

**An Autopsy**  
**Of an**  
**Ode to the Gurkhas**

By Santa Bahadur Pun

Permit me to begin this article with my English translation of Subedar Rekh Bahadur Saru Thapa<sup>1</sup> Magar's following poem<sup>2</sup> "To My Ex-Army Servicemen Friends" in Nepali:

**To My Ex-Army Servicemen Friends**

*By Subedar Rekhbahadur Saru Thapa Magar*  
*Translated by Santa Bahadur Pun*

*Oh! My ex-army servicemen friends  
That we are the brave fighters of Nepal  
To the world we have proven  
That in every atom of our bodies  
The blood of Mother Nepal runs  
To the world we have shown*

*But  
As Gurkhas we were recognized  
As Nepalese we were not.*

*The First World War we fought  
The Second World War we also fought  
On Italy's battlefields we fought  
On Burmese soil we also fought*

*But  
On returning to our Motherland  
For our rights and privileges we fought not.*

*On Indonesia's battlefields we fought  
On Tunisian soil we also fought  
On the battlefields of France we fought  
On the soil of Palestine we also fought*

*But  
On return to our homeland  
To His Majesty's Government  
The whereabouts of Royalty British Pound 25  
We questioned not.*

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<sup>1</sup> Subedar Rekh Bahadur Saru Thapa (*mother Dilsara, father Nar Bahadur*) was born in 2002 BS at Archaldi, Bhirkot VDC/Tanahun district. He served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gurkha Rifles Regiment (*the original Kumaon Regiment of Almora*) of the Indian army. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2061 BS, at a premature age of 59 only.

<sup>2</sup> Rastra magazine, Purnangka 4, Magha 2055 BS, Kathmandu - page 28

*Indo-Pakistan war we fought  
Indo-China war we also fought  
In Sri Lanka we fought  
On the battlefields of Bangladesh we also fought*

*But  
On return to our motherland  
To His Majesty's Government  
The Ministry of Ex-army servicemen  
We demanded not.*

*The bullets from our guns  
Frightened the enemies of Britain  
The glint of our Khukuri  
Also frightened the enemies of India*

*But  
On return to the land of our birth  
From the scrawny peon of District headquarter  
Frightened we got.*

*.The Britain of the British  
Great Britain we made  
The British capital London  
The capital of the World we made.*

*But  
On return to our native land  
The crafty and deceitful have made us  
The sons of the soil of this country  
Menial labourers and homeless.*

*Come,  
Let us identify  
Who thrived from the sweat of our toil  
Who made us homeless and  
Know who monopolized on our blood.  
From now onwards  
For the rights and privileges of our children to come  
Let us fight the Very enemy  
Within our Very Country!*

### **Foreword to the Ode:**

The readers would agree that this is truly a heart-wrenching ode to the Gurkhas, not by a gushing, patronizing British or an Indian, but by a Gurkha soldier himself. The Gurkhas toiled in foreign armies, not for the riches of the Moghuls or the Germans and Japanese that they fought against, but simply so that their brood in Nepal could be reasonably fed, clothed and perhaps, in more recent times, educated as well. In that toil in foreign lands, the Gurkhas earned for themselves and their motherland that famous epithet "*bravest of the braves*". Yet, on return to their own native land, so graphically depicted above by Rekh Bahadur Thapa, they are contemptuously looked down upon as mercenaries, at

times even bullied, and “excluded” studiously. Why has this misfortune/”sati ko sarap” fallen on “the sons of the soils” in their own country? This is a difficult question to answer offhand. However, it appears that lately the process of publicly prodding this question and searching for answers have fortunately begun. Towards that process, this article makes an attempt to perform a historical autopsy on Subedar Rekh Bahadur Thapa Magar’s ode.

