, the children must not eat meat or milk, while in the case of the death of a father only meat is forbidden to the children for the period of mourning (eleven days).<sup>15</sup> Sometimes onion and garlic are not eaten, but salt continues to be eaten, unlike in the case of many other Hindu groups. Elders from the house of the dead may not take food from other houses, but children may do so except for meat and milk in the case of the death of a parent. On the day of death, no agricultural work is done in the village.

### Religion and Ceremonies

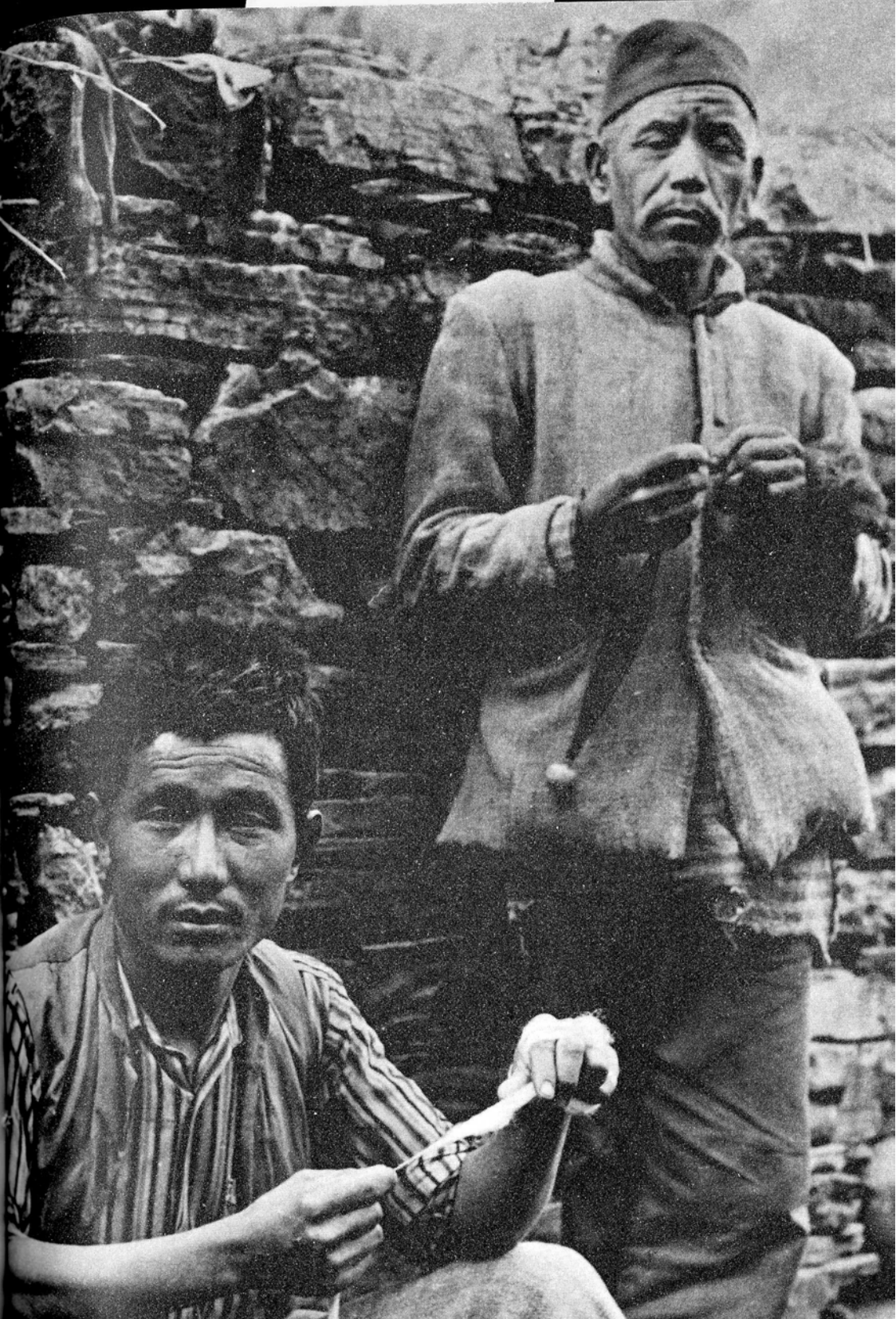
The religion of the Byanshi combines features of Tibetan Buddhism, hill animism and Hinduism in a very complex pattern. These notes must be taken as being of a purely preliminary nature. Byanshi deities can be divided into household divinities, ancestor gods, village divinities, gods taken from the Hindu pantheon as well as a local shamanistic tradition with assorted ghosts and evil spirits.

