

## THE "CALLING," THE *YETI*, AND THE *BAN JHAKRI* ("FOREST SHAMAN") IN NEPALESE SHAMANISM\*

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The *ban jhakri* (jungle/forest shaman) of the Himalayas is a spirit, a god of the shamans, and a creature said to be partially human. They are sort of gnome, yoda-type figures, tricksters, and shamanic teacher/initiators. The *banjhakri* is the Nepali name given to the small *yeti* (three to five feet tall) whose red or golden hair covers his entire body except for face and hands. According to legend, *ban jhakri* live in forests and caves and kidnap young candidates, typically between seven and twenty years of age, to initiate into shamanism. Only those youths who are *chokho* (pure) in body and heart are retained for teaching, ideally for thirty days, before being returned to the place from which they were initially abducted. Candidates with physical scars or impure hearts are released quickly, often violently "thrown" from the *ban jhakri*'s cave, or worse, captured by his big and ferocious wife, the *ban jhakrini*, who desires to cannibalize the young initiate.

The focus of this paper is the intimate connection between the shaman's "calling" in Nepal and those liminal figures of the ancient forests, jungles, mountains, and caves known as the *yeti* and the *banjhakri*: These anomalous characters have an overlapping cultural mythology: they are indigenously believed to be spirits but also current-living vestiges of the ancient past, with a physical appearance and presence, who also manifest in dream and trance states. Thus they coexist in two realities which interpenetrate and are not separated in Nepali consciousness.

Like the *yeti*, there is extensive oral mythology on the *ban jhakri*, but there is not the same level of public interest and therefore no literature of which I am aware devoted exclusively to the *ban jhakri*. However, a few very interesting descriptions of *ban jhakri* initiatory encounters are given in Hitchcock and Jones (1976): from the Limbu (Sagant, 1976), from shamans living in the Kalimpong area near the Nepal-Indian border (Macdonald, 1976), and the Solokumbu Sherpa (Paul, 1976). The Thami and Tamang *ban jhakri* from the Dolakha district are discussed by Miller (1997), from

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\*Foreign terms are in Nepali unless indicated otherwise.  
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Tamang residing in Kathmandu by Skafté (1992), and in Boudha (just a few miles from Kathmandu) by Peters (1978,1981).

The *yeti* is not a missing link, as some early anthropologically minded persons believed, but the primary character in a vast oral tradition about becoming a shaman, something I have encountered repeatedly over twenty years of investigating shamanism in Nepal. My dissertation (Peters, 1978) and subsequent book (Peters, 1981) studies Gajendra, a Tamang shaman, who was considered a *banjhakri* initiate due to his "calling" at the age of thirteen. Since that time, I have heard many other stories about the initiatory encounters of future shamans with *banjhakri*. These personal accounts come from individuals from various Nepali ethnic groups including Tamang, Helembu Sherpa, Magar, Gurung (all *bhotiya*, Le., of Tibetan ethnicity), as well as from Hindu sweeper and tailoring castes. Despite cultural differences and personal embellishments, their stories are virtually the same. This article is an attempt to integrate this ethnographic material on the *banjhakri* with previously published accounts and discuss the relevance of the *yeti* to this pan-Nepali paradigmatic *mythos* of the shamanic "calling."

#### THE *YETI*

The *yeti* is very popular in Nepal. Royal Nepal Airways boasts of its "*yeti* service," and its main office features a *yeti* statue. One of Nepal's few five-star hotels is the Yak and Yeti. The *yeti* has been the topic of much discussion, and numerous expeditions have been launched to discover one, including one by Sir Edmund Hillary (Hillary & Doug, 1962). Many sightings have been reported, yet no photographs exist, only highly suspect artifacts and footprints. A plethora of literature both supports and debunks these finds. Most lay Nepalese believe in *yeti* but say they are rare, almost extinct nowadays as a result of human aggression (Lall, 1988a).

The term *yeti* is attributed to diverse linguistic sources. In Tibetan, *yeti* or *ne-te* is a bear that stands erect. The Tibetans also call it *mete* which means bear-man. It may also be derived from the Tibetan *yeh-teb* meaning man of the high snow mountains (Majupuria & Kumar, 1993). The Tibetans sometimes call it *metoh* (unwashed) *kangini* (snowman), translated by Newman in 1921 as "abominable snowman" (Majupuria & Kumar, 1993). According to the Sherpa, the term comes from *yah* (rock) and *teh* (man), thus "rockman" or "cliff dweller" (Pandey, 1994). However, Norbu (in Norbu & Turnbill, 1972) says that *yeti* is not originally a Tibetan word. Some believe it derives from the Sanskrit *yaksha*, a being of superhuman strength with thick hair covering their bodies. It is half-human and half-beast, with both a wild nature and intelligence (Gupta & Nath, 1994). Another view is that *yeti* is derived from *yati*, a Hindu hermit who retreats from the world and into the forests and caves, living without fire, protection, or human comforts in pursuit of emancipation from worldly bondage (Lall, 1988a).