### **Inclusion then Total Exclusion:**

King Ram Shah (1606 – 1633 AD) of the then fledgling Gorkha kingdom trusted a Rana Magar family as one of the “*chha thar*”, the others being Pande, Panth, Aryal, Khanal and Bohara, in his advisory council<sup>3</sup>. Prithwi Narayan Shah’s Dibya Upadesh is testimony to the contributions of Khas, Magar, Thakuri, Gurung, Brahmin and others in his long, tireless unification campaigns. In fact, he instructed that “*In giving the Kazi’s post to the Pandes, Basnyets, Panthas and Magars, give it to them each in turn.*” It was mainly the blood of Khas, Magar, Gurung and others that were spilt in the dramatic expansion of Nepal from Teesta in the east to Sutlej in the west. The Brahmins were “*bullocks*”<sup>4</sup> whose blood spilling was dreaded as sins even in the more modern days of Juddha SJB Rana. While Juddha had no qualms in putting to death in 1941, for attempting to overthrow the Rana regime, Sukra Raj Shastri (*Newar Joshi*), Dharma Bhakta Mathema, Dasarath Chand and Ganga Lal Shrestha, he did not dare dole out the same punishment to Tanka Prasad Acharya and Ram Hari Sharma. Prithwi Narayan Shah, recognizing the impartial qualities of Magars, directed in his Dibya Upadesh “*Magar janchi Bichari thapnu*” in the courts of Nepal. The erudite scholar, Mahesh Chandra Regmi, points out that from 1768 to 1814 “*At least seven among the 49 Kajis of this period were Magars of the Rana and Thapa clans, while one, Narsing, was a Gurung.*”<sup>5</sup> This indicates that in the critical expansion phase of Nepal, prior to the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814 – 1816, “*at least*” fifteen percent of the Kajis were Magars. Ran Bahadur’s assassination in 1806 gave Bhimsen Thapa the opportunity to eliminate all his potential rivals. “*The turbulent period following Ran Bhadur’s assassination marked the virtual end of Magar-Gurung representation at the Kaji level. Narsing Gurung was beheaded, while the four Rana-Magar Kajis were removed from their posts. The six Kajis in the 1808 list include only one Magar, Devadatta Thapa.*”<sup>6</sup> Thus began the marginalization, or in modern parlance, “*exclusion*” of Magars and Gurungs who were long associated with the ruling Gorkha regime. The very last of the high ranking Magar, General Abhiman Singh Rana, became a victim of Janga Bahadur’s 1846 Kot massacre where, Jung in his quest to eliminate all his rivals copied Bhimsen Thapa, assassinating

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<sup>3</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> Thiti of King Ram Shah, annex to Mulki Ain of BS 1910 (AD1854), Ministry of Law and Justice, Kanun Kitab Bewastha Samiti, Singha Durbar BS 2022 – page 697

<sup>4</sup> Stiller LF, SJ, Prithwinarayan Shah in the Light of Dibya Upadesh, Catholic Press, Ranchi, 1968 – page 40

<sup>5</sup> Regmi MC, Kings and Political Leaders of the Gorkhali Empire 1768 – 1814, Orient Longman Ltd. 1995, Hyderabad - page 44

<sup>6</sup> Regmi MC op. cit. - page 44

19 high ranking officials: 3 *Chautarias*, 7 *Kazis*, 2 *Generals* and 7 *Sardars*.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, with the introduction of the 1854 Mulki Ain by Jang, the Magars and Gurungs as well as other non-thread wearing “*matwales*” were all relegated to “*pani chalne*” but third class citizens, far removed from political and State powers. Among the 219 signatories of this Mulki Ain, the Chetris were clearly predominant with “*about eight Newar, about three Gurung, about four Magar; another 4-5 might be Tamang or of other ethnic groups.*”<sup>8</sup> By enforcing this Mulki Ain, Jang sowed the seeds of disunity in an ethnically diverse nation that “*char jat chhattis varna ko phulbari*” Prithwi Narayan Shah had envisioned. Jang ruthlessly suppressed all ethnic voices/uprisings: Rais’ 1867 Dasain boycott/Dhankuta, 1870 Limbu language suppression/east of Arun, Magar revolt of 1875 by Lakkhan Singh Thapa/Gorkha and 1876 Gurung revolt by Supati also in Gorkha.<sup>9</sup>