The Byanshis have a legend that claims that the Byanshi are descendants of Byans Rikhi, the legendary writer of the Mahabharata. According to this legend, Byans Rikhi travelled through this area on pilgrimage to Kailash and settled in a cave above Chhangru. There are legends about the magical feats of the Byans Rikhi many involving characters from the Mahabharata. The name Darchula is a corruption of dhar meaning the top of a hill and chula from fire place (chulo). This comes from three hills in the area, which taken together form the fire place of Byans Rikhi. The influence of Hinduism on this area seems quite old. The Byanshis worship Byans Rikhi, Mahadev, Lango (worshipped in Bajhang by Brahmins and Thakuris),<sup>16</sup> Baram (a local deity worshipped by Hindus in other sections of Darchula district), Mati (a bhumi or earth deity - variations of which are found in many areas throughout the Himalayas) as well as forms of Devi.

The household divinities of the Byanshi are Milin Rani, the deity of the hearth; Pirupise, the deity of the four corners of the house; Gyamarang Sayang Se, the god of the main door; Nyuontang, the divinity of the goth or cowshed; and Kayarghawala, the roof divinity.

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Two Byanshi men spinning yarn out of raw wool in Darchula-Khalanga.



The first three deities can be worshipped at any auspicious occasion, but they are worshipped only on the odd number days and in the period of the full moon. The fourth deity (Nyuongtang) is a female deity and considered to be an apsara (nymph or concubine ?) of the god Indra. She is worshipped on odd number days, only in the full moon of the month of Bhadra. She is worshipped in the cowshed and offered puri and sweets. The cowshed is kept clean, since this is her home. She is worshipped only by virgin girls who have not yet menstruated, but if no girl with these qualifications can be found at the period of worship, any woman not then menstruating can substitute. These worshippers must not have taken liquor or meat prior to worship.

Kayar Ghawala, the roof deity is worshipped in the full moon period of the month of Phagun (February-March). There are no restrictions against eating meat or drinking alcohol during the worship of this deity. Worship is performed by the senior lineage (rath: Bys.) member in his house and all members of the lineage assemble to take part. This deity and Gyamarang Sayang Se have certain clan divinity aspects, especially since they are worshipped by the lineage as a whole, but the Byanshi consider them to be guardians of the roof and the door, hence household divinities. These divinities are considered to be less aggressive than clan or village deities, and are concerned mainly with the protection of the household or family.

The Byanshi call their ancestors simitang (spirits of the dead). Ancestors are worshipped at least once a year, and if a person has two residences (as most Byanshi do) ancestor worship must be performed upon first entering the new residence each year. If a person is living in somebody else's house, he must worship his own ancestors, but in a place outside of his friend's or landlord's residence. When worship to any other god is performed, the ancestors must be invited and given a share of the offering.

The term gram devata (village gods) is used synonymously with kul devata (clan god) or istha devata (also roughly clan god), but the Byanshi term is syang se. The reason for the confusion is partly translation, but also the fact that each village has a single temple (kipang and sometimes called sathan) for all clans to worship at regardless of the number of clans in the village as well as the household divinities clan aspects which cause some confusion. When the ceremony is held to ensure the long life of the eldest son (see above), it is to this temple that the children are taken. The names of the gram devata are as follows: Chhangru, Mahadhau; Tinkar, Namase; Garbyang, Kungar; Kuti, Gulacha; Gunji, Jagmal; Nabi, Thangpang; and Rongkong, Dhanakong (the last five villages are located in India). When these gods are worshipped each rath contributes the items needed for worship: a white goat, (black is inauspicious) grain (whatever grain is being eaten at the time, the amount contributed by the household dependent on the number of members in the rath), sattu (fried grain flour),