There is also a long list of appellations for the *yeti*. In Nepal, he is sometimes known as *mahalongoor* or "great monkey," and one of the important traditional abodes of the *yeti* in Nepal is Mahalongoor Hirmal. This aligns the *yeti* with the revered Monkey God and King of the Monkeys, Hanuman, who, like many descriptions of the *yeti*, is

also represented as half-human and half-monkey. Hanuman is endowed with magical powers, can change his shape, and fly like the shaman. The Lepchas of Sikkim call them *chu mung* (spirit of the glacier) or *10mung* (mountain spirit). To them, the *yeti* is the lord of all mountain and forest animals, especially the deer, and is thought to be a god of the hunt. In India, he is called *van manus*, in Nepal, *banmanche*, both of which mean forest man and carry the connotation of wild man. He is known in Tibet as *rime* (forest dweller), *me shormpo* (strong man), *me chenpo* (great man), or *megod* (wild man, untamed) and is therefore an apt symbol, according to Samuels (1993), for the shamanistic aspects of Tibetan culture and religion which he sharply contrasts to the "tame" clerical monastic ethos.

The smallest and fastest *yeti* is named *rang shin bombo* (lit.: "self-generated shaman") by Tibetan tribal groups like the Sherpa and Tamang, and in Nepali he is called *ban jhakri*. The term *bombo* means shaman, as does *jhakri* in Nepali, and these *yeti* are often thought to have mystical powers (Gupta & Nath, 1994; Pandey, 1994).

The origins of the *yeti* are told in various legends. In one Sherpa legend, they are the offspring of a Tibetan girl and a large ape, thereby hovering, so to speak, between human and animal worlds. They are spirits that magically materialize from a fragment of bone (Lall, 1988b). In another legend, they are living forms taken by the souls of the dead—the living dead. Hindu sources identify them as "spirits" or "descendants from the sun." The sun is one symbol for the highest realized consciousness in Hinduism (Schuhmacher & Woerner, 1989). They are thought to be the loyal followers of Shiva (Mahadev), the Lord of Yogins, Lord of Animals, Bestower of Wisdom, World Creator and Destroyer, and major divinity of Nepalese Hindus and many lay Buddhists. In Tibetan Buddhist lore, *yeti* are sometimes seen as guardian spirits, protectors of the *dharma*, and associated with Chen-ri-zi, the God of mercy and compassion (Saunders, 1995). *Yeti* are said to venerate Shiva's yellow-clothed *sadhu* mendicant renunciates (Lall, 1988a). Thus the *yeti* is both creature and spirit, Buddhist and Hindu, and is believed in by various ethnic groups in Nepal.

There are three types of *yeti* identified. The first is called *nyalmo*. It is huge (fifteen feet tall), dangerous, and carnivorous. It is bearlike and preys on yak and other large horned animals by catching them by the horns and twisting their necks. They are said to be maneaters and will kill in order to eat human brains. The females are biggest and lead the group. They are reported to capture humans and mate with them (Gupta & Nath, 1994; Majupuria & Kumar, 1993). *Nyal* are listed by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993) as originally mountain divinities of the old Bon shamanistic religion; *mo* is a female suffix in Tibetan (Jaschke, 1972), i.e., female mountain divinity.

The second type of *yeti* is the *chuti*, standing about eight feet tall, and both vegetarian and carnivorous. The *chuti* live at altitudes between 8-10,000 feet, below that of the *nyalmo*. Like the *nyalmo*, their hands are larger than their feet, and they are black and hairy with short necks.

*Rang shin bombo* (Tamang/Tibetan) or *ban ihakri* are the third type and, as noted earlier, stand only three to five feet tall. They have red or golden hair covering their bodies. Some believe these *yeti* live in the forests at the lowest altitudes and are typically vegetarians. They are sometimes reported coming into villages to take grain,

flour, and milk. *Rang shin bombo* walk upright and are only infrequently quadrupedal. They can be dangerous but will only attack if provoked. The discrepancies in height reported may be because the different types of *yeti* live at different altitudes (Gupta & Nath, 1994; & Kuma, 1993), although others suggest that all types live at higher altitudes in summer and lower ones in winter when food resources diminish in the high Himalayas (Pandey, 1994).

