

Gahri



Population:

5,880 (2000)
7,050 (2010)
8,350 (2020)

Countries: India, China

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: 15

Overview of the Gahri

Other Names: Bunan, Lahuli of Bunan, Ghara, Lahul, Lahouli, Lahuli, Boonan, Punan, Poonan, Erankad, Keylong Boli, Lahaula

Population Sources:

4,000 in India (2000, B Grimes [1997 figure])

1,467 in China (1995, Global Evangelization Movement)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Western Himalayish, Kanauri

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 70%

Practising Buddhists: 60%

Christians: 0.2%

Scripture: Portions 1911

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Lahouli: Bunan

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: BFU

Approximately 6,000 Gahri people live on both sides of the remote India-China border in the western Himalayan mountains. The *Ethnologue* lists a 1997 estimate of 4,000 Gahri living in the Gahr Valley in the north Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.¹

A further 1,500 Gahri people live across the border in an extremely isolated area of western Tibet. Western Tibet is separated from Xinjiang to the north by the imposing Kunlun Mountains, and in the south Himalayan peaks rise over 7,000 metres (23,000 ft.) above sea level. China and India had several military border clashes here during the 1950s and 1960s. China

has since claimed thousands of square miles of territory from India, including the area inhabited by the Gahri. The Gahri's isolated homeland is so remote that few outsiders have ever travelled there. The Indian government, who also claim the territory inhabited by the Gahri, did not find out that the Chinese had built a road there until two years after it was completed.²

The Gahri people are known by a variety of ethnic names, including Bunan³ and Lahul. In India they form part of the Lahaula Scheduled Tribe. The word Lahaula is 'derived from two local words, *hya-hul*, meaning deities or spirits (divine or supernatural, generally of the malevolent type) and *hul*, meaning land or abode'.⁴

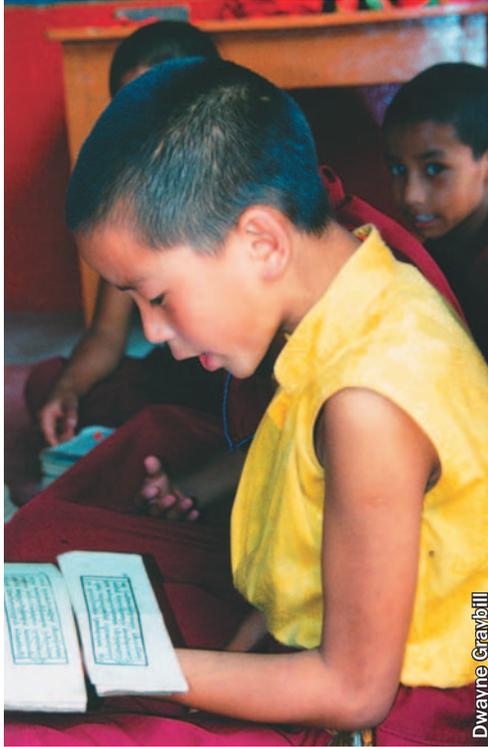
The Gahri language is a part of the Kanauri arm of the so-called *Himalayish* branch of Tibeto-Burman. It is one of a number of different languages located in the linguistically diverse western Himalayan region.

This diversity can be seen in linguistic surveys that find the Gahri language has 39 per cent lexical similarity with Sunam, 26 per cent to 39 per cent with varieties of Chamba Lahuli, 37 per cent with Tinan Lahuli, 26 per cent to 34 per cent with

varieties of Central Tibetan and 23 per cent with Kanauri.⁵ Gahri culture has been heavily influenced by the people's devotion to Tibetan Buddhism. Many Gahri make annual pilgrimages to Lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailas—two holy Buddhist sites in western Tibet. Among the Gahri on the Indian side of the border there is some Hindu influence, although the majority

are adherents of Tibetan Buddhism. Both the Buddhist and Hindu Gahri retain elements of the spirit-worship that dates back thousands of years. K S Singh states, 'The ancient faith of the area was based on the Loong Pai Chos creed, a form of belief centering around the propitiation of spirits and demons. Many elements of that creed have been incorporated into the Buddhist and Hindu faiths of the area, though the followers of that faith have long ceased to exist as a separate entity'.⁶

The Gahri had portions of the Bible translated into their language by missionaries in 1911, but these have been out of print since 1923. Today there are a handful of Gahri believers, but they are rarely able to fellowship with each other because of geographical separation. Most Gahri in both India and China remain completely unaware of the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Dwayne Graybill