unprocessed wool and cloth, which is cut into strips and hung as streamers from the temple. The goats are sacrificed and the intestines, parts of the belly and some other pieces are cooked by themselves, offered to the god and then eaten at the shrine by those present. The rest of the meat is distributed to the lineage members as prasad. This prasad is not distributed outside the clan (though prasad from the worship of the household divinities can be so distributed) so that a married girl will not receive prasad from the home of her husband, but must worship her own natal divinities, even though she worships her husband's gods. Likewise, the husband goes to the wife's parents' house and worships her deities, but cannot receive prasad. This worship is called sime puja. In recent years there has been some "cost-cutting" in that each family will donate cash rather than goats. From that cash, goats are purchased. Village deities are worshipped each in the full moon period of Bhadau. The gram devata are the most important to the Byanshi, as they look after the welfare of both the lineage and the village as a whole and are very aggressive if offerings are not made. There are several secondary deities as well within the village (for example Namjung, Amigurma, Knasatha, Knasafe, Cholakote and so on) of relatively minor importance.<sup>17</sup>

Several Hindu deities or Hindu - derived deities are worshipped by the Byanshi as a whole. For example, Byans Rikhi (Sidha), the legendary teacher is worshipped as a god, along with Devi, Kailash Mahadev (Hyangangari: Bys.) as well as Baram (a god worshipped by Brahmins and Thakuris throughout this region) and Namjung.

Baram and Namjung are worshipped similarly to the gram devatas mentioned above (i.e. goat sacrifice), but here by the Byanshi shaman (: dangrya) rather than the lineage head. Byans Rikhi and Devi are worshipped by all Byanshis at the same time. The Nepali Byanshi worship Byans Rikhi on the 5th day of the full moon of Bhadau (August-September). The puja is performed at the confluence of the Mahakali and Nampa rivers below Chhangru. He is worshipped with flowers, incense, rice and sweets and on the puja day meat and alcohol are tabooed. Kailash Mahadev is worshipped simultaneously. The Byanshi call upon their metal workers from Duhu garkha to play at the puja.

Each lineage has its own shrine to Devi. If possible, she is worshipped in every month in the full moon. But her main worship is also held in the month of Bhadau. Goats are sacrificed and on occasion khichadi (rice cooked with dal) is cooked and eaten by all virgin girls. A virgin from each family of the particular rath in question should be present at the time of worship. All others present eat both khichadi and meat.

In addition to these deities the Byanshi are plagued by various ghosts and spirits called sina and also a witch (boksi) known as sinakte. These ghosts and spirits are warded off by black flags

and if a patient is seriously attacked by the spirits, sisno (:net-tles), used shoes, or the smoke of burning chillies are used to exorcise them. Jhankris or dhamis are present among the Byanshi and the Nepali term dangrya is used (sometimes the term lama is also used).<sup>18</sup> Dangryas come from particular lineages, but are not necessarily the sons of another dangrya. The mantras are supposedly learnt in dreams, usually dreams in which the clan divinities appear. In the initial stages of becoming a dangrya, a youth finds the syllables of the mantras difficult to pronounce. At this point, he must be ritually purified and does so by going on a pilgrimage to one of the Hindu or Buddhist holy places. After he returns, he is considered a full dangrya and must follow certain restrictions; for example he must avoid the touch of ritually polluted women and men and must eat only in certain places. The dangrya wears no special dress, unlike jhankris or dhamis reported in other areas, but before working he must bathe and put on clean clothes. Most dangryas wear silver bangles (nang: Bys.), usually worn only by women in the Byanshi. Byanshi dangryas sometimes wear a long pigtail, plaited with gold or silver thread. This pigtail is used in some cases to drive-off boksis (:witches) or other spirits. When the dangrya goes to the village shrine he sits on a clean cloth, preferably a used tent cloth. Dangryas carry a binti (a vessel filled with water and flowers). Byanshi shamans do not use the expected shaman's drum, but carry the damaru (the small two faced drum associated with Siva) and a bin (:bell) except for those dangryas whose only god is Kailash Mahadev. These dangryas carry damaru and firetongs (:kabche: Bys.) and no bell.