Aside from differences in height, most observers are in general agreement about what the *yeti* looks like. Its head is conical or egg-shaped, eyes deeply sunken, with red wrinkled flat faces like an orangutan, although the *nyalmo*, as mentioned earlier, are said to be black and bearlike. The hair of the males is long and covers the eyes; a full beard covers the rest of the face. All *yeti* have long arms, thick shoulders, and short legs. They have no tail. The Sherpa consider them dangerous, believing that even looking at them can bring bad luck, illness, coma, or even death. They are nocturnal and can see perfectly at night. They also have long ears and correspondingly acute hearing. Feet turn inwards; toes point backwards. It is said they are considered less than human but more than ape, and live in Himalayan caves and in the jungles. They do not wear clothing, have neither tools nor weapons, do not use fire, eat their food cold and raw, and are afraid of fire and the smell of gun powder. They roar like a tiger, produce a bark resembling a cough, and a softer *koo koo koo*. Except for the larger *nyalmo*, who are matriarchal, *yeti* live in patriarchal families (Gupta & Nath, 1994). One report suggests they have two eyes in back as well as two eyes in front of their heads, and a small horn in the middle of their forehead (Ashkinazi & Gongi, 1979).

Female *yeti* have large breasts hanging down below their abdomens, which they will sling over their nape when they rest and carry in their hands when they run. Lore suggests that the best way to escape from a *yeti* is to run downhill. The hair of the male *yeti* blocks his vision; the female will lose her balance running downhill holding her large breasts in front of her. Their lair stinks, and their bodies reek heavily of garlic. Yet they are amorous and there are numerous reports of matings between humans and *yeti*, even mixed *yeti* and human families. The female is dangerous, and there are myths of her rage. In one, a female *yeti* bears a child fathered by a captured human. When he escapes, she kills the child and eats its brain, which bigger *yeti* are said to desire. Their intelligence is thought to be less than human, yet *yeti* seem capable of experiencing the full range of human emotions including love for a human spouse, human friend, and their own children. They cry when their feelings are hurt, and there is one legend about a *yeti* suicide due to loss of family, another about a *yeti* suicide in anticipation of being killed by a human hunter. Another tells a story about a *yeti* who saves a human life. They have a taste for alcohol which, according to myth, has contributed to their demise. In relation to humans, their behavior is imitative of what they see, and men have used this tendency against the *yeti*, again contributing to their near-extinction (Gupta & Nath, 1994; LaU, 1988b).

In addition to the larger animals they hunt, *yeti* eat a frog-like creature known as *muphala* that grows very large in the Himalayas. The local population also eats this animal, and there are stories of frequent encounters at the rocky places where these frogs are abundant. They *also* eat a salty moss growing on rocks in the moraine fields. *Yeti* are also said to raid granaries and gardens, eating potatoes and vegetables fresh from the earth. Further, they will sometimes eat with the backs of their hands (Lall,

1988a). The *yeti's* meat is considered to be a cure for gallstones, jaundice, and mental illness, according to an eighteenth-century Tibetan medical text. They have a life span of more than three hundred years (Majupuria & Kumar, 1993). Bon shamans believe their blood to be highly efficacious in pacifying or engaging the help of aggressive spirits (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1993).

*Yeti* are thought to have spiritual abilities like ESP and can see and hear at long distances. They do divination by inspecting the heart of a recently killed animal, just as human shamans do. They have been sighted doing community rituals after a hunting kill and during the full moon. They shape-shift at will, assuming guises ranging from the big and monstrous to smaller than the human hand. They can also become invisible. One tale says their *size* increases as the day *gets* later, until they are huge at night. They are believed to follow the hidden course of the earth's magnetic fields or "ley lines," a practice which may be cross-cultural among tribal hunter and gathering peoples, found in animals and, albeit much less frequently, among urban dwellers (Gupta & Nath, 1994; Michell, 1983).

*Yeti* are sacred beings. Still they are feared and dangerous. Children are especially afraid as the *yeti* is a sort of bogeyman utilized by parents as a threat. "Don't do this ... or the *yeti* will take you ...." (Pandey, 1994). The children hear stories about victims who never return, while others who are fortunate enough to escape return unkempt, unclothed, walking on all fours, have forgotten language, behave insanely or like an animal, or tell harrowing stories of their capture, imprisonment, sexual seduction, and escape.

#### THE *BAN JHAKRI*

The *ban jhakri* who kidnaps young people in order to initiate them into shamanism is not generally considered a *yeti* in either the literature on the *yeti* or on that about *ban jhakri* initiation. However, as has already been established, they have the same name, as does the shaman who is so initiated. Thus, there is some inevitable semantic confusion, and when necessary for clarification. I'm going to call them *ban jhakri yeti*, *ban jhakri* teacher, and *ban jhakri* shaman. I believe that the first two are the same, they are spirit and prototype master shaman. The third is obviously the human shaman.

The semantic difficulty is further complicated by physical and mental similarities. I recorded stories in which the small *ban jhakri yeti* and the *ban jhakri* teacher were so close in the minds of the storytellers that they were easily interchanged. In one account, the *ban jhakri* teacher was the protagonist; in another telling of the exact same story by another person, it was the *ban jhakri yeti* that assumed the central character role.