### Search for Employment, “Lahore” connection:

While such was the “*exclusion*” and suppression environment within Nepal, the colonial British was opening employment opportunities within her newly acquired Indian empire for martial races from Nepal. The East India Company had marveled at the qualities of Nepal’s “*highland soldiers*” in the 1814-1816 Anglo-Nepal war. Their fighting qualities were amply demonstrated at Nalapani, Jyathak, Deothal, Malaon, Almora etc. Bal Bhadra Kunwar’s (*Bul Budder to the British*) famous stand at Nalapani was principally the handiwork of the Magar battalion, Purano Gorakh, with Barakh, Kalidal and Shardul Jung companies.<sup>10</sup> The British, thus, ensured in the Rajgurh Convention of Agreement between Kazi Ambar Singh Thapa and General Ochterlony on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1815 that “**All the troops in the service of Nepal, with the exception of those granted to the personal honor of the Kajees Ummer Singh and Ranjore Singh, will be at liberty to enter into the service of the British Government, if it is agreeable to themselves and the British Government choose to accept their services, and those who are not employed will be maintained on a specific allowance by the British Government, till peace is concluded between the two States.**” The 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1815 Segowlie Treaty of Peace<sup>11</sup> was not the treaty as envisioned by Kazi Ambar Singh and his commanders in the far west. The treaty virtually contracted Nepal to the present Mechi – Mahakali boundary, stripping Nepal of more than one-third of her former territories of Kumaon and Garhwal. The aftermath of the treaty resulted in dissatisfied officers like Bal Bhadra along with 200 other volunteers going to Lahore to join the Punjab leader, Ranjit Singh, rather than serve the Nepalese government they could not reconcile with or the

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<sup>7</sup> Stiller LF, SJ, Letters from Kathmandu: the Kot Massacre, Research Center for Nepal and Asian Studies/Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, - page 304

<sup>8</sup> Hofer Andras, The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal (A study of the Mulki Ain of 1854), Himal Books 2004 second Edition, Kathmandu – page 5

<sup>9</sup> Harkha Gurung, Trident and Thunderbolt Cultural Dynamics in Nepalese Politics, published by Social Science Baha, Himal Association, Lalitpur, 2003 – page 14

<sup>10</sup> Purano Gorakh Battalion – from Gorkha to Now, published by Purano Gorakh BS 2059, Kathmandu

<sup>11</sup> Approval and acceptance of Sugauli Treaty by Rajah of Nipal December 8, 1816 with Substance of Letter under the Red Seal of Rajah of Nipal December 11, 1816 (BS 7<sup>th</sup> of Poos 1873)

British they fought against.<sup>12</sup> Among the prominent officers who went to join Ranjit Singh was Ranjore Singh Thapa, Kazi Ambar Singh Thapa's own son, who was given a General's rank in the Khalsa army. Thus, originated the term "*Lahure*" that originally meant returnees from the city of Lahore, Ranjit Singh's capital. But later "*Lahure*" encompassed all military personnel returning from India or abroad. With the Kumaon and Garhwal territories ceded to the British, Kazi Ambar Singh Thapa died, a saddened and dejected man, on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1816 at Nil Kanth near Gosai Kund in Rasuwa. However, Bal Bhadra Kunwar and his Gorkhalis died fighting the Afghans to the last man for Ranjit Singh in 1823 at Yusufijei, Afghanistan. The British, in the immediate aftermath of the Sugauli treaty, garnered the services of these martial hillmen, creating three Gurkha regiments<sup>13</sup>: 1<sup>st</sup>/Nassira at Subathu, 2<sup>nd</sup>/Sirmoor at Dehra Dun and 3<sup>rd</sup>/Kumaon at Almora. The wily Governor General, Francis Rawdon Hastings (*Earl of Moira*), apprehended that if in case the East India Company failed to employ the Gurkhas, they would "***cut adrift, they having not either habits or means of industry, must through necessity repair to standards and range themselves in arms against us.***" The British resident, BH Hodgson, in 1832 compared Nepal's highland soldiers "*....who dispatch their meal in half an hour and satisfy the ceremonial law by merely washing their hands and face ...*" with the native Indian sepoy "*...who must bathe from head to foot and make puja ere they begin to dress their dinner...*" Hodgson further recommended that the "*Khas, Muggurs and Gurungs*" be made "*participators of our renown in arms ... their gallant spirit and unadulterated military habits might be relied on for fidelity...*" The British, thus, were equally instrumental in fueling the "*exclusion/exodus*" process of the highland villagers from Nepal.

