

**'Bravest of the Brave': Representations of 'The Gurkha' in British Military Writings**



Lionel Caplan

*Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Jul., 1991), 571-597.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-749X%28199107%2925%3A3%3C571%3A%27OTBRO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y>

*Modern Asian Studies* is currently published by Cambridge University Press.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/cup.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

*‘Bravest of the Brave’:  
Representations of ‘The Gurkha’ in British  
Military Writings*

LIONEL CAPLAN

*School of Oriental and African Studies*

**Introduction**

The legendary Gurkhas have inspired a considerable literature about their character, quality and exploits under British command. Some years ago, after I returned from fieldwork in an area of east Nepal inhabited by the Limbu people, many of whom had served in Gurkha regiments, I began to read some of this literature for background purposes. It struck me then, although not nearly so forcibly as it did later when I had read Edward Said (1978), and returned to the Gurkha material after a long absence, that these writings have a very distinctive character, constituting a particular mode of ‘orientalist’ discourse.

Orientalist writing on south Asia, Inden suggests, places exclusive stress on difference (1986: 402). This is not the case in the writings to which I am referring, however, where there is less concern to distance the Gurkhas, and more to represent them as being, in certain fundamental respects, quintessentially like those very Europeans who produce the discourse.

The term ‘Gurkha’, I should point out, derives from the place name of Gorkha, which was a small principality to the west of Kathmandu, whose king, around 1765, sent an army against the Newar rulers of the Valley of Kathmandu, and, after his victory, made it the capital of his newly constituted kingdom (see Spaight 1941). The creators of this discourse see the Gurkhas as the descendants of the fighting men who

An earlier version of this paper was presented to a seminar at the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen and I am grateful to participants for their comments. I am also beholden to Alan Macfarlane and Pat Caplan for their advice.

conquered the Valley and created the modern Nepalese state. They apply the term to those sections of the population whom they regard as suitable for military service.

The majority of the writers are British officers, or former officers, with the Gurkhas. A number of them are regimental historians—the first regimental history appeared in 1912 and there are now histories of all the regiments, which are updated periodically. Some officers have written biographies or autobiographies, others war diaries, or simply accounts of their experiences in the Gurkha regiments, and a few have written ethnographic handbooks on the ethnic or tribal groups which comprise the Gurkhas. Finally, a few of the writers are professional journalists who rely mainly on the publications I have already mentioned for their source material. Since 1947, India has also been recruiting soldiers from Nepal. One estimate I have seen suggests that there are now 100,000 Gurkhas in the Indian army, but the writers I will be discussing are exclusively British and the Gurkhas to whom they refer are those who have served or are serving in British regiments.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Gurkhas have been mentioned in writings of one sort or another for over 170 years, the literature to which I refer and which I want to discuss in this paper is a distinctive genre, which has emerged in its present shape in the course of this century. With a few notable exceptions, these books have all been published after 1930, most of them during the past 25 years.

Although they are by no means all alike, they have very obvious 'family resemblances'. Parts of the discourse are reproduced almost verbatim over many years, and appear in numerous editions of regimental handbooks, histories or other publications, so that early texts acquire an authoritative stamp.<sup>2</sup> For example, in the Preface to *Nepal and the Gurkhas*, published by the Ministry of Defence in 1965, the compiler, R. G. Leonard, states that the original version of the book first appeared in 1883, was republished with some additions in 1896, and again in 1918, 1933 and 1942. Even those publications which are, as it were, original, borrow freely from works which have gone before. It has what Padel, referring to representations of the 'tribals' in India calls a 'formulaic quality' in that 'certain formulas, stock phrases and ideas are repeated time and again' (1988: 2).

<sup>1</sup> As far as I have been able to ascertain, apart from a few regimental histories, Indian officers have hardly written about 'their' Gurkhas.

<sup>2</sup> Felix Padel, in an unpublished paper, has observed how in the discourses on 'tribals' in India, 'early texts continue to be cited as authoritative' (1988: 2).

While there are some minor points of disagreement among these authors (see Cross's 1985 review of Farwell 1984), overall, there is little evidence of a debate, of different readings of the Gurkha contribution to Britain's military history, or of any alternative assessments of the Gurkha project. Unlike the orientalist of India discussed by Inden (1986), where on one side there are utilitarian-minded *disapprovers* of everything Indian, and on the other, romantic-idealist *approvers* of everything Indian, in this discourse on the Gurkhas there are only romantic approvers. The author of a recent publication remarks that in his perusal of the British military literature of the past 165 years he found only one disparaging word about the Gurkhas—and that by the 'eccentric' Orde Wingate (Farwell 1984: 14).<sup>3</sup>

Reading this literature, one gets a very strong sense of consensus and continuity; it comes across as monolithic and timeless, relying heavily on stereotype, and with little political or historical context. However, there is no way in which the production of the discourse can be separated from the issue of power, both in the narrow sense that those in an unambiguous superordinate position (the officers) produce authoritative knowledge about their military subordinates, and in the wider sense of the unequal economic, political and social structures within which the depictions occur. This marks it out as a species of colonial, or, if you prefer, neo-colonial discourse, which refers to 'knowledges developed in the course of domination, and "rhetorical strategies" employed to describe colonial peoples . . .', (Mani 1986: 3). Power manifests itself in yet another sense as well: like western social scientists, these British military authors control completely the texts they produce (Rabinow 1986).

Let me say at this point that Nepal does reap significant advantages both from British government subventions for the right to recruit and from remittances, which were, until the comparatively recent development of tourism, Nepal's largest earner of foreign currency. The present cost of annual pension payments to British Gurkhas alone is £5.6 million (House of Commons 1989: xxxi). And anyone who has visited the villages which send men to the British army could not fail to notice the very real material advantages which accrue to those men and their families, especially if they have remained long enough in

<sup>3</sup> Wingate criticized the Gurkhas, among other things, for being 'mentally unsuited' to the role given them in the first Chindit expedition in Burma during WW2. But Wingate himself is accused of failing to understand that Gurkha soldiers 'need a different type of leadership to the British soldier' and so of failing to 'exploit their best qualities' (see Smith 1973: 126).

service to earn a pension (Hitchcock 1966; Caplan 1970; Macfarlane 1976).

To begin the discussion, I want to say a brief word about the kind of socio-military environment out of which those producing these writings emerge.

### **The British Officers**

By the late eighteenth century there were two distinct bodies of armed soldiers in India. The first consisted of detachments of the Royal or King's army, which were British throughout. These were mainly detachments of the British Home army which took it in turn to have a spell of duty overseas. The second, approximately three times the size of the King's force, was the Indian army, until the mid-nineteenth century the army of the East India Company. This was divided into three separate native armies, one at each of the three Presidencies of Madras (in the south), Bombay (in the west) and Bengal (in the east). These regional armies were composed of soldiers and NCOs who were mainly Indian, while the officer corps was British. All were ultimately subject to the Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal force (Pemble 1971: 90).

The Royal army was apparently much more generously officered than the Indian, a cause for serious complaint, since Company officers felt that, in the words of one, they were 'the very life and soul of the Indian army, and, consequently, the main prop of our Eastern Empire . . .' (Anon 1849: iii). Matters were not helped by the fact that officers of the Royal army considered themselves a cut above their Indian colleagues. One historian notes that the 'Company's officers had been made increasingly aware of the panache, the mystique, the prestige attaching to the King's army, and left in no doubt that the military service of a mere trading corporation (i.e. the East India Company) was decidedly inferior' (Pemble 1971: 93).