The *ban jhakri* teacher, like the *ban jhakri yeti*, is a forest and cave dweller. Both are considered *ban manche*, or wild men, and also spirits and deities. Both have conical heads and hair covering every part of their bodies except hands and face. Both are unclad and demand their abductees be naked (Dhakal, 1996). *Ban jhakri* teachers are small (three to five feet tall), always male, and have big ears. When seated, their

tangled hair completely covers their bodies. Extraordinarily long hair is also a feature of the ancient Tibetan Black Bon shamans (Ekvall, 1964). Wives of the *banjhakri* teachers, the *banjhakrini*, are ferocious, bigger than the males, with long breasts slung over their napes, like the female *nyalmo yeti*, the big matriarchal *yeti*. Further, the *banjhakrini* is often called *nyaimo* (Peters, 1981, 1990).

*Ban jhakri* teachers are further similar to *yeti* in that their feet turn inwards and backwards (see Miller, 1997), and they sometimes eat with the backs of their hands. Also they are nocturnal, see well at night, have the ability to shape-shift into anything, can make themselves invisible, and always capture their candidates or victims after sundown. Like the *yeti*, they are not human but possess many human attributes, live for more than three hundred years, are loyal servants of Shiva, and have amorous propensities toward humans. *Ban jhakri* teachers are said to have taken female humans as mates and have half-human offspring, some of whom become shamans with psychic abilities. I have not found this to be true of the female *nyalmo* and the children of her captive husbands. The *ban jhakri* teachers dress in white frocks with peacock feather headdresses when on pilgrimage, as shamans do on pilgrimage, and beat small golden shaman drums or golden plates, which they teach to their initiates so they may invoke them in the future. These latter features are not mentioned for the *ban jhakri yeti*.

The *nyalmoyeti* physically cares for her captives if they are submissive, turning them into dependent reproductive prisoners, but, as mentioned earlier, if they don't accept their fate, they are killed or must risk a dangerous escape. However, the *banjhakri* teacher instructs the youths they abduct, returning them unscathed if they are deemed worthy.

Those whom the *ban jhakri* teacher considers imperfect suffer a different fate, as in the case of Giri, a forty-year-old Tamang female I met in Boudha, She relates that one evening when she was seven years old, she was walking in the forest with her father at dusk. When he wasn't looking, a *banjhakri* grabbed her from behind some trees and thickets. She was taken through the forest to his cave where he took her clothes from her and had sex with her. Afterwards, when inspecting her body, he discovered she had a slight scar on her face-i-an imperfection-and immediately "threw" her out of the cave. However, because they were "married," he has not left her spiritually and has caused her to shake uncontrollably since she was a child. During the one day she spent with the *ban jhakri!* teacher, she learned some healing *mantra* but she does not know how to keep the *banjhakri* teacher in its "proper place," to "tame" it so that it does not come to her involuntarily and make her shake out of control which causes her distress. Thus she has not been able to become a shaman. Many years ago, she found a guru, but this guru could not help her, for he himself did not know how to please the *banjhakri* and make offerings to it of flour and grain. The *banjhakri* teachers never take a sacrifice of living things, which is true of all deities. Only the lower spirits are fed blood, according to Aama Bomba ("Mother Shaman"), a master Tamang shaman. Giri has now become a disciple shaman to Aama Bomba, who will teach her how to please the *banjhakri* to stop him from attacking her, and give her the proper *mantra* to invoke the *ban jhakri* when she needs him.

Giri is a very interesting example as there are only a few accounts of girls being taken by the *banjhakri* in order to be taught (for another example, see Skafte, 1992). In fact,

nearly all shamans deny that it happens. Aama Bornbo, Giri's guru, told me only three months before she met Giri, that girls were never taken by the *banjhakri* and taught to be *jhankri*. It seems to be that belief is changing to keep pace with social change for women in Nepal.

Baktabahadur, a Tamang man of thirty years from a small village near Boudha, was also taken as a seven-year-old child and kept for one day. *Thebanjhakri* tried to teach him *mantra*, but he could not focus and memorize them. Thus the *banjhakri* got angry and threw him out. Baktabahadur literally flew out of the cave and hit a huge rock which seriously slashed his lip. He had to spend days in the hospital and still wears the scar, not only of the physical wound but of the traumatic encounter with the *banjhakri* teacher who possesses him to this day and makes him shake. Because Baktabahadur is not a healer, most people, including his wife, believe that he is crazy. Currently he is being initiated and treated for this *banjhakri* illness by Aama Bombo, who has been embodied by this particular *banjhakri* teacher in ritual, who told Baktabahadur and others present that Aama Bombo was to teach him those very *mantra* he did not learn as a child and train him to become a shaman, which he is capable of becoming since he has a "pure heart."

I spoke to other shamans who were "thrown" by the *banjhakri* after only one day because of some defect, one because he passed gas, another because he became ill and fainted at the time of their kidnappings. Currently these men, one of tailor caste and the other a Tamang, function as shamans in their communities. The *banjhakri* teacher still embodies these shamans, but in a more controlled trance-possession state than Baktabahadur and Giri, who are still initiates. And, while it is true that these practicing shamans call themselves *banjhakri* shamans, none of them are initiates of the *banjhakri*. They say the *banjhakri* did not "complete" them. They were thrown before finishing the entire experiential process as told in the *mythos*.