Shamans are consulted in the case of illness, misfortune and loss of objects through theft or other means. They act as an astrologers and are indispensable to all village ceremonies. In the case of epidemics, the dangrya is brought from his house to the village shrine over a road which has been purified with gold water and no bare headed person may stand in front of him. If a man is sick and wishes to seek the help of a western-style doctor, he must first seek permission from the god, through the intercession of the dangrya.

In addition to the dangrya, there are also local medical practitioners known as oshosyungda. These practitioners pass their knowledge from father to son, though some claim that their sema (ancestors) have taught the methods to them in a dream. These men treat superficial illnesses such as wounds, using herbal techniques.

Below, Table 2 gives a list of the basic festivals of the Byanshi.

Calendar of Festivals

Month	:	Festival	:	Description
Baisakh (April-May)	:	Bisu Tihar	:	Special food such as <u>puri</u> , sweets are prepared and eaten on the first day of Baisakh. No deity is worshipped.
Srawan (July-August)	:	Saune Sankranti:	:	No deity is worshipped. Special food is prepared and eaten.
Srawan	:	Saune Tihar	:	This festival is celebrated for two days: the last day of Srawan and the first day of Bhadau. This is also a festival of cattle, when cattle are given special fodder.
Bhadau (August-Sept)	:	Ghiu Tihar	:	On any day of the full moon period, food items are prepared in ghee and eaten. This festival is celebrated for a week. Neighbors are invited and feasted. No deity is worshipped.
Asoj (Sept-Oct)	:	Dasain	:	Special food is prepared and eaten. Unlike Hindus of the region, the Byanshi do not put <u>tika</u> on their foreheads. No deity is worshipped.
Kartik (Oct-Nov)	:	Gai Tihar or Diwali	:	Special food is prepared and eaten. Unlike Hindus they do not worship the goddess Lakshmi and sisters do not garland brothers.
Magh (Jan-Feb)	:	Narahari Tihar	:	On the last day of Poush they make <u>puris</u> and eat them on the following morning of the first of Magh. No deity is worshipped.



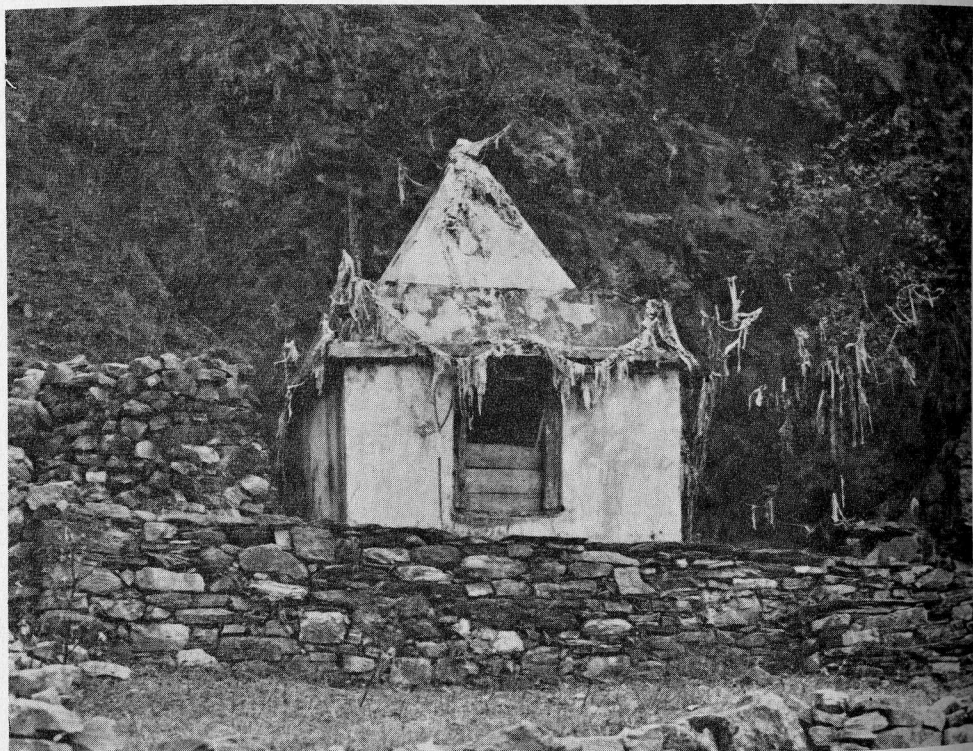
The table above shows that, in spite of the fact that most of the festivals celebrated by the Byanshi during the year are Hindu in their origin, the method of celebrating is quite different than that usually associated with these holidays in other locations. It might be noted that the Byanshi believe that the gods migrate to Mansarovar in Srawan and return to Byans in Bhadau. This is the reason given that there are no holidays celebrated in that period.