#### **"Nun ko Sojho/True to Salt":**

During Nepal's westward expansion, the Gurkhas and the Sikhs briefly fought against each other over Kangra in 1809. Perhaps because of this animosity, the Sikhs refused Ambar Singh Thapa's request in 1814 to unite with the Gurkhas to drive out the British from India. But as early as 1825 the British used the Gurkhas against the Jats, Pathans and Rajputs at Bharatpur and in 1846 against the Sikhs at Aliwal and Sobroan. The acid test of the Gurkha "*fidelity*" to the British crown was soon demonstrated by the three Gurkha regiments when the Sepoy Mutiny erupted on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1857. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha regiment/Sirmoor Rifles stationed at Dehradun was ordered to move to Meerut where the Sappers and Miners had mutinied over the supposed issue of cow-fat greased cartridges. What is interesting is that the Gurkhas were moved from Roorkee to Nanoo (*nearest point of Meerut*) on a fleet of 45 boats down the Ganges Canal that was completed in 1854 only. This Gurkha regiment then in early June was moved to Delhi where together with the 60<sup>th</sup> British regiment and the native Guide Corps (*that included one Gurkha company*) manned Hindoo Rao's House on a vital Ridge which dominated Delhi. For three months and eight days the Sirmoor Rifles repulsed "*no less than*

<sup>12</sup> Khanduri CB, A Re-Discovered History of Gorkhas, Gyan Sagar Publications Delhi 1997 – page 230

<sup>13</sup> Landon Perceval, Nepal, first print London 1928, Asian Educational Services reprint New Delhi and Madras, 1993 - page 191 in Volume II

*twenty six distinct attacks by the mutineers on the Ridge*".<sup>14</sup> The fall of this Delhi bastion would have had a major psychological impact on mutineers all over India. In fact, no less an authority than General Tuler is of the opinion that the fall of Delhi's Hindoo Rao House would have signaled the fall of the entire British empire in India. At the end of the seize, the Sirmoor Rifles' losses "*totaled 327 of all ranks out of the 490 with which it entered the siege.*"<sup>15</sup> This 67% "*killed in action*" is indeed a very high toll. In recognition of this gallant service, Queen Victoria herself designed and sent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkhas the Queen's Truncheon that was, till a few years back, displayed each year on 14<sup>th</sup> September during the Regiment's Delhi Day, celebrating the breakage of the seize. It was during this 1857 mutiny year that the British, realizing the value of the Gurkhas, hastily raised two more Gurkha regiments, the 4<sup>th</sup> at Pithoragarh and the 5<sup>th</sup> at Abbottabad.<sup>16</sup> This further fueled the exodus of the hill-men from Nepal.