The purchase system—which was abolished only in 1871—ensured that the army was never closed to the wealthy middle classes. The Indian army, therefore, allowed 'lesser lights' to quench their thirst for social status (Razzell 1963: 259). The large majority of Indian army officers, it appears, came from undistinguished middle class professional families (*ibid.*: 248).

While there may not have been any exclusive regiments in the Indian army, this did not prevent the elaboration of a complex

hierarchy and distinctive regimental cultures.<sup>4</sup> By the early part of the twentieth century the Gurkhas had certainly become a service apart from the rest of the Indian army. One former officer notes that the Brigade was 'unquestionably a corps d'elite and its officers could hardly be blamed for taking every opportunity to emphasise the difference between their men and those of ordinary Indian regiments' (Morris 1960: 55). And he recalls how he was 'infected with the distinctly superior attitude that officers of the Gurkha regiments adopted towards the rest of the (Indian) army . . .' (*ibid.*: 216). In the view of another officer on the receiving end of this attitude, the Gurkhas were an 'exclusive proprietary club' and their British officers 'adopted an air of condescension' towards other regiments including those whose 'fame and glory were the pride of the Indian army' (Proudfoot 1984: 27).

During peacetime most officers had little or nothing to do, leading a leisurely life, with servants and an active social round (Farwell 1984: 115-17).<sup>5</sup> They spent their afternoons playing tennis or squash or watching the men play football (Morris 1960: 90). Gurkha service, one ex-officer reminisces, offered good opportunities for 'indulging one's sporting instincts and leading the gentlemanly life' (*ibid.*: 192). The 9th Gurkhas, we are told, had a 'reputation as a polo-playing regiment' (Farwell 1984: 116). So one Brigadier records how, as a newly qualified officer, he had considered choosing a cavalry regiment, assuming that life would be ideal in a world of horses and polo. But without private means it was 'out of the question'. However he discovered that officers of two Gurkha regiments did play polo. So 'as first choice I applied for the 9th Gurkha Rifles' (Bristow 1974: 22).

The officers were predominantly from the public schools, and the products of certain schools were apparently preferred by some regiments: Wykehamists, for example, by the 2nd Battalion of the 3rd Gurkha Rifles (Bishop 1976: 78). The public school system, says Philip Mason, was thought to make a boy independent. He was

<sup>4</sup> Anderson observes that whereas the Home armies of Europe tended to take a pragmatic and professional view of their calling, the colonial or 'second' armies 'stressed glory, epaulettes, personal heroism, polo, and an archaizing courtliness among its officers' (1983: 138).

<sup>5</sup> Henry describes an Indian army camp at the beginning of the nineteenth century as 'extremely pleasing and amusing'. There were numerous camp followers—'about 10 or 12 for every soldier'—Bazaar people, coolies, jugglers, nautch-girls, servants, attendants, and so forth (1843: 238-9). Such retinues had of course disappeared by the time most contributors to this literature on the Gurkhas came to serve.

taught to put a high value on physical health and on success at games; he learnt to exercise and accept authority at an early age (1974: 457).

Finally, we have to remind ourselves that British officers shared the assumptions prevailing throughout the colonial period, and especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century, about the Anglo-Saxon destiny as a governing race. The rise of the British Empire was attributed by the Victorians to 'the distinctive racial attributes of the English people' (Street 1975: 19).

### **The 1814–16 War and the 'Discovery' of the Gurkhas**

The Anglo–Nepal war of 1814–16 is a critical reference point for the discourse to which I am referring, since it was during this war that the British officially 'discovered' the Gurkhas. By the middle of the eighteenth century there was already a brisk trade between representatives of the East India Company and the Newars in the Kathmandu Valley. Nepal was regarded by many English merchants as a region of opulence, and the East India Company wanted Nepal's rice, butter, spices, oil-seeds, timber, drugs, dyes and gold (which was actually Tibetan gold). In turn the Company sold English and India-made cloth, sugar, salt and other produce to the Nepalis.

In 1767 the Company, anxious about its trade with the Newars, had sent an (ill-fated) expedition to assist one of the Newar kings (Jayaprakash) in his battle against the invading armies of Gorkha (Prinsep 1825: 56). Thereafter, the House of Gorkha, which soon became the ruling power in Kathmandu, remained suspicious of the Company and sought to keep it at arm's length. A treaty signed in 1801 established a British Residency in Kathmandu by means of which the Company hoped to create a British dependency. The Nepalis had little choice but to accept a Resident because of their own internal dissensions, and because they had only a tenuous hold on their own feudatories who would from time to time call on the assistance of the English. The Resident remained for only a year, however, leaving in disgust at the Nepal Government's delays and prevarications, and the Treaty was formally dissolved in 1804.

In the decade which followed the abandonment of the British Residency at Kathmandu, relations between Nepal and the Company deteriorated. As in the past, the King of Nepal continually sought to establish his proprietary rights over the territories of other petty principalities, activities which the English, with their concept of fixed

and immutable boundaries—a concept alien to the Nepalis<sup>6</sup>—saw as encroaching on their own territory or that of their neighbours and allies (see Burghart 1984: 114–5).

The Company could probably have invaded Nepal at any time but was reluctant to do so because in this period it was committed in the Marathi country, and was also fearful of antagonizing the Chinese (Chaudhuri 1960: 140), since it 'was generally assumed that Kathmandu was in some form of political subordination to the Ch'ing Emperors' (Rose 1961: 209), an assumption which Kathmandu did little to dispel.

However, the British were concerned about a possible alliance between Nepal and the Sikhs, so if the Nepalis could be expelled from the bordering terai region (the fertile strip of plains between the Company's territories and the hills), they would be 'bottled up' in the mountains and no longer pose a danger. This the British set out to do, as well as to install another Resident in Kathmandu to keep a 'careful and controlling watch' on the Nepalese durbar (Sanwal 1965: 211). The Governor-General, Warren Hastings, declared war on Nepal in November 1814.

After some initial successes against the Company's forces, the War resulted in the loss to Nepal of most of the terai, approximately one-third of its existing territory. Some 7,000 square miles were ceded to the Company by the Treaty of Sagauli, which concluded hostilities. The terai was a major source of government revenue and provided the lands granted in pensions and rewards to military leaders and administrators for loyalty and service to the monarch. The Company's appropriation of this land was thus a direct threat to the future of Nepal's noble families and the unity of the kingdom (Stiller 1976: 49).<sup>7</sup>

Several South Asian historians of the period suggest that the British assumed a rigid attitude on border disputes—thus precipitating the war—because the Governor-General had decided to contain the Gorkhas, and to bring their expanding Himalayan state under British influence (see Sanwal 1965: 211; Ramakant 1968: 21–4). Rana takes a

<sup>6</sup> Stiller points out that the notions of 'boundary' and 'boundary lines' were foreign to the Nepalis, who were 'concerned with the control of villages, which waxed or waned according to the military strength and vigour of the ruling dynasty . . . Boundary lines followed from the history of western diplomacy and drew their meaning from maps and lines drawn on maps' (1976: 220–1).

<sup>7</sup> Some of the terai lands were returned to Nepal at the conclusion of hostilities, and others were given back in recognition of her assistance during the Sipoy 'Mutiny' of 1857.



broader and more balanced view of events, acknowledging that the uninhibited growth of two regional powers led inevitably to a military confrontation (1970: 28).

British writers on the Gurkhas, however, taking their cue from earlier British accounts (eg Fraser 1820; Smith 1852), and from each other, place the entire blame for the war on Nepal. Vansittart, for example, states that 'From 1804 to 1814 the Nepalese carried on a system of outrage and encroachment on the British frontier' (1915: 31). For Forbes 'the root cause of the war . . . was the desire of the barons of Nepal to extend their sway over the zamindars (the landlords) of the plains . . .' (1964: 46-7). Northey also writes that 'the Gurkhas pushed steadily southwards into British territory . . .' (1938: 57). This is apparently still the official British view, inasmuch as it is repeated in Leonard's Ministry of Defence-sponsored handbook on the Gurkhas (1965).