Most agree that the ideal length of time to stay with the *banjhakri* teacher is thirty days, also the maximum time to learn what is being taught. Any more time risks inevitable capture by the *banjhakrini* and is superfluous, according to Aama Bombo. Reports in the literature vary; some shamans speak of three-, five-, seven-, or nine-day ordeals. Others speak in terms of years (Macdonald, 1976). Gajendra, a Tamang shaman, spent seven days with the *banjhakri* teacher who abducted him when he was thirteen. The *banjhakri* made him "crazy" and shake, possessed him, and called him to the forest where he lived with him for a week, naked, and was instructed by the *banjhakri* to eat red earthworms off the backs of his hands, under threat of decapitation by the *banjhakrini*, a tall, fat, black, furry beast who whipped his hands and threatened him with a curved sword (*kukri*) of gold if he did not do precisely what he was taught by the *banjhakri*. The *banjhakri*, who was small with a golden conical head and pointed cap, gave him special initiations and *mantra* that enabled him to master fire and heat, passing tests of placing his hands in boiling oil or sitting in a bed of live coals. When he was released into the forest at night, he was chased by the *banjhakrini* and narrowly won the foot race by descending a hill, as the *banjhakri* had warned he might need to do so in order to escape. Still the *banjhakrini* chased him into a cemetery where he was attacked by evil ghosts (*lagu*) of various types and was finally saved by the clear light of a divinity (Peters, 1989, 1990).

Ram Ali, a young man in his twenties, a Magar *ban jhakri!* shaman from the Pokhara area of Nepal, was taken when he was nine years old. Prior to this, he had dreams, and the *ban jhakri* teacher came to him and said, "I will take you some day and teach and make you a shaman." Stm, when he was finally taken, it was by surprise. He was picking some fruit when the *ban jhakri* teacher came and said, "So you've come to *eat*," giving Ram a few fruits to eat which instantly put Ram into a "dream" or non-ordinary reality, although Ram says the fruit was not a psychedelic.

Ram relates that the wind began to blow like tornado, and there was a big storm accompanied by an earthquake. The *ban jhakri* teacher took him to his cave. Ram says he spent four years with the *ban jhakri* and his wife, whom Ram called "bear woman." Other shamans deny that four years is true, but Ram says he never wanted to leave. It was a fabulous and golden cave. He could see everything and wanted for nothing, but he says it is "imagination" and like a dream. While there, he ate red worms with the backs of his hands, under the threat of being killed and cannibalized by the golden *kukri-wielding ban jhakrini*. Ram describes the *ban jhakri* teacher as five feet tall, golden, hairy, looking *like* a monkey, but able to shape-shift at will. He has long white hair with a pointed cap made of gold and diamonds. The *ban jhakri* teacher taught Ram many shamanic techniques and then returned him as he had found him, unscarred, to the place where he had first abducted him. The *ban jhakri* still appears to him in his dreams and instructs him. Before conducting shamanic healings, Ram invokes the *ban jhakri* who is his chief teaching spirit.

Unlike the *yeti* who does not have a spoken language, the *ban jhakri* teacher communicates telepathically as well as through a secret language. Kailash Surendra, a Magar shaman, was eight years old and tending his family's cows when he was unexpectedly taken from behind the animals' shed by a *sunna jhankri* (a golden *ban jhakri*) and taken to his temple in the forest. He was kept by the *ban jhakri* for four weeks but returned once each week to the place from which he had originally been kidnapped and then taken again on the next evening. However, when Kailash was at home, he was invisible, and the villagers could not see him. He saw them but was unable to speak to them. Kailash communicated with the *ban jhakri* in their secret language, which he could understand, he says, due to becoming embodied by Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of wisdom, while he was with the *ban jhakri* teacher.

Bel Bahadur, Kailash's brother and also a shaman, described the *ban jhakri* teacher as having power objects. He had "thunder-stones" and golden drums with which he taught Bel to play. He keeps a porcupine as a pet who shoots his quills at him so that he might practice blocking the "arrows" sent by evil sorcerers and spirits, something he also teaches to his candidates. Other *ban jhakri* shamans showed me a thunderbolt hurling slingshot, a small bow that sends fire arrows which can destroy an enemy's brain, and a ball of string with which they ensnare enemies. Kailash did not discuss his abduction in depth in our single interview but mentioned that the *ban jhakri's* wife was a dangerous *ban devi* or forest goddess who hunts animals, devours human flesh, and causes aU sorts of problems for hunters.