### **Restoration of Ceded Territories to Nepal:**

During this 1857 mutiny, Janga Bahadur also provided valuable military support to the British. While the British Resident, Colonel Ramsay, immediately accepted Jang's offer of military assistance, the Calcutta based astute Governor-General, Lord Canning, was suspicious whether Jang would come to the rescue of the British or the mutineers. In fact, there was a lobby in Nepal that tried to influence Jang to assist the Indian mutineers so that Nepal's lost territories of Kumaon and Garhwal could be recouped once the British were thrown out of India.<sup>17</sup> But Jang backed the British as what the Resident, Colonel Ramsay, calls "*that providential visit of his to England and the experience he gained there*" to be able to pick the ultimate winning horse.<sup>18</sup> Lord Canning changed his mind a month and half later, requesting Nepal's military assistance. In July 1857 three thousand Nepalese troops were immediately dispatched. Later in December 1857 Jang himself led another 8,000 of his troops to sack Lucknow and bring back to Nepal a 16 mile long baggage train of 4,300 cartloads that included military stores and loot<sup>19</sup>. To the consternation and chagrin of the British Army quartermasters "*the Nepalese troops also marched off with the 10,000 new model rifles supplied them on their arrival in India.*"<sup>20</sup> For this valuable service rendered by Nepal in Britain's hour of real need, Lord Canning intimated Jung in March 1858 (*when they met at Allahabad*) that the British government would restore to Nepal a large part of the former Gurkha possessions extending "*from the river Gogra on the west to the district of Gorakhpur on the east and is bounded on the south by Khyragarh and the district of Bahraich*" that

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<sup>14</sup> Landon P op. cit - page 191 Volume II

<sup>15</sup> History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> King Edward's Own Goorkha Rifles, Gale & Polden Ltd Aldershot 1912 – page 51

<sup>16</sup> Landon P op. cit. - page 191 Volume II

<sup>17</sup> Digby William, 1857 A Friend in Need, 1887 Friendship Forgotten, first published London 1890, reprint Asian Educational Services, New Delhi 1993 – page 41

<sup>18</sup> Digby W, op. cit. – page 41

<sup>19</sup> Stiller LF, SJ, Nepal Growth of a Nation, HRD Research Center, Kathmandu 2<sup>nd</sup> reprint – page 98

<sup>20</sup> Stiller LF, SJ, Nepal Growth of a Nation - page 99

Nepal had to cede to the British in 1816.<sup>21</sup> This retrocession of the Oudh Terai (*originally called Naya Muluk in Nepal*) was done through a treaty dated 1<sup>st</sup> November 1860 and comprises of the present day districts of Bardiya, Banke, and Dang. One must stress here that this return of the lost Terai lands by Britain to Nepal was tied as much to the “*fidelity*” of the five Gurkha regiments to the British crown as also to Jang’s vital support during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. But history has been giving this credit entirely to Jang and Jang alone. Interestingly, Jang in 1861 had the entire district of Bardiya assigned to himself as Birta by King Surendra and this was divided in true Rana fashion: *fifty percent to the Prime Minister and the rest to his brothers!*<sup>22</sup>

### **Rise in Gurkha Regiment Strength:**

After the bitter 1857 experience, Britain was determined to maintain a strong Gurkha Brigade in her Indian army. For this they needed fresh recruits annually from Nepal. Jung, however, was reluctant to supply these recruits as this would have not only expanded British influence but adversely affect his hold over Nepal as well. He, thus, refused to allow Gurkhas, on home leave, to wear their uniforms in Nepal and also strongly objected to recruiting parties (*gallawalas*) entering Nepal under any guise.<sup>23</sup> So from 1878 the skilful British adopted the “*guns for recruits*” policy whereby fresh recruits from Nepal were acquired by supplying the guns/ammunition needed by the Nepalese army or by simply refusing to give recognition to the new Prime Minister<sup>24</sup>. This policy worked because when Bir Shumshere came to power after assassinating his own uncle, Ranoddip, in 1885 “*He permitted the free enlistment of Gurkha recruits for the Native Army in India.*”<sup>25</sup> This signaled the first official recognition by Nepal of Gurkha recruitment into the British Indian army and Britain quickly expanded her Gurkha Brigade from five to ten regiments<sup>26</sup>. The policies of British India and the Rana government of Nepal, thus, fueled the “*exclusion/expulsion*” process of the “*matwales*” further. The Khas are recruited for the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment while the Limbus and Rais are recruited into the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Regiments. For the rest of the other seven Regiments “*almost the only men enlisted are Magars and Gurungs.*”<sup>27</sup> Vansittart, who had a penchant for details, gives an interesting figure of 36,107 recruits from Nepal recruited during the period 1894/’95 to 1912/’13. This means an annual intake of about 2,000 recruits per annum just before the onslaught of