The most conspicuous feature of the war, as far as these writers are concerned, was the discovery of Nepalese fighting qualities. Thus Northey and Morris suggest that it was 'an eye opener to our army in India to find another race which could meet them and beat them on equal terms' (1928: xviii).

In their accounts of the Anglo-Nepal war the writers by and large dismiss native troops in the Indian army as incompetent. This echoes earlier assessments of the qualities of the sepoys (soldiers). At the beginning of the nineteenth century most native troops in the Company's armies were regarded by their officers with the utmost contempt. In the words of one officer, native troops lacked 'those essential qualities without which men cannot be soldiers: bravery and bodily strength' (Carnaticus 1821: 429). An anonymous military observer of the Anglo-Nepal war wrote in similar fashion that Indian sepoys live 'in a different stage of civilization and intellectual development. Like every people in the same condition, their only courage is apathy, and their valour consists in animal ferocity . . . A native soldier, of whatever rank, has no heroism, and he is ignorant of honour in every acceptance of the word . . .' (Anon 1822: x).

By contrast, the Nepalese forces who fought against the Company's army are portrayed in glowing terms. Moreover, the admiration is not one way: the *mutual* recognition of fighting qualities is noted again and again. The British—especially the officers—and the Nepalese soldiers on opposite sides are described as speechless with admiration for the others' daring and competence.<sup>8</sup> The latter, we are told, 'obviously

<sup>8</sup> In like fashion, the Report of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, on the Future of the Gurkhas notes that the 'Gurkha connection' developed solely as a result

recognized a kindred spirit among the British officers (James and Sheil-Small 1965: 16). In a word, British officers and Gurkha soldiers are presented as having fallen instantly in love (see also Bolt 1967: 58; Farwell 1984: 32).

This unstinting admiration for Nepalese bravery, however, very soon becomes differentiated. It is the ordinary Nepalese soldiers on whom praise continues to be lavishly conferred, but their military leaders—the Nepalese officers—are carefully excluded. By the early nineteenth century the view was widespread in India that native troops could flourish only under British officers. The Commander-in-Chief of the Madras and later of the Bengal army at the end of the nineteenth century, Lord Roberts, articulated this view very succinctly: 'Native officers can never take the place of British officers . . . Eastern races, however brave and accustomed to war, do not possess the qualities that go to make good leaders of men . . .' (Quoted in Mason 1974: 347). The Nepalis would only realize their enormous potential under the tutelage, supervision and control of British officers (see Northey 1938: 196).

In keeping with this view, the Nepalese army, which had by all earlier accounts acquitted itself so well during the Anglo-Nepal war (see Stiller 1973: 291–2), was to be dismissed as of little moment. The weak points, it is claimed by most writers, were the officers (see Vansittart 1915: 42; Northey and Morris 1928: 89).<sup>9</sup> The need for British officers was, moreover, apparent to the ordinary troops in the Nepalese army from the very beginning. This is expressed clearly in what can be regarded as the founding myth of the Gurkhas.

The story takes place during the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814–16. It focuses on a British officer, Lt Frederick Young, who later came to be regarded as the 'father' of the Brigade of Gurkhas. Lt Young, at the head of some 2000 native Indian troops, is sent to intercept a force of Nepalese soldiers, on their way to relieve the besieged Nepalese Fort at Jythuk. Although there are only two hundred of them, the Nepalis attack and disperse the larger group under the British. Young and several of his officer colleagues find themselves alone, their own native troops having fled in disarray. They look up and see the Nepalese soldiers surrounding them. The Nepalis ask Young: 'Why did you not run away too?'

of British and Gurkha soldiers admiring each other's fighting qualities (House of Commons 1989: XIX).

<sup>9</sup> Nepalese historians of course have a different opinion. Rana points out that despite having a comparatively small army, Nepal fought gallantly because of its brave soldiers and 'able Generals' (1970: 33).

Young looks at them with his 'fearless Irish eyes', and answers: 'I have not come so far in order to run away. I come to stop.' And he sits down.

This wins the hearts of these 'merry men of the Nepalese hills' who reply: 'Ah, you are brave men. We could serve *under* men like you' (my emphasis). Lt Young is then taken captive, and the Nepalis treat him well and teach him their language. The story is retold almost verbatim in numerous books about the Gurkhas (see, for example, Bolt 1967: 60; Bishop 1976: 26–7; Toker 1957: 86; Chant 1985: 22).<sup>10</sup>

### Representations of 'the Gurkha'

In this section, which examines the way the Gurkhas are represented, I want to focus on two overlapping themes in the writings—martiality and loyalty—and relate them to the historical and political context in which they were created and are reproduced.

#### *Martiality*

The Gurkhas are identified in this discourse as 'above all a martial race . . .' (Bolt 1967: 87). The notion that some people will make good soldiers and others will not is not an idea original to the British in India, but in the course of the nineteenth century they 'formulated and codified the principle . . . into a dogma' (Mason 1974: 349). MacMunn in *The Armies of India* (1911), which had a Foreword by the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian forces, outlined the 'martial theory' succinctly.

It is one of the essential differences between the East and the West, that in the East, with certain exceptions, only certain clans and classes can bear arms; others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior. In Europe, as we know, every able-bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort . . . In the East, or certainly in India, this is not so . . . Nor are appearances of any use as a criterion. Some of the most manly-

<sup>10</sup> The origins of the myth appear to be relatively recent. Prinsep (1825), in his history of the war, recounts the defeat of the Indian army at Jythuk and Young's participation in the battle, but there is no mention of the episode featured in this story. It is not even reported in Vansittart in his Handbook of 1915, a key source for so much of the later writing. As far as I can make out, it is told for the first time in Young's daughter's biography of her father, published over a century following these events (Jenkins 1923).

looking people in India are in this respect the most despicable (1911: 129–30).

Brian Hodgson, who was for a time assistant to the British Resident and later himself the Resident in Kathmandu during the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century, was probably the first to label particular tribal groups within Nepal as 'martial classes' (Hodgson 1833: 220). He urged the East India Company to recruit Nepalis into the army on the grounds that 'they are by far the best soldiers in India (with) unadulterated military habits' (Quoted in Mojumdar 1973: 159). But at the time he wrote—hardly 15 years following the end of the 1814–16 war—Hodgson suspected that the Nepalis might turn against the British again, and it seemed to him wise to employ Gurkhas in the Indian army. Stiller suggests that Hodgson was obsessed by the size of the Nepalese army, and by the fear that it might turn against the British (1976: 249). In the view of another historian of that period, 'the more these turbulent martial people were drained away from Nepal, the brighter would become the prospect of Nepal being a weak and peaceful neighbour of British India' (Mojumdar 1973: 160). This was, indeed, a principal reason for Nepal's initial opposition to British enlistment of its civilians (see Note 15). So Hodgson's classification had a very pragmatic political motive, but in time the underlying reason for his plea disappeared in the general rhetoric surrounding the development of the martial race theory in India, especially in the period following the Sipoy Mutiny or Uprising of 1857. The 'theory' had several strands, which I will examine in turn.