After the abduction and teachings, the candidates typically take the *ban jhakri* as their *mukhiya guru* or chief tutelary spirit. The *ban jhakri* continues to teach them in



dreams and to embody and instruct them during ritual. The candidates, when they become shamans, light a special candle for the *banjhakri* before doing ritual, burn coals for him with incense, and invoke his spirit with the drum beat he taught them.

Those *banjhakri* shamans who are taught by the *bon.jhakri* teachers are considered to be *rang shin tugpa*. As already mentioned, *rang shin* means "self-generated" in Tibetan, i.e., arising on its own accord from its very nature, of itself, by itself, and involuntarily. *Rang shin* is the Tibetan name for the third type of *yeti*, the *banjhakri yeti*. *Tugpa* means tutelary or teaching spirit, so that the phrase can be literally translated as "spontaneously arising tutelary spirit" (Jaschke, 1972; Peters, 1978) and is a good description of the *banjhakri* teacher.

What this means is that a *rang shin* is a category of *yeti*, a category of shaman, the small *banjhakri* teacher, as well as a chief shamanic teaching spirit, an "inner guru" said to appear spontaneously or, as the Nepalese say, *aph se aph* ("Hautomatically"). Thus all *banjhakri* shamans are *aph se aph* shamans, i.e., spontaneously arising shamans, "called" or chosen by the *banjhakri*. But all *rangshin bombo* or *aph se aph* shamans are not *banjhakri*. Aama Bombo was chosen, "attacked" as they say, by her father's spirit *aph se aph* and not by a *banjhakri*: Thus she does not claim to be a *banjhakri*. Still, because she is embodied by her father who was a *banjhakri*, she knows his memories and experiences *aph se aph*. All her teaching occurred in dreams and visions direct from the spirits *aph se aph*. She had no human *guru*. *Aph se aph* also has the connotation of not being learned or produced through human intention or effort.

Aama Bombo says that, during the Golden Age, all shamans were *aph se aph* or *rang shin*. Nowadays, however, during this Kaliyuga or Dark Age, the connection to heaven is veiled, and most shamans have to learn from each other. Aama Bombo believes, as do most Nepalese shamans, that *mantra* or teachings that arise spontaneously, i.e., given in a dream--*aph se aph* are much more powerful than those learned from other shamans. I believe that totally *aph se aph* shamans who have no *guru*, like Aama Bombo, are very rare, but this requires more study and is not the major topic of this paper (cf Hitchcock, 1976). Aama Bombo says that the scarcity of *aph se aph* shamans indicates that shamans are becoming less powerful.

There are some very powerful "calling" experiences that do not involve the *banjhakri* teacher. Still, the *banjhakri* shaman--those abducted and taught--are typically considered to be the most powerful type of shamans. They are prototypical models for becoming a shaman in Nepal and, so to speak, a mark of distinction and an epithet of supernatural potency and unofficial status.

It is in the dangerous passage aspect of this initiatory scenario with the *banjhakri* teacher that the figure of the *yeti* wife clearly emerges. Both Gajendra, my Tamang teacher, and Ram Ali, a *banjhakri* shaman mentioned earlier, knew that to escape her threats to devour them, they needed to run downhill. In the minds of these shamans, there was little difference between the *banjhakrini* and the large female *nyalmo yeti*. She is more of a dark figure with black hair; he with a golden aura. She is violent and rageful; he is a teacher of shamanic rituals. Yet without her, the passage would be less dangerous and therefore less profound. She is said to leave the cave every evening and

Unlike deities, *lagu* are fed on blood. Chickens and goats are fine, but the powerful *bokshi* need to offer them human blood and are thus killers. The *chada*, on the other hand, feeds these spirits blood taken from his fingers when he plays them. The *choda*, by disposition, is not a murderer. Thus the battle of good vs. evil has been projected onto the plane of the War of *the Sexes*.

The *banjhakri* teacher is the god of shamans. Numerous informants attest that the *ban jhokrin*; is the goddess of the *bokshl*. Her *nyalmo yeti* origin connects her with the man-eating bogeyman stories told to children. She is a beast-a bear-and provokes fear, demanding pieces of the flesh and the lives of the "pure" child disciples her husband abducts. In her and her husband's golden cave, her husband teaches future shamans the techniques to combat her, how to become invisible. chase bad spirits away by mastering fire, to invoke the *banjhakri* teacher (i.e., himself) and other spirits for protection, to shape-shift and fly, and to utilize some of the *ban jhakri's* arsenal of spiritual weapons. She is the driving force behind all this learning and teaching, the dark background. He is a spirit descended from the sun. Without her, he would be without either definition or purpose.

#### THE "CALLING" AND THE TRAINING

The initial process of being kidnapped or taken is said to be the same thing as a "possession" (*chaadhnu*: to climb upon) by the *ban jhakri* teacher who thereby "attacks" the candidate. This is the calling, and it is a "spontaneous selection" (Eliade, 1964), an *aph se aph* experience. But it is often difficult to tell the difference between this "creative illness" and its pathological experience (Ellenberger, 1970). In this context, it is much more difficult for a woman. Her "symptoms" are often recognized as a spirit illness and not as a calling.