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<sup>21</sup> Landon P, op. cit. – page 150

<sup>22</sup> Stiller LF, SJ, Nepal Growth of a Nation – pages 112 & 118

<sup>23</sup> This was the reason why the writer’s father in 1921 had to run away from his village in Char Hazar Parbat with the “*gallawala*” as the district administrators continued to enforce this order much later also.

<sup>24</sup> Stiller LF, SJ, Nepal Growth of a Nation - page 123

<sup>25</sup> Vansittart E, The Gurkhas, Anmol Publications New Delhi, reprint 1993 - page 40

<sup>26</sup> Landon P, op. cit - page 192 Volume II; As per the British policy: 1<sup>st</sup> Gurkha at Dharamsala, 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha at Dehra Dun, 3<sup>rd</sup> Gurkha at Almora, 4<sup>th</sup> Gurkha at Bakloh, 5<sup>th</sup> Gurkha at Abbottabad, 6<sup>th</sup> Gurkha at Abbottabad, 7<sup>th</sup> Gurkha at Quetta, 8<sup>th</sup> Gurkha at Shillong and Lansdowne, 9<sup>th</sup> Gurkha at Dehra Dun and 10<sup>th</sup> Gurkha at Maymyo and Takdah

<sup>27</sup> Landon P, op. cit. - page 193 volume II

the First World War. The meticulous Vansittart's breakdown of this intake during that period indicated that 35.2% were Magars, 22.9% Gurungs, 13.8% Rais, 13.2% Limbus and others (*Khas, Thakuris, Sunwars etc.*) 14.9%.<sup>28</sup>

### **First World War and Chandra's Policy:**

The outbreak of First World War in 1914 gave Chandra Shumshere an opportunity to offer Britain "*We shall be proud if we can be of any service, however little that may be.*" The British government accepted this offer with gratitude and six regiments of the Nepalese army were dispatched to India for garrison duty, four to the turbulent North-West frontier of the Pathans and two to the United Province (UP). This relieved the British government to dispatch her own Gurkha troops from India to the battle fields of Europe and Middle East (*Festubert, Givenchy, Neuve Chapelle, Loos, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia etc*) to fight the Germans and Turks. Two Gurkhas, Kulbir Thapa and Karna Bahadur Rana, earned the coveted Victoria Cross. Though there were only 26,000 Gurkhas in the regular Indian army in 1914, the number of men who actually left Nepal "*for all military purposes amounted to more than two hundred thousand*" during the war period.<sup>29</sup> To obtain such large number of recruits, the whole country was quartered by Chandra and "*a new and intensive system of recruiting was put into force.*"<sup>30</sup> Furthermore the wily Chandra "*gave five rupees to each candidate sent, whether he was accepted or not, and the British, at Chandra's suggestion, gave an additional twenty rupees to each recruit they accepted.*"<sup>31</sup> This rupees 25 is probably the 25 British Pounds royalty that Subedar Rekh Bahadur Thapa talks of in his Ode. Actually for rendering such services, Chandra Shumshere was pocketing an annual royalty of Rupees ten lakhs from the British.