One strand, which was very widespread, was based essentially on the idea of natural qualities. This concept of a martial race, to quote Cynthia Enloe, flags an ethnic community as somehow inherently inclined towards military occupations; it possesses some special characteristic embedded in its physical make-up, in its 'blood' (1980: 39). This characteristic, moreover, could be passed on to succeeding generations. Brian Street reminds us that the general acceptance of the notion that 'cultural characteristics' can be inherited genetically was an 'important source of many nineteenth century representations of other peoples' (Street 1975: 106). Thus, Temple saw the Gurkhas as possessing the 'warlike qualities of their forefathers' who conquered Nepal and so are 'imbued with and cherish the true military spirit' (Temple 1887/2: 233). The twentieth-century writers I am examining here continue to subscribe to these beliefs. So, we are informed by one that the Gurkhas are 'natural soldiers' (Vansittart 1915), and by

another that they are 'imbued with the warlike qualities of their ancestors [so that] it is but natural that [they] should cherish the military spirit to a high degree . . .'. (Northey 1938: 98). In battle, we are told, 'they seem in their proper element' (Bolt 1967: 76). Even in one of most recent publications we read that the Gurkhas have 'an inherent and subtle chemistry which allow[s] them to become good soldiers' (Cross 1986: 12).

A second strand, and one which was usually held alongside the idea of martial inheritance, introduces a climatic element. It argues that we find warlike peoples in cooler places while, by contrast, in hot, flat regions races are timid, servile to superiors and tyrannical to inferiors, and most of all unwarlike (see Cohen 1971: 47). The Bengalis, especially, had a bad press: they were 'languid and enervated' (Oldfield 1974: 262), and even the 'well-born race of the upper classes' were 'hopeless poltroons' (MacMunn 1911: 130). To pure climatic influences, MacMunn, who made a special study of martial races, added 'prolonged years of varying religions', early marriage, juvenile eroticism and 1000 years of malaria and hook-worm as explanations for the lack of martial aptitude among people of the plains (MacMunn 1932: 2). The conviction thus grew, and it continues to inform recent writings on the Gurkhas, that the cool and bracing climate of the Nepalese hills produces a robust and sturdy character, physically as well as morally superior to any of the Hindus of the plains, which breeds a 'hopeless slave mentality' (Forbes 1964: 54). The 'demanding environment' also 'forms the hardy, stoical, self-disciplined but cheerful characteristics in the Gurkhas who join the British army' (Edwards 1979: 222).

We have also to note that element in the discourse on the 'martial races' which stresses very much their masculine qualities as opposed to the 'femininity' of the non-martial races. Merchants and town-dwellers were thought to have no 'guts' (MacMunn 1932: 345), while the Indian intelligentsia were dismissed as 'effeminate' (*ibid.*: 354). Although ranked undeservedly low in the Nepalese caste system, we are told by one writer, the Gurkha is the very opposite of the low-ranked Sudra of India—who is described as 'a humble, rather cringing man' (Tuker 1957: 26–7).

Nepal as a country comes out rather well in the masculinity stakes. It benefits especially by contrast, since it borders on the 'least masculine' of India's people in Bihar and Bengal (Tuker 1950: 626). It is also opposed to the south of India. The Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army at the end of the nineteenth century asserted that there is

no comparison between the 'martial value' of a regiment recruited amongst the Gurkhas or the 'warlike races of north India' and one recruited among the 'effeminate races of the South' (Quoted in Mason 1974: 347).

Hodgson was only the first to write about that 'masculine energy of character . . . which distinguish[es] . . . the military races of Nepal' (1833: 220). Campbell, the Assistant Surgeon at the British Residency in Kathmandu during much of Hodgson's tenure also detected a natural propensity for the masculine activity of warfare and the 'abhorrence of all the military tribes in Nepal to engaging in other pursuits than that of arms . . .' (see Hasrat 1970: 226). This tendency to present the Nepalese as naturally warlike continued into this century, and we even find the historian Landon suggesting some 50 years ago that in Nepal, war is the 'only work worthy of a man's attention' (1928/1: 193).<sup>11</sup>

The portrayal of Nepalese men as martially inclined is still a dominant feature of British writings on the Gurkhas. Leonard, in his handbook for the MOD (1965: 48) notes that Nepalese youth 'look down on a man without military experience', while Cross insists that 'soldiering is seen as the one honourable profession open to the Gurkhas of Nepal, especially when under the British Crown' (1986: 7).

The idea of Gurkhas as a martial race developed fully towards the end of the nineteenth century. At first the Gurkha regiments were apparently not too discriminating in their recruitment policies. Garhwalis and Kumaonis were taken on, and there are reports of 'fugitive criminals and outlaws' who later deserted finding their way into the regiments (Mojumdar 1973: 165). However, by the end of the century, regiments were permitted to recruit only men from the classes prescribed by army headquarters (Mason 1974: 140). Nepal was divided up into 'tribal' or ethnic units and a particular set of characteristics would be attributed to a whole people on the strength of often very casual personal observations (see Street 1975: 7). A few British officers became avid ethnographers, producing handbooks in which ethnic differences were exaggerated and systematized (see, for example, Vansittart 1915). This is what Cynthia Enloe appears to mean by

<sup>11</sup> The Nepalese historian Ludwig Stiller describes as 'sheer nonsense' the conviction that Nepal was a 'nation of soldiers'. He points out that the military accounted for a very small proportion of the population, and even within the 'so-called military castes' the percentage of fighting men was still small. 'Nepal was then, as it is now, a nation of farmers', he insists (Stiller 1976: 205).

her comment that 'building militaries has been, in part, an ethnographic enterprise' (1980: 28).

For some years, Hodgson's identification of martial groups formed a recruiting blueprint, and only Magars and Gurungs were taken. Indeed, at one point the Nepalese Prime Minister is reported to have begged the Indian army not to insist so exclusively on enlisting only Magars and Gurungs, since the areas in which these people lived were becoming denuded of their young men (Husain 1970: 246). Hodgson's other military class, the Khas (or Chetris as they came later to be known), whom he deemed to be somewhat less desirable because of their 'brahmanical prejudices' and devotion to the House of Gorkha (Hodgson 1833: 220), were lightly recruited before the Mutiny, but hardly at all for several decades after (Cardew 1891: 136). It was only in 1893 that a special regiment was formed for them.

The Newars, who had resisted fiercely the attacks of the Gorkha armies on the Valley of Kathmandu, were none the less characterized as lacking the essence of martiality. Peoples of the eastern hills, the Limbus and Rais, while acknowledged as good fighters, and taken into a number of police and para-military units, were deemed 'head-strong and quarrelsome' and so too undisciplined to be labelled real martial classes (*ibid.*; see also Landon 1928: 245). By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the latter groups had been recategorized as properly martial, and two regiments were raised consisting of Limbus and Rais.

For a long time a group which was normally regarded as martial, could only be so in its own native territory. There was the belief that when, for example, Gurungs or Magars migrated to the east of the country from their original homes in west Nepal, as many of them did, they somehow ceased to retain the qualities which characterized them as martial in the first place. So the handbooks make statements such as 'The Gurungs of eastern Nepal are practically not Gurungs at all' (Vansittart 1915: 78). Or, it is suggested that Magars and Gurungs outside their native habitat are 'usually of inferior quality and are not normally enlisted' (Northey 1938: 94). Such assertions are usually unaccompanied by any explanation, but where a reason is given it is that either intermarriage has occurred—so the blood which carries the military qualities is contaminated—or that these persons reside as a minority amongst a majority of foreigners (i.e. people of other ethnic groups), and this 'destroys their individuality' (Vansittart 1915: 78). This attitude, however, gradually changed and according to the latest handbook settlements of Gurungs and Magars in east Nepal are reported to 'produce some excellent recruits' (Leonard 1965: 140).