There are also agricultural rites which have to be celebrated at certain times of the year. Nuvusam, held in Srawan after the planting of the crops, protects the crops from insects. Insects are collected from the field and are tied in paper, bhoj-patra and other leaves or cloth and placed around the neck and on the horns of a black male goat. The goat is sacrificed at a crossroads outside of the village and the meat is consumed there. The meat must not be brought back to the village, since this would cause the insects to return.

In addition, the Bhumya (earth deity), of the area where the Byanshi settle or purchase land must be celebrated through the sacrifice of a goat.

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Byanshi kipang in Darchula-Khalanga dedicated to Devi, note the streamers hanging from the temple and neighbouring trees.



Shrines called sathan by the Byanshi are often seen throughout the country-side. In the shrine are often found iron tridents (:trisul) varying in shape and size, conch shells (:sankha), as well as bells and flags of different sizes and colours, both in the Byans area and around in Darchula-Khalanga. The Devi shrines are similar to this general type, with red and blue flags, as well as white flags. The sanbans (bodyguards of Devi) always have black flags and are offered black things such as black dal and even black goats. Once things are offered to the sanbans, they must be thrown away and are never consumed. Only white flags are found at the shrine of se (male gods). Two legged animals are never sacrificed, therefore chickens and even eggs are not offered to the gods.

Males have an important organization called seba, which is influential in collective religious performances. In addition, this organization looks after co-operative village ventures such as the maintenance of trails and bridges in the village area, as well as the settling of disputes. There have been no cases of disputes between Byanshis registered in the district court at Darchula-Khalanga. If one fails to abide by the decision of the seba organization, one suffers social ostracization<sup>19</sup> (see also foot note 12, below).

#### Continuity and Change

The Byanshi are progressive group and like the Thakali of central Nepal put a premium on education. Byanshis have sent their children to school in Pithoragarh, Nainital as well as schools in Kathmandu such as St. Xavier's, St. Mary's, Ananda Kut, Laboratory School and so on. There is an intermediate college in Dharchula and degree college in Pithoragarh, heavily patronized by the Nepali Byanshi. Since there are schools in both Byans and Darchula,<sup>20</sup> many Byanshi children go to school in Nepal through high school. This emphasis on education has created a talent pool, allowing some Byanshis to work as overseers, school teachers, officers in Nepalese army, employees in travel agencies and hotels in Kathmandu and even a former minister has come from this group.

In addition to stress on education, there is also an emphasis on entrepreneurship. For example the Byanshi have imported several Indian machine looms for use in the two new factories registered with the H.M.G. Cottage Industry Department. Three families have purchased land in Banjariya in Kanchanpur district, in Nepal's Terai and are organizing what we have termed 'extended farms' in the area.<sup>21</sup> Petitions have been placed before the government on behalf of 180 households in Byans panchayat for resettlement in the Terai. These households claim that since the Byanshis were dependent on trade and cottage industries and their agriculture can only support them for three months out of a year, there is hardship. Since the Chinese have come to Tibet, trade has slackened and consequently these Byanshi claim it's difficult to make

a living. They wish to be resettled as a group, but at the same time they strongly suggest that they will not give up their "shrunk-en" trade upon resettlement. This group, as well as the group already holding land in the Terai, probably desire to form 'extended farms', gaining access to Terai farm land in addition to what they already possess. One might note the desired pattern of migration is the "diadic" one noted for migrants in other areas of Darchula district in Rai, Manzardo, Dahal: 1976. Also, this situation is similar to the action taken by the Thakalis, when their border trade was cut off to the north, notably large purchases of land in their corresponding Terai area, with a 'diadic' pattern of migration (Manzardo: 1976). The situation in Byans is slightly different, however, since the border between China (Tibet) and Nepal still remains permeable, even though trade is now curtailed and controlled, while in Mustang district, the in-migration of the "Khampa" groups caused the border to be firmly and totally closed for the purpose of trade. The Byanshi are playing a game to extend their holdings, the Thakalis had to move to maintain their standard of living.