Chandra's policy depleted Nepal of all young men and in many villages of Nepal only women and old men remained to tend to their fields.<sup>32</sup> Euphemistically, this was Chandra's method of "*ethnic cleansing*" of the *Matwales* from Nepal. The bulk of the Gurkhas was drawn from Magars, Gurungs, Rais and Limbus; and the 1920 census indicates Nepal's population as being 5.6 million.<sup>33</sup> The noted scholar, Dr. Harkha Gurung, adds that "*One of the reasons why the British recognized Nepali sovereignty in 1923 was the valuable service rendered by the Gurkhas in World War I.*"<sup>34</sup> Dr. Gurung is referring to the Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and Nepal that was signed in December 21, 1923.<sup>35</sup> This

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<sup>28</sup>Vansittart E, op. cit. – pages 174 to 177

<sup>29</sup> P Landon op. cit. - page 141 Volume II

<sup>30</sup> P Landon ibid 18 – page 141 Volume II

<sup>31</sup> LF Stiller, op. cit. page 151

<sup>32</sup> LF Stiller, Nepal Growth of a Nation op. cit. – page 151

<sup>33</sup> Landon P op. cit – page 258 Volume I

<sup>34</sup> Dr. HB Gurung, Nepal Tomorrow Voices and Visions edited by DB Gurung, Koselee Prakshan 2003, Kathmandu – page 2

<sup>35</sup> Bhasin AS, Nepal's Relations with India and China, Siba Exim Pvt Ltd Delhi 1994 – page 13



treaty was used in 1949 by the Rana government as one of the proof that Nepal is a sovereign independent nation to the Inquiry Committee of the United Nations when Nepal applied for admission. However, the cunning Chandra, under an understanding with the obliging British, ensured that the rank of the commissioned officer was not given to any Gurkhas by the British and limited up to the rank of Subedar Major only<sup>36</sup>. This is presumably the reason why the astute British, in as early as the 1920s, started to dole out the ranks of Honorary Lieutenants and Captains to deserving officers on their retirement. After India's independence in 1947 and the Tripartite agreement on the fate of the Indian Gurkhas, Padma Shumshere, Nepal's second last Rana Prime Minister, announced that henceforth Nepal's Gurkhas, who are capable,<sup>37</sup> could also become commissioned officers in the armies of India and Britain.

### **Annual Present in Perpetuity of Ten Lakh Rupees:**

At the end of the First World War, Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy of India, in his letter of December 27, 1919 offered to the King of Nepal : *"I am now addressing Your Majesty in order to convey to you the cordial thanks of my Government and to inform you that , as a recognition of the services (which have been rendered by the Nepalese troops during a period of nearly four years) and in testimony of the friendship which unites us, I am offering to Nepal on behalf of the Government of India, **an annual present of ten lakhs of rupees to be paid in perpetuity** unless and until the friendly relations which so happily subsists between the two countries are broken off. No other conditions whatever are attached to the offer."* Lord Chelmsford further explained that *"money is offered only because it is impossible to **repeat the retrocession of territory which expressed the gratitude of the Indian Government for the services of Nepal during the Mutiny of 1857 and 1858.**"* The Viceroy took pains to stress that Nepal accept this annual present *"**as forming the best available substitute for any restoration of territory.**"* Landon further disclosed that *"if by any access of folly this annual grant be refused by the Indian Parliament, the situation thus created would be of grave importance.... It would perhaps be to the advantage of all that this payment should be secured by the creation of some form of Consolidated Fund ...which shall be guaranteed by the British Government and **exempt from Indian Parliamentary criticism.**"* This *"retrocession of territory and exempt from Indian parliamentary criticism"* are very illuminating and illustrate how skilful and visionary the British are, however selfish they may be.

Thus started in 1919 the saga of *"**an annual present of ten lakhs of rupees to be paid in perpetuity**"* . This was mainly for the blood and sweat spilt during the First World War by the Gurkhas of the Indian army. The Nepalese army did provide valuable garrison duties in India but saw no action. Along with this annual gift, Britain also provided a lump sum of 21 lakh rupees which Chandra used to build the 19 mile Raxual-Amlekhgunj railway (*now defunct*), the Amlekhgunj-Bhimphedi

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<sup>36</sup> Promode S Rana, op. cit. - page 158

<sup>37</sup> Gorkhapatra BS 2004 Poush 14, National Archives, Nepal

motor road and the 14 mile Dhorsing-Matatirtha “*ek tare*” ropeway (now also defunct).<sup>38</sup>