A different sort of prejudice involved the enlistment of what were called 'line boys', the sons and grandsons of soldiers who had been born in the family quarters of the Gurkha battalions in India or elsewhere. Now MacMunn reasoned that if such a boy had a Gurkha mother he would have 'sucked in' the regimental tradition with her milk, and kept most of the warlike traits of his father for at least one generation (1932: 199). Northey also believes that they 'deteriorate but little' in the first generation, but by the second they can hardly achieve the standard of the 'hill-bred article' as fighters (1938: 195).

The prejudice still exists. Most line-born children would have been to school, and while it is acknowledged that they are intelligent, it is felt that they have 'grown too clever by half' (Farwell 1984: 81). A recent contributor to the literature on Gurkhas still maintains that line-boys simply do not possess the 'inherent chemistry engendered by an upbringing in the hills' which enables them to 'make good if they are enlisted', although he shares the widespread opinion that the education they receive (in British Army schools) 'is useful when technicians and specialists are being recruited' (Cross 1986: 133-4).<sup>12</sup>

### *Bravery*

That the Gurkhas constitute a martial race is above all demonstrated by their bravery. This, as I have already indicated, is a dominant emphasis in the discourse. There is no printed work on the Gurkhas which does not refer to their toughness, strength, ferocity, courage and bravery. Their motto is said to be: 'Better to die than be a coward', and this, we are told, is quoted by 'many old soldiers to their young sons as they set out to enlist in the British army' (Smith 1973: 175). All 'militaria' and regimental histories are full of the fierce fighting qualities of the Gurkhas. They perform miraculous feats of daring. They fear no one, while their opponents are terrified of them. When they heard the war-cry 'Ayo Gurkhali' ('the Gurkhas are coming') the Japanese and Germans froze with fear (Bishop 1976: 112). Their presence is said to have 'played a significant part' in the deci-

<sup>12</sup> Although Cross probably expresses a widespread 'traditional' view on 'line-boys', the prejudice against them eased somewhat following World War I, according to Woodyatt (1922: 194). In evidence to a recent House of Commons Select Committee on the future of the Gurkhas, the Brigadier of the Brigade noted that the (small number of) Nepalese officers trained at Sandhurst tend to be the sons of retired Gurkha officers who have been at British Army Schools, and therefore from the 'lines' (House of Commons 1989: 26).



sion of the Argentinians to surrender during the Falklands war (Cross 1986: 179).

When everyone else uses rifles and more sophisticated weapons, the Gurkhas generally draw only their khukuris—the short curved knife—which is a general utility instrument in the Nepalese hills, but is represented in the discourse as the national weapon. ‘Head on the Gurkhas charged, kukris held high into a hail of machine-gun fire’ writes one (Bishop 1976: 112). The same author tells us that Gurkhas are known to ‘stake the left hand in a wager and cut it off with a kukri when they lose’ (*ibid.* 19).

Another author, recounting his experiences during World War II acknowledges that Gurkhas are ‘not supermen’ (Smith 1978: 73) and that the motto ‘Better to die than be a coward’ is an ideal which is rarely attained, even by Gurkha soldiers (*ibid.*: 144), but these are uncommon admissions. The overwhelming tendency is to represent the Gurkhas as invincible, the ‘bravest of the brave’, a phrase which first appeared in the Preface of Turner’s splendid *Nepali Dictionary* (1931), and is quoted in many subsequent writings. Turner was for a time an officer in the Gurkhas.

Now by any standard Gurkhas do perform remarkably well in battle, and if the Victoria Cross is a measure, then it has to be noted that they have been awarded 13 such medals since they became eligible during World War I—a disproportionately high number. But that is not the point. What is significant is that the Gurkhas are made to appear larger than life.

Although the martial race theory fell into disuse as a rationale for enlisting soldiers in the Indian army during World War I and was abandoned during World War II, it still lingers as a basis of recruitment in the Brigade of Gurkhas. According to one writer, the section of the population from which recruits are sought continues to form only 6 per cent of the total population of the country, and the area in which this population is found (the middle hills) comprises about one-third of the total area of Nepal (Edwards 1979: 228).<sup>13</sup> Leonard (1965) has a table listing the districts in which ethnic groups who are potential Gurkhas are to be found, with comments about their qualities. Moreover, he reiterates the underlying theory by tracing the origin of the martial spirit in Nepal to the ‘infusion of north Indian blood into the brave, but unenterprising hill tribes.’ (*ibid.*: 27).

<sup>13</sup> One recent study of local economy in western Nepal found that ‘recruitment is highly spatially concentrated even within areas with fairly homogeneous percentages of eligible ethnic groups . . . Certain districts, too, in spite of having high proportions of eligible groups, have very low recruitment rates’ (Blaikie *et al.* 1980: 282).

Similarly, Farwell's book, which was published only in 1984, has an Appendix on 'The Gurkha Tribes' which repeats almost word for word the descriptions of tribes recruited as Gurkhas which first appeared in Vansittart's handbook of 1915 (Farwell 1984: 300-3). Significantly, then, the authors continue to rely heavily on stereotypic thinking which reduces the movement through time 'to a symbolic instant that is perhaps psychologically satisfying to the thinker but is rarely sufficient to the subject of his thought' (Crapanzano 1980: 32).

To conclude this discussion of martiality let me note that in these representations one may clearly identify what Enloe has called a 'Gurkha syndrome'. This consists in labelling as martial a group, usually remote from the centre both in the geographical and politico-economic senses. Moreover, the perfect martial race is an ethnic group that produces men who are both martial and *loyal*. This, says Enloe, is at the heart of the Gurkha syndrome. Which brings me to a second theme in the discourse.

### *Loyalty*

For these writers, as I have pointed out, the Gurkhas' qualities can be revealed only under the tutelage of British officers. Like all martial classes, their fighting abilities actually render them a danger to themselves and everyone else unless they are controlled and led (MacMunn 1932: 358). Without a strong hand, wrote Vansittart at the beginning of this century, 'they very soon deteriorate and become slovenly' (1915: 59).

The Gurkha needs a strong hand because he is at base something of an innocent, less than an adult, not fully grown. So Gurkhas are frequently described in diminutives, indicating immense affection and a patronizing manner. They are tykes, little highlanders, little Gurkhs, little blighters, doughty little Mongolian hillmen. Animal metaphors also abound: they are tigers, ferrets, mountain goats, and gambolling bull-pups.

Vansittart, like Temple before him, who described the Gurkhas as 'slow-witted' (1887: 233), pronounced them 'extremely simple minded' (1915: 74); and Farwell, writing 60 years later, is still insisting that intelligence is 'a quality not generally included in the list of Gurkha virtues' (1984: 303). The Gurkha is characterized as 'slow to learn', in fact 'thick'. So there are humorous stories about the mule who goes lame when he kicks a Gurkha in the head, or the British

officer who is killed when a bullet ricochets off a Gurkha's head (Farwell 1984: 49).

In a sense, this characterization is self-fulfilling, since policy all along has been to recruit from the 'backwoods'—from the villages and so from the least educated segment of the hill population, as the attitude to 'line-boys' attests. This tendency was also widespread in India. Like these British recruiters, the colonial administration, says Parry, preferred 'unsophisticated natives' to the town-bred, educated Indians whom they derided mercilessly (Parry 1972: 50).

Implied in the description of the Gurkhas as simple, 'happy warriors' is the idea that they are apolitical and unquestioningly loyal. Such a portrayal enables them also to be represented as accepting without reservation the geo-political aims and goals of their military masters. The Gurkhas are always ready to do battle with any enemy of Britain (Cross 1986: 120), to whose cause they are selflessly devoted (Farwell 1984: 16); those who die do so for the British Empire (see Bishop 1976: 48, 81).