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Two Byanshi women in traditional dress note that the Byanshi women do not wear sindur (vermillion) in their hair to denote marriage rather they maintain the Tibetan custom of wearing an apron (chyun-bala) to denote married status also a bala (:silver bracelet) at least on the right wrist. These are both quite wealthy women.





Srivastava (1967) has already discussed the striving of the Bhotiya groups in India to achieve elevation in caste status. We will add only a small note to his discussion. The Hindus in Khailanga panchayat claim that upto a decade ago, the Byanshi were considered untouchable by the Hindus. The Hindus practised chito halnu, that is the sprinkling of water after the touch of an untouchable, when they inadvertently came into contact with a Byanshi. We have already noted that the Byanshi now utilize Chhetri clan names when they are in contact with Nepali castes, and claim in various legends to be descended from Sahi Thakuris from Humla or variously Rajputs from Chittor in Rajasthan. A similar process has been noted among the Thakalis (see Iijima: 1963 and Bista: 1971) as well as for other Tibeto-Burman speaking groups in Nepal. For this reason the Byanshi reaction to Hinduization is not surprising, but considering the greater time depth for Hinduization of the Byanshi compared to that of let's say the Thakalis (whose Hinduization took place in 20th century), one must feel that the recent rise in caste mobility (i.e. the gradual acceptance of a least matwali Chhetri standing), if the local Hindus are to be believed, must be due to a fairly recent rise in economic status. This however for the moment remains speculation, but one cannot fail to recognize many similarities in social and economic organization with other Tibeto-Burman speaking trading groups such as the Thakali. Whether this affinity is due to common origin or merely similar reactions to similar constraints, with the common origin far back in the past is impossible to say. Let us for the moment take the Byanshi at face value and note that here is another group in the Himalayas which have solved the problem of ecological insufficiency in their homeland by becoming clever and resourceful intermediaries in the trade between the peoples to the north and the south of the Himalaya.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. This research is an offshoot of work done under a grant from the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies called Hill Migration in Nepal. We would like to express our gratitude to the Dean, Dr. Prayag Raj Sharma, without whose support this project would not have been possible. We would also like to thank Mr. Bahadur Singh Aitawal and Mr. Jaman Singh Bohra, Pradhan Panch of Byans Panchayat for their help.
2. The Byanshi are called sauka meaning rich men by the local Hindus. The term sauka will be used in this paper to mean the entire ethnic group, living both in Nepal and in India, while Byanshi will refer to the strictly Nepalese population of this group. The Byanshi prefer to be called sauka, but we feel this is useful distinction, because the sauka living in India have a slightly different clan-structure, many more clans and a different economy. Sauka has been used by Raipa (1974) to refer to the Indian population of this group. We will continue this designation, and since the term Byanshi is

derived from the Byans region of Darchula, we will use Byanshi for the people living in Byans.

3. Matawali Chhetris theoretically do not wear the sacred thread and drink alcohol. Presently, however, Matawali Chhetris wear the sacred thread, but continue to drink alcoholic beverages.
4. The research for this study was done in the winter home of the Byanshis in Khalanga Panchayat of Darchula. None of the authors has yet travelled Byans Panchayat, therefore, the information on Byans Panchayat is secondhand.
5. Since the Byanshi of Rapla do not migrate in the winter, it was not possible to interview significant numbers of them. This settled group of Byanshi and the settled group in Sitola Panchayat of the Marma area (garkha) of Darchula are therefore not included in the study, except to note their existence.
6. Prior to coming of the Chinese to Tibet in 1959, agricultural workers came to the Byans region from Bajhang and Humla to work in the fields of Byanshis. They would arrive in Jeth and worked to Srawan, when they would return. Again, they would travel from their home in Asoj and remain until Kartik for the harvest. The Tibetan refugees remain in Byans, for the most part, all year around acting as guards (Bys.: gumi) for the livestock and houses. Some, however, migrate to Darchula-Khalanga in the winter with the Byanshis.
7. The first cross between a male yak, and female Bos indicus, is locally called a jopu (a corrupted form of dzo-ba). A cross between a male Bos indicus and a female yak (dromu) is also locally called jopu, but this cross is considered less healthy and does not live long. The second cross, that is a cross between a jopu and a Bos indicus is termed tolba. For more details, on yak-cattle cross breeding and a terminology for the Dolpo area see Jest, C., Dolpo-Communautés de langue Tibétaine du Nepal, Editions du CNRS, Paris, 1975.