## **Second World War:**

Chandra, after a long reign of 28 years, died in 1929 to be followed by a short reign of Bhim and then from 1932 by Juddha Shumshere. When the Second World War erupted in 1939, Juddha, like Chandra, immediately offered the services of the Nepalese army to Great Britain. The offer was accepted and the Nepalese army was sent to the North-West Frontier and Dehradun for garrison duty. At Kohat some soldiers of Second Rifle and Bhairon regiment revolted against their officers on the question of kinds in lieu of cash allowance. The revolt was crushed with one mutineer hanged in Kathmandu. Though both the regiments were disbanded immediately, the Second Rifle was rehabilitated later. The Nepalese army did see active duty when the Japanese opened upon the Burma front. The Gurkhas in the British army saw active duty mainly in the Middle East and Italy (*Tobruk, El Alamien, Tunis, Cassino, Gothic Line etc.*) as well as on the Burma front (*Mandalay, Rangoon road, Meiktila, Imphal etc.*). Ten members of the Gurkha Brigade received Victoria Cross: (*Lal Bahadur Thapa, Sher Bahadur Thapa, Thaman Gurung, Ganju Lama, Gaje Ghale, Lachhiman Gurung, Tul Bahadur Pun, Agamsing Rai, Netra Bahadur Thapa and Bhanu Bhakta Gurung*). “British Minister Falconer put the number of Nepalese serving in the British Gurkhas as high as 160,000.”<sup>39</sup> Including the Nepalese army contingent and those Nepalese serving in other units (*such as the Assam and Burma military police, Dacca police battalion, Army Bearer Corps, Labour Corps*<sup>40</sup> etc.) Nepal like in the First World War again “contributed more than 200,000 men to the British war effort.”<sup>41</sup>

## **Annual Present Increased and Capitalized:**

In February 1945 Juddha informed the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Olaf Caroe, that he expected a substantial reward for assisting the British in World War II. “**He also wanted the annual gift capitalized, the money invested in land in India, and the land ceded to Nepal.**”<sup>42</sup> Britain agreed to raise the annual presents from ten lakh rupees to twenty lakh rupees. But instead of looking into the sensitive issue of investing on Indian lands and having this ceded to Nepal, Britain broached other avenues. The British “*present in perpetuity*” was paid from resources generated within India and not Britain. That independent India would not accept this, Britain well knew. Hence, the visionary British wanted to capitalize this gift by constructing a hydropower in Nepal which would annually generate revenues that would account for this annual gift. In fact, British technicians did come to Nepal to survey the Kosi and Gandak rivers which for some unexplained reasons

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<sup>38</sup> BB Pande, op. cit.- page 303 Volume II; The Americans, in the early 1960s, upgraded and extended this ropeway between Hetauda and Teku which is now sadly defunct.

<sup>39</sup> LF Stiller, Nepal Growth of a Nation op, cit. - page 177

<sup>40</sup> P Landon op. cit. - page 142 Volume II

<sup>41</sup> LF Stiller, Nepal Growth of a Nation op, cit. - page 177

<sup>42</sup> LF Stiller, Nepal Growth of a Nation op, cit - page 176

did not fructify. Like the First World War's lump sum of twenty one lakh rupees, Britain after the end of the Second World War provided Nepal with a large lump sum of three crore and thirty three lakh rupees to finance development works in Nepal.<sup>43</sup>

To appease the restive Nepalese population clamouring for democracy, Mohan Shumshere in 1949 decided to invest one crore and eighty lakh rupees from the lump sum amount Britain provided on the 22,000 Kw Kali Gandaki hydroelectric project near Gaidakot to power the industries that he had planned for Nepal's first Five Year Plan.<sup>44</sup> The electricity so generated would have cost six paisa per unit but the newly arrived Indian ambassador, CPN Singh, cleverly shot down that project by sounding out Mohan that India would be generating a large amount of cheap electricity that Nepal could import at a mere two paisa per unit. Mohan