So, they have been used in virtually every one of Britain's military actions since becoming part of the Indian army, and from 1875, when they were first sent to Malaya, have also fought overseas. Regimental histories depict their every campaign: the Sipoy mutiny, where they stood loyal to the Company, Gallipoli (where 40 percent of the Gurkhas were killed); the Boxer Rebellion in China; Afghanistan; Waziristan; in virtually every theatre of battle during both world wars; in the post-Second World War insurgencies in South East Asia; and, most recently, in the Falklands (see House of Commons 1989: x).

Gurkha loyalty is taken for granted and they are assumed automatically to support the political projects and share the attitudes of the British authorities. None of these authors thinks to question the propriety of using Gurkha troops in politically sensitive situations, and especially where Kathmandu itself may be embarrassed.<sup>14</sup> Nepal has occasionally been criticized by friendly governments who have found themselves facing Nepalese troops in the employ of the British (see Muni 1973: 174). Such criticisms are presented as 'foreign, hostile propaganda' whose intent is mischievous (Cross 1986: 136). Michael Hutt points out that the enlistment of Nepalis in foreign armies 'does cause disquiet among certain sectors of the educated classes of Nepal', and he examines the ways in which Gurkhas are represented in

<sup>14</sup> The British insist that the latest (Nepal-India-Britain Tri-Partite) agreement allowing recruitment does not 'impose any significant restriction on the employment of Gurkhas in the British Army' (House of Commons 1989: XX).

modern Nepali literature. He concludes that in fiction the Gurkha 'attracts some criticism' but also 'sympathy and a certain amount of grudging admiration', although poets tend to 'despise and resent' these soldiers (Hutt 1989: 27, 29).

For their part, the British writers I have been reviewing save some of their sharpest barbs for 'politicized Nepalis'. They are especially scathing about the 'left-wing politicians down in the plains (*sic*) of Kathmandu' and 'irresponsible students encouraged by unfriendly powers' who oppose the recruitment of Gurkhas in foreign armies (Smith 1973: 3).

Despite the agreement of the Nepalese government at the end of the nineteenth century to allow recruitment within Nepal by the British Indian army, this policy has for at least 50 years been seen by many Nepalis as an anomaly in the country's foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> It impinges on its professed non-aligned, anti-imperial and anti-colonial stand and, in the view of some, contributes nothing to Nepal's own defence.<sup>16</sup>

### **Representing the Other: Representing the Self**

Finally, I want to examine the manner in which these writers portray what they see as the natural bond between the Gurkha and his British officer; that is, how they represent the Gurkha as 'other'. We are told by one author that when the 'little highlanders' met the Company's British officers, that 'mutual respect and admiration was sparked off which was to burn as a steady flame for the next 150 years' (Bolt 1967: 59). Another comments: 'It is no insignificant thing that the relations between the British and Gurkha ... have from the beginning exhibited the natural devotion of the men of both races for each other' (Tuker 1957: 3). Whatever the state of the relationship between the East India Company, later the Crown, and the Nepalese government,

<sup>15</sup> The expansion of Gurkha numbers occurred in the face of measures by successive Nepalese governments to thwart these recruitment efforts (Mojumdar 1973: 165). Their attitude was one of consistent opposition, so much so that until 1884 the British had to carry on their enlistment *sub rosa*. This Nepalese resistance has little place in the discourse, which stresses simply the harmony of purpose between the British and Nepalese regimes since the end of the Anglo-Nepal war (see James and Sheil Small 1965: 14; Edwards 1979: 225).

<sup>16</sup> Muni argues that in the case of independent India, which now also recruits Gurkhas, there is an undertaking to meet Nepal's military needs regarding defence production, army transport planes, civil supplies and training facilities (Muni 1973: 20).

'intense camaraderie' is seen to have characterized the bond between Gurkhas and their British officers.

But this connection is represented in two somewhat different ways. On the one hand, as we have seen, the Gurkhas are portrayed as an ethnic category whose natural qualities render them dependent on, and so inferior to, their western officers. On the other hand they are seen as endowed with the essential characteristics of those very officers.

That aspect of the discourse which depicts the Gurkha as simple, juvenile, and dependent, so needing a firm hand, accords with the hierarchical relations obtaining between them and their British officers. As many writers note, officers holding the Sovereign's commission were until comparatively recently all British, but the Gurkhas, in common with other Indian army regiments, had their own (Gurkha) officers. The latter received their commissions from the Viceroy of India. Crucially, these Gurkha officers ranked below the most junior British officer, and could never command British troops (Mason 1974: 173; Farwell 1984: 132-3; Forbes 1964: 77-8; Bolt 1967: 119). The situation is not very different today (they are now called Queen's Gurkha Officers), although a few Nepalis have recently been commissioned at Sandhurst (see Note 12).

No Gurkha, or for that matter no Indian, could ever be given command of a Gurkha force because, in Philip Mason's words:

The basic assumption on which the (British) officer was recruited was that certain moral qualities were linked with class and could not be acquired in one generation. An officer was judged by social as well as professional standards, by delicate distinctions in behaviour difficult to define in writing and hard for a foreigner (eg an Indian or a Nepali) to learn (Mason 1974: 458).

Mason also touches on what he regards as a crucial feature of the relationship between officers and men of the Indian army. He notes that between people so different there could be courtesy, kindness and liking, affection, but no dealing on equal terms. The relationship was paternal, accepted on both sides. There was no thought of equality (quoted in Parry 1972: 51).

In the writings on Gurkhas a recurrent theme is the warmth of feeling and mutual respect between Briton and Nepali. British officers, we are told, '[regard] the men with affection and admiration as we would our own children' (Sheil-Small 1982: 183). Rosaldo, (following Kenneth Burke) refers to this way of representing subordinates as the 'pastoral mode', which conveys a 'peculiar civility' and 'tender

courtesy' in relationships that cross social boundaries (1986: 97). The authors thus appear to transcend the hierarchical gulf separating superiors from subordinates. Even so, the pastoral mode in the end 'reveals inequalities and domination' (*ibid.*).

Another thrust of the discourse does not so much transcend as suspend the hierarchy, by insisting that the Gurkha and his British officer are essentially alike. Both are imbued with a 'martial spirit', and fight honourably and fairly. In one early text we are told that the Gurkha displays a 'chivalrous courtesy altogether unusual in the East' (Pearse 1898: 229). He possesses the 'dogged characteristic of the Britisher . . . taciturn by nature, brave and loyal to a degree' (Bolt 1967: 91). Moreover he holds his drink 'like the gentleman he is' (Leonard 1965: 48). Both are 'honest and incorruptible' (Tuker 1957: 122). Both have a keen sense of humour and an appreciation of sarcasm (Leonard 1965: 47) although in the case of the Gurkha it is his 'Mongolian strain' which is responsible for his 'proverbial good humour' (Northey and Morris 1928: 96-7). Both have a 'cachet for smartness and turn out' (MacMunn 1932: 199). And both have a strong independent streak. This can be accounted for in the Gurkhas, according to one writer, by the fact that they are (like the British?) 'freehold yeomen farmers' which breeds in them a 'spirit of independence' (Forbes 1964: 55).

Finally, both have an abiding love of field sports of all kinds; the Gurkhas, like their British counterparts, have 'inborn hunting instincts' (Forbes 1964: 130)—they are very much 'men of the rod and the gun' we are told (Tuker 1957: 122). The theme of Gurkhas as sportsmen recurs time and again in the writings and one author dwells at length on sport in Nepal on the grounds that it plays 'a large share in the development of the character of a people' (Northey 1938: 121). It is of course a familiar refrain, frequently applied to the character of the British ruling class. Hugh Ridley, in his discussion of colonial fiction, remarks how in the nineteenth century the love of sport and hunting emphasized the 'racial health and strength of the English' (1983: 92).