It took Aama Bombo ("mother shaman") nine years of experiencing the shaking which is the sign of possession to finally begin developing a relationship with her *mukhiyaguru* (her deceased father) and practice shamanism. The doctors thought she was crazy. Everyone in her family, lamas, and other shamans thought she was beset by evil spirits. Basically because she is a lady, they did not believe that her father, a once famous and powerful shaman, would come to her. Thus she had to master herself without the aid of a shaman guru. All of her training, both didactic and ecstatic, came, as indicated earlier, "automatically" (*rang shin* or *aph se aph*).

But, as stated above, this is rare, for nearly all who are "chosen" *aph se aph-ball jhakri* or not-must find a shaman guru. Gajendra served an apprenticeship for nine years in which, as he explained it, he enhanced his relationship with all his spirits through a sort of on-the-job-training at healing rituals, *guru puja*, which are rituals involving drumming and calling one's *mukhiya guru* to possess them and speak through them. through a series of pilgrimage-initiations in order to acquire *sola!* (power) from Shiva,

When the shaman guru takes his disciples on pilgrimages to Shiva shrines in the forests and mountains on important full-moon festivals, they are on a quest to receive Shiva's *sakti*. They are repeating a Hinduized version of the *banjhakri* origin myth

which relates how Shiva endowed his *sakti* on the first shaman in the Golden Age, the *banjhakri*, so that he could bring candidates to the forest, and there teach them to be healers (see Macdonald, 1976).

During these pilgrimage initiations, *gurupuja*, and on-the-job training, the *banjhokri* neophyte improves on his initial initiatory experience. By playing the drum, first taught by the *banjhakri* teacher, he becomes proficient at invoking the *banjhakri* to be of aid in the context of a healing ritual, the performance of which is the shaman's major social function. Healing rituals are themselves endeavors to defeat the *lagu* and *bokshi* who are attacking and possessing the patients and thereby making them ill. It is believed that the symptoms and illnesses suffered by patients are the result of being "consumed" by *bokshi* and *lagu* which is what the *banjhakri* threaten to do to the young initiants (Peters, 1995).

The healing rituals the shamans perform communicate cultural values, for it is said that *bokshi* attack through conniving to "trick" and thereby "spoil" others. The shamans conquer evil by naming it. The cause of trouble, a sorcery based on malevolent intent, is revealed for aU to see and then sent away to its "proper place," ritually blocked from returning to the patient to cause more damage.

In the reports described above, and numerous others I collected of those *banjhakri* shamans who were kept for a day or less, the *banjhakrini* did not appear. In our examples, those who were kept for a longer period had the full experience and learned how to combat her, becoming apprentice shamans or shamans soon afterwards. Most of the others battled with the *banjhakri* illness of shaking and/or accusations of being insane until they found a guru to teach them. Some are only beginning to learn the trade now, decades later. It is the complete mythos that is experienced by the young candidate that makes *banjhakri* shamans. Without the *banjhakrini*, the *banjhakri* initiatory encounter is one that has been aborted because of some impurity or impropriety of the candidates. As noted above, the shamans themselves recognize these brief encounters as being "incomplete." Those kept for only a day are "thrown"; the others are taught to master the Queen of the Bokshi by the God of the Shamans and then typically returned.

The defining characteristics of the *bokshi* is that she goes against the socially-appropriate, abrogating fundamental values. For the *bokshi*, as we have seen, there are no rules, no *love*. The most powerful commit the worst crimes in order to acquire that power. They are antagonistic to the good and to life. This spiritual evil is often symbolized in the mythopoetic imagination of Nepal as characters who have their feet turned backwards. For example, the *kicakanni*, a *lagu*-type spirit and *bokshi*, is described as hideously ugly with feet that are turned backward, but able to shape-shift into a beautiful phantom who seduces and eventually kills her male victims by draining their energy during intercourse. *Kicakanni* walk backwards to hide their identifying characteristic. Each night, she appears to the unsuspecting man until he finally wastes away.

When the *banjhakrini* discovers her husband's candidate is their cave, she wants to cut him and attempts to give the hungry youth food. However, if he takes it with the palms of his hands, and not the backs, she has tricked him and will cut him. The *ban*

*jhakri* teacher teaches his candidates to eat with the backs of their hands in order to dispel the attack of the *banjhakrini*.