There are reports that the horse is utilized for ploughing fields as well. Fields are ploughed using a single horse, but the plough used with a horse is smaller than that used by a team of bullocks. This has not been confirmed however.

8. Jest, C., "Le Haute Seti, pays du dieu Langa", Objets et Mondes, Tome XIV, Fasc. 4, Hiver, 1974, p. 252-55.
9. This perhaps explains the difference between our understanding and the list of clans produced by Raipa (1973) who listed five clans for the Nepali Byanshi as well.

10. There is some dispute about to whom the revenue was paid. According to one informant, there exists a sanad, written by the British government of India, the Tibetan government and Sri 3 ko Sarkar (Rana government) of Nepal, which gave the revenue of the five Byanshi villages (both in India and Nepal), to the Nepalese government. As stated above much of the land of Byanshi villages located in India is on Nepalese soil, hence even though the Byanshis of these villages were Indian nationals, they were still obligated to pay Nepalese land tax. This sanad is dated 1961 B.S. (1904 A.D.). As yet we have not been able to find this document.
11. This institution is practised by the Nepali castes in Far-Western Nepal as well. These institutions are known as deoda khelne, sabha basne, and ganja khelne.
12. Cash contributions are always systematized. The village male organization (seba) meet the night before a ceremony and organize a meeting called jumko. In this jumko, the council decides which contributions should be given and how they are to be spent. Villagers then give their contributions on the basis of the resolution made by the jumko. If all the money contributed is not spent in the performance of that particular rite, the excess is contributed to a village fund to be utilized for collective religious rites, feasting guests or government officials or for use in village building projects.
13. The yak (a female when a female dies, male when a male dies) is treated as if he was the dead person. The yak is fed, given drink and has the clothes of the dead person hung on him. He is given tea and the food loved by the dead man while he was alive. The hoofs of the animal are washed as if they were the hands and feet of the dead and the yak is taken through the activities of the daily life of the dead man for three days. On the fourth day the final purification is done and the horns of the yak are decorated with gold (or silver in the case of the poor). This is called sabi. The whole body of the yak, from neck to tail, is decorated with ochre (called rathangyam) and the yak is led toward Kailash (sometimes by the Tibetans) and released. The yak is considered to be the holy animal of Kailash and when such a yak is given in the name of the dead, the dead would assuredly go to heaven (baikuntha).
14. It is for this reason that modern girls who wear their hair unbound are considered to be witches by the older Byanshis.
15. Actually the situation is a bit more complicated in the case of gon. Since all Byanshi deities are worshipped in full moon period, the gon ceremony must fall in the new moon period, therefore if a man dies on the first day of the full moon period, they must wait for the 15 days until the new moon to



perform the gon. If a man dies in the new moon period, the ceremony must be held before that period ends, even if he dies on the last day of the new moon. Since sarat can be performed in any period of the month, it is likely that the sarat ceremony would be substituted for a gon ceremony, if one were to die toward the end of the new moon period, especially since sarat is fairly loose and can be postponed if it is inconvenient to hold it at the proper time.