So, in the way he is portrayed the Gurkha reminds us of nothing so much as a British public schoolboy. And this is explicitly recognized. The colonel of one of the Gurkha regiments at the beginning of this century had this to say:

The temperament of the Gurkha reminds one of our public schoolboy. The same light-hearted cheerfulness, hatred of injustice, love of games, and veneration for superior ability or skill. There is the same mentality, with

dogged affection (if well treated) and also, like the schoolboy, he works best and hardest with a firm controlling hand. No punishment, however severe, is ever resented if thoroughly deserved' (Woodyatt 1922: 177; also quoted in Landon 1928/1: 194).

In this fusion of the Gurkhas and their British officers, we have a device used by writers of Victorian colonial fiction, which was, as Brian Street puts it, to represent 'what is noble in the savage as being also British' (1975: 20).

I think we can appreciate this tendency in the discourse if we remember that these (serving or former) British officers were engaged in an internal struggle to differentiate and distinguish their own regiments from, until 1948, others in the Indian army and, since that time, other regiments in the British army.<sup>17</sup> Since 1948, moreover, and especially during the past 25 years, the Gurkhas as a force have been under threat as a result of defence cuts and various strategic considerations.<sup>18</sup> In this struggle the survival of the Gurkhas may serve as a metaphor for the very integrity of the British officer class.

Another aspect of this portrayal of the Gurkha as 'oneself' needs to be noted. It is, in effect, the obverse of viewing the Hindu as 'other'. The Gurkha is starkly differentiated from the mass of ordinary Hindus. Hodgson's original and much-quoted observation on respective eating habits creates and underlines the distance. The Company's Indian sipoys, he wrote 'must bathe from head to foot', and 'make *pūja*' (pray) 'ere they begin to dress their dinner'; they eat 'nearly naked' (i.e. in a ritual *dhoti*) in the coldest weather, and thus take three hours over a meal. The Gurkhas, he notes, laugh (and presumably the British did too) at all this 'pharisaical rigour'. They 'despatch their meal in half an hour' (Hodgson 1833: 221; see also Smith 1852: 136). Others also expressed satisfaction that the Gurkhas 'refused to be taken in' by the 'bigotry and prejudices of Brahmanical law'. Like good Protestants, they have 'rejected much of the shadow (while retaining the substance) of Hinduism' (Oldfield 1974: 262). These authors developed this theme of the Gurkhas' separation from other

<sup>17</sup> During the recent Defence Committee proceedings at the House of Commons on the future of the Gurkhas, representatives of the army were asked if service in the Gurkhas is nowadays a 'plus' factor in the career of an officer. The response (though not by an officer with the Gurkhas) was that it was 'not deemed to be a plus of any great magnitude or concern'. Nor, for that matter, were the Gurkhas considered a 'backwater' (House of Commons 1989: 25).

<sup>18</sup> Between 1949 and 1987 the Brigade has been reduced from 8 to 5 battalions, involving a reduction in men from 15,000 in 1957 to 7,900 in 1987 (House of Commons 1989: 39).

groups in the Indian army. Temple quotes one senior British officer with the Gurkhas as claiming that the latter 'hate and despise Orientals of all other creeds and countries, and look up to and fraternize with Europeans, whom they admire . . .' (Temple 1887: 232). Thus the Gurkha is presented as having become an honorary European, assuming the latter's characteristics and sharing his attitudes to and distance from the Oriental 'other'.

### Conclusion

Let me try to draw together some of the strands in this essay. I have attempted to place the Gurkha discourse in its historical context—political, military and intellectual. Firstly, the discourse—with its emphasis on martiality and loyalty—has emerged over many years, and against the background of relations between the British in India and successive Nepalese governments. The Anglo–Nepal war and the flowering of Martial Race theory in the latter part of the nineteenth century have helped to shape the Gurkha project and to mould the discourse I have been examining. It reaches its fullest and most prolific expression during the last 25 years, in a period when Britain's role in India has ended, and the future of the Gurkhas is in doubt.

I have also attempted to situate those who have created the discourse in a particular socio-military context. They were part of the Indian and later British armies, and very anxious to carve for themselves a place in the military pecking order, and by and large successful at doing so. The authors of this literature have a vested interest in the subjects of their discourse, who are both the Gurkhas and themselves.

Now, I am not sure that the analysis of a discourse such as this benefits from the corrective of what the Gurkhas are 'really' like. Said has been criticized for his ambiguity about the relevance of the 'real' Orient to set beside the constructions of the orientalists (see Mani and Frankenberg 1985: 181). So, in light of the general belief in the Gurkhas' untiring loyalty to Britain and British officers, should we note that in 1947, at the time of India's independence, and the division of the regiments between Britain and India, only a minority of Gurkhas opted to remain with the regiments which were assigned to the British army, the majority electing to go to the new Indian army (see Proudfoot 1984: 27; Praval 1987: 128)? Or, on a more mundane issue, against the collective view of the authors that the Gurkha has a



'hereditary education as a sportsman' (Vansittart 1915: xx) or that from earliest childhood they are 'instructed in all forms of sport' (Northey 1938: 99), or again that 'the love of sport is universal in Nepal . . .' (*ibid.* 102), how relevant is it to point out, following Nick Allen, that adults in Nepalese villages 'play no games or sports and have no call for a special concept of fitness . . .' (Allen 1976: 507-8)? His comment certainly applies to the Limbu in east Nepal, among whom I have carried out fieldwork.

Regarding the discourse itself, we have to ask 'how orientalist is it'? If orientalism means speaking for, producing authoritative knowledge about others, then these representations of the Gurkha are clearly part of an orientalist genre. If orientalism 'dichotomises and essentialises' in its portrayal of others, and in so doing functions as an element of (colonial or neo-colonial) domination (Clifford 1980: 216), then I think by these criteria as well the Gurkha literature qualifies as orientalist.

However, this is not a species of orientalism whose overriding concern is domination, or control, as Said and others would appear to suggest is the goal of all such genres. In these writings, the Gurkhas are not exoticized. On the one hand, a 'pastoral mode' permits the authors to project relationships of inequality as characterized by immense courtesy, respect and affection between officers and men. On the other, Gurkhas are portrayed as anything but Hinduized, caste-obsessed, or brahmanical, all of which, for these writers, denote otherness. The Gurkhas are, rather, described as quintessential English public schoolboys. This brings to mind Abercrombie and Turner's argument that the 'dominant ideology', whatever its effect on the subordinate classes in society, is aimed primarily at the dominant class itself. If this discourse on the Gurkhas is seen as ideology, we get the distinct impression that British officers are engaged in a conversation with themselves, the Gurkha serving primarily as a means of self-reflection.

## References

- Allen, N. J. 'Approaches to Illness in the Nepalese Hills'. In *Social Anthropology and Medicine* (ed.) J. B. Loudon. London: Academic, 1976.
- Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Anon. *Military Sketches of the Gorkha War, in India, in the Years 1814, 1815, 1816*. London: R. Hunter, 1822.