When shamans do healings for disorders in which *bokshi* are implicated, their patients are advised to bring in food which the shaman first blows healing *mantra* into before he has them eat from both the front and back of their hands. This ritual act is called *uito* (right way) when the right palm is facing up and *sulto* (wrong, opposite, or contrary way) when the right palm is facing down. These simple ritual gestures are culturally believed to have far-reaching cosmic implications, as the two sides of the hands, by analogy, are recognized to be the same as positive/negative poles, day/night, visible/invisible, good/evil, male/female, etc. When shamans do *ulto-sulto*, they direct their patients first to do *ulto* to counteract the "poison" that the victims of the *bokshi* attack (the patient) unwittingly ate with no evil intent, in the proper manner (i.e., palm up). Then, with the back of their hand, they eat to get rid of the *lagu* who have attacked them from the hidden backside, imbued with a more powerful shamanic *mantra* than the one given by the *bokshi* to the *lagu* that caused the patient's illness. In a certain sense, the *ulto* part of the rite treats the effects (symptoms); the *sulto* part treats the cause of the patient's problems, i.e., the agents of affliction: *bokshi* and *lagu*. According to Aama Bombo, the *mantra* she puts into the food is one of fire that burns, poisons, and frightens the *lagu*, causing them to flee for their lives and consequently staying off the *bokshi* attack. If patients do not eat with the backsides, the *bokshi* and *lagu* that attack from this clandestine and unseen side cannot be dispelled, and the patient slowly dies.

As mentioned earlier, the peculiar characteristic of backwards or inwards pointed feet is also attributed to the *nyalmo* (or *banjhakrini*) *yeti* as well as the *banjhakri* teacher. The former, as we have seen, is large, dark, female, carnivorous, man-eating; the latter small, golden, male, vegetarian. One is highly dangerous, the other a teacher. One is a spirit associated with illness and the other a tutelary healing spirit. One closely resembles a bear; the other is ape-like. Yet they both kidnap their victims and take them away from society and family. They are naked and sometimes eat uncooked food with the backs of their hands. They both have something golden too: he a golden nimbus-like conehead, and she a golden *kukr*;

They are clearly distinct. Yet the same. Both are *ulto-sulto*. Both embody a trait of the other, and share in the other's darkness and light, like the yin-yang Tao. One is reminded of the universal theme of the mystical union, the sacred marriage of opposites. They are two, but in essence one. An apparent paradox, but at a deep level, two necessary parts of the same process, the process of initiation. The *banjhakri* myth tells of a confrontation with the unconscious which, as Jung (1966) said, is where the gold of the psyche is mixed with shadow, where the best and worst is seen to somehow live together for better or worse and work together as necessary complements. In Jungian psychology, it is this confrontation with the shadow that is the necessary beginning of the individuation process.

At bottom, the process of initiation is a process of transformation. It requires a death and a rebirth, and it is a dangerous passage. A powerful shamanic initiation is akin to a "spiritual emergency" which is a critical event and is painful. However, the crisis is necessary; without it there is not opportunity for change and growth (Grof & Grof,

1989). Rites of passage, by definition, are "life-crisis" rituals (Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1960).

The shamanic initiation embodied in the tales of *ban jhakri* shamans require an encounter with evil, for that is what the heroic shaman must combat. If he does not experience it, overcome his fear, he will not be able to help others who are victimized by it. In it, there must be a confrontation with the *ban jhakrini*, the prototype bogeyman, *bokshi*, and a dominant symbol of evil.

This confrontation typically occurs in a cave. Caves (*gufa*) are the traditional places where Tibetan and Indian yogins and shamans retreat. *Gu* currently can be any structure that is enclosed and used for an initiation. Numerous types of Nepalese initiations occur in a *gufa*, or such enclosed structure known as *gufa*; Like all places of retreat, they are spaces of the "betwixt" and "between" or "liminal" condition of the initiation process-separated/isolated but yet to be returned. It is the period of a "compressed learning" where the sacra are revealed. To the Nepalese shaman, these are the *mantra* and the shamanic tools and paraphernalia of the *ban jhakrt*. But the liminal is a time of paradox and the coexistence of opposites. Self-generated transformation-e-'spiritual emergence'-occurs in times of danger and crisis. Thus the *ban jhakrini*, her cannibalistic threats and bestial nature, resonate from childhood nightmares of being kidnapped by *yeti* and other bogeymen. The shaman needs to master those very same demons and *bokshi* to heal his patients- to awaken from their nightmares-by using what the *ban jhakri* taught him to do.

The *banihakri* are the masters of liminality. They stand at the juncture of two realities, in between categories and boundaries. They are physical and spiritual, human and animal, beings of dream and of reality. They are the masters in a numinous unbounded space where everything is backwards, opposite, and dangerous. They are the neophytes' guides through the dark night before initiatory rebirth.

There are hints that, at one point in the ancient past, this mythic scenario may have reflected or been part of a profound shamanic rite of passage. Be this as it may, today it is, as the shamans say, an *aph se aph* experience, that is, it arises on its own, unbidden and automatically, to those chosen to be shamans by the spirits. It is a spontaneous rite of passage.

Indeed the *yeti* and *ban jhakri* are real. They are not just characters in a story told, but realities lived in the soul of the Nepalese shaman.

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