16. See Jest, 1974 for further references to this god. Also see C. Jest, "Encounters with Intercessors in Nepal" in Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas, Hitchcock and Jones (ed.), 1976, especially p. 304 and 305 where Jest states, "Langa is a divinity with extensive magical powers, who intervenes when the dhami officiates." See also footnote 15 p. 308.
17. There is information that there is a clan in Tinkar that worships a kul devta, whose shrine is located at the confluence of the Limi Karnali and Chuwa Khola, below Simikot in Humla. It is said that this group made a yearly pilgrimage to this region, but now the trips have become irregular. It is also mentioned that part of this group still lives in this region and intermarries with the local population. There are three groups of villages in the region. One group is of Byanshi population, a second is of Tibetan-speaking population and there is a third medial village as well. The Byanshis will intermarry with the medial village and the medial village will intermarry with the Tibetan-speakers. No direct intermarriage will take place between the Byanshis and the Tibetan-speakers.
18. One informant noted that the same man can be called both. The term lama refers to a shaman when he is not possessed (i.e. a man with knowledge, a potential healer), while dangrya refers to the same man in possession.
19. Though this group is religiously based and differs from the gram samiti it might be noted that it serves a function similar to the Thakali samaj mentioned in Manzardo and Sharma: 1975. Also note that the method used i.e. ostracization is similar to the method used by the samaj, the result (i.e. no disputes outside the group) is the same.
20. There are two primary schools in Byans Panchayat and one middle school. Byans is fortunate to have several very dedicated masters, one a Brahmin from Darchula-Khalanga, who has been teaching Byanshi children in both Byans and Khalanga Panchayats for more than 12 years, migrating with them throughout the year. Speaking fluent Byanshi, he is probably the expert on Byanshi society in Nepal.

21. The term 'extended farm' comes from Hill Migration in Nepal and is defined as a type of reversible migration, where farmers "have sufficient capital to purchase land outside their home area for the purpose of investment and cash crop production. This investment land is purchased in addition to subsistence land in the village of origin, and is usually purchased in an ecological zone different than that of the village of origin. A member of the extended family usually will shuttle between the various land holdings. Sufficient labour can be obtained to simultaneously maintain both farms, although the different seasons might cause one farm or the other to be emphasized" (Manzardo, Rai, Dahal, 1975: 30).

## Appendix I

Byanshi Agricultural Calendar

In the Byans region there is only one crop cultivated a year, i.e. from Baisakh to Kartik. Wheat and paddy are never cultivated due to the problem of irrigation, snow, severe cold and poor soil condition.

Baisakh (April - May)	The field (unirrigated or <u>pakho</u> land; locally known as <u>re</u> ) is either ploughed or hoed. Manure is carried from the house ( <u>dar</u> : Bys.) to the field and spread. Potato followed by <u>napal</u> (small grained wheat) followed by <u>rayo</u> are sown. When the potato forms a tuber, it is divided into two to four pieces and resown. The field is levelled. The Byanshi traders start their trading trip to Taklakot.
Jeth (May - June)	The remaining fields are ploughed and sowing of <u>napal</u> , <u>uwa</u> (naked barley), <u>tite phapar</u> (bitter buckwheat), potato and <u>rayo</u> continues. On the third week <u>napal</u> is weeded. Cabbage is sown. The seedbeds for green vegetables are manured and prepared.
Asad (June - July)	Sowing of <u>uwa</u> and bitter buckwheat continues. Earlier variety of buckwheat, <u>uwa</u> and <u>napal</u> are weeded. Green vegetables such as radish ( <u>lafe</u> : Bys.) coriander, beans ( <u>kosi</u> : Bys.) <u>rayo</u> ( <u>Brassica</u> sp: Latin), carrot ( <u>chhankan</u> : Bys.) <u>govi mula</u> (:khol rabi) and cabbage are sown.
Srawan (July - August)	Buckwheat, potato, <u>napal</u> and <u>uwa</u> are weeded for the second time.
Bhadau (August - Sept.)	Potato and green vegetables such as <u>rayo</u> are harvested. Some households prepare manure and store for the next year. Firewood is collected.
Asoj (September - Oct.)	Fodder collection is done intensively. Grains such as buckwheat, potato, <u>uwa</u> , <u>napal</u> are harvested. Radish, <u>rayo</u> and other green vegetables are reaped. Harvested grains are ground into flour or meal and stored in <u>vinjims</u> (:Bys.).
Kartik (October - Nov.)	The later variety of <u>uwa</u> and <u>napal</u> are harvested up to the 15th of the month. Vegetables are also collected. The Byanshi traders return from Taklakot and start their trip to south i.e. Darchula-Khalanga.



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