- Anon. *On the Deficiency of European Officers in the Army of India. By One of Themselves*. London: James Madden, 1849.
- Bishop, E. *Better to Die; The Story of the Gurkhas*. London: New English Library, 1976.
- Blaikie, P., J. Cameron and D. Seddon. *Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980.
- Bolt, D. *Gurkhas*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967.
- Bristow, R. C. B. *Memories of the British Raj: A Soldier in India*. London: Johnson, 1974.
- Burghart, R. 'The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal', *Journal of Asian Studies*, XLIV, 1984, pp. 101-25.
- Caplan, L. *Land and Social Change in East Nepal*. London: Routledge, 1970.
- Cardew, F. G. 'Our Recruiting Grounds of the Future for the Indian Army', *The Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, XX, 86, 1891, pp. 131-56.
- 'Carnaticus' (pseud.) 'General View of our Indian Army', *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, XI, 65, 1821, pp. 429-39.
- Chant, C. *Gurkha: The Illustrated History of an Elite Fighting Force*. Poole: Blandford, 1985.
- Chaudhuri, K. C. *Anglo-Nepalese Relations: From the Earliest Times of the British Rule in India till the Gurkha War*, Calcutta: Modern Book Agency, 1960.
- Clifford, J. Review of Said's *Orientalism*. In *History and Theory*, 19, 1980, pp. 204-23.
- Cohen, S. P. *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Crapanzano, V. *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University Press, 1980.
- Cross, J. P. Review of B. Farwell, *The Gurkhas*. In *Strategic Studies*, 3, 1985, pp. 168-75.
- *In Gurkha Company: The British Army Gurkhas, 1948 to the Present*. London: Arms and Armour Press, 1986.
- Edwards, J. H. 'Nepal and the Brigade of Gurkhas', *Royal Engineers Journal*, V, 93, 1979, pp. 220-30.
- Enloe, C. H. *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980.
- Farwell, B. *The Gurkhas*. London: Allen Lane, 1984.
- Forbes, D. *Johnny Gurkha*. London: Robert Hale, 1964.
- Fraser, J. B. *Journal of a Tour through Part of the Snowy Range of the Himala Mountains and to the Sources of the Rivers Jumna and Ganges*. London: Rodwell and Martin, Bond-Street, 1820.
- Hasrat, B. J. *History of Nepal: As Told by its Own and Contemporary Chroniclers*. Hoshiarpur, Punjab: the Editor, 1970.
- Henry, W. *Events of a Military Life: Being Recollections after Service in the Peninsular war, Invasion of France, the East Indies, St Helena, Canada and Elsewhere*. London: William Pickering, 1843.
- Hitchcock, J. *The Magars of Banyan Hill*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1966.
- Hodgson, B. H. 'Origin and Classification of the Military Tribes of Nepal', *Jnl of the Asiatic Society*, 17, 1833, pp. 217-24.
- House of Commons, Defence Committee. First Report, *The Future of the Brigade of Gurkhas*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1989.
- Husain, A. *British India's Relations with the Kingdom of Nepal 1857-1947*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970.
- Hutt, M. 'A hero or a traitor? The Gurkha Soldier in Nepali Literature', *South Asia Research*, 9, 1989, pp. 21-32.
- Inden, R. 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 3, 1986, pp. 401-46.
- James, H. and Sheil-Small, D. *The Gurkhas*. London: Macdonald, 1965.
- Jenkins, L. Hadow. *General Frederick Young*. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1923.
- Landon, P. *Nepal* (2 vols). London: Constable, 1928.

- Leonard, R. G. (for the Ministry of Defence), *Nepal and the Gurkhas*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965.
- Macfarlane, A. *Resources and Population: A Study of the Gurungs of Nepal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- MacMunn, G. *The Martial Races of India*. London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1932.
- and A. C. Lovett. *The Armies of India*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911.
- Mani, L. 'Notes on Colonial Discourse', *Inscriptions*, 2, 1986, pp. 3-4.
- Mani, L. and R. Frankenberg. 'The Challenge of Orientalism', *Economy and Society*, 14, 1985, pp. 174-92.
- Mason, P. *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, its Officers and Men*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1974.
- Mojumdar, K. *Anglo-Nepalese Relations in the Nineteenth Century*. Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1973.
- Morris, J. *Hired to Kill: Some Chapters of Autobiography*. London: Rupert Hart-Davies, Cresset Press, 1960.
- Muni, S. D. *Foreign Policy of Nepal*. Delhi: National Publishing House, 1973.
- Northey, W. B. *The Land of the Gurkhas or The Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal*. Cambridge: Hefer & Sons, 1938.
- Northey, W. B. and C. J. Morris. *The Gurkhas: Their Manners, Customs and Country*. London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1928.
- Oldfield, H. A. *Sketches from Nepal: Historical and Descriptive with an Essay on Nepalese Buddhism and Illustrations of Religious Monuments and Architecture*. Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1974 (originally published in 1880).
- Padel, F. 'Anthropologists of Tribal India: Merchants of Knowledge', (unpublished conference paper), 1988.
- Parry, B. *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880-1930*. London: Allen Lane Penguin, 1972.
- Pearse, H. 'The Goorkha Soldier (as an enemy and as a friend)', *Macmillan's Magazine*, LXXVIII, July, 1898, pp. 225-37.
- Pemble, J. *The Invasion of Nepal: John Company at War*. Clarendon, 1971.
- Praval, K. C. *Indian Army after Independence*. New Delhi: Lancer International 1987.
- Prinsep, H. T. *History of the Political and Military Transactions in India during the Administration of the Marquess of Hastings 1813-1823* (2 vols). London, 1825.
- Proudfoot, C. L. *Flash of the Khukri: History of the 3rd Gorkha Rifles (1947 to 1980)*. New Delhi: Vision Books, 1984.
- Rabinow, P. 'Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-modernity in Anthropology'. In J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Ramakant *Indo-Nepalese Relations: 1816 to 1877*. Delhi: S. Chand, 1968.
- Rana, N. R. L. *The Anglo-Gorkha War (1814-1816)*. Kathmandu: the Author, 1970.
- Razzell, P. E. 'Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army: 1758-1962', *British Journal of Sociology*, 14, 1963, pp. 248-60.
- Ridley, H. *Images of Imperial Rule*. London: Croom Helm, 1983.
- Rosaldo, R. 'From the Door of his Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor'. In J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Rose, L. E. 'China and the Anglo-Nepal War: 1814-1816', *Proceedings of the 24th Indian History Conference*, 1961.
- Said, E. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge, 1978.
- Sanwal, B. D. *Nepal and the East India Company*. New York: Asia, 1965.
- Sheil-Small, D. *Green Shadows: A Gurkha Story*. London: William Kimber, 1982.
- Smith, E. D. *Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas*. London: Leo Cooper, 1973.

- *Even the Brave Falter*. London: Robert Hale, 1978.
- Smith, T. *Narrative of a Five Years' Residence at Nepaul* (2 vols). London: Colburn, 1852.
- Spaight, W. J. M. 'The name "Gurkha"', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, xxviii, 1941.
- Stiller, L. F. *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1973.
- *The Silent Cry: The People of Nepal 1816-1839*. Kathmandu: Sahayogi Prakashan, 1976.
- Street, B. *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction 1858-1920*. London: Routledge, 1975.
- Temple, R. *Journals kept in Hyderabad, Kashmir, Sikkim, and Nepal* (2 vols). London: W. H. Allen, 1887.
- Tuker, F. *While Memory Serves*. London: Cassell, 1950.
- *Gorkha: The Story of the Gurkhas of Nepal*. London: Constable, 1957.
- Turner, R. L. *Nepali Dictionary, Comparative and Etymological*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1931.
- Vansittart, E. *Gurkhas: Handbooks for the Indian Army*. Calcutta: Govt of India, 1915.
- Woodyatt, N. *Under Ten Viceroys: The Reminiscences of a Gurkha*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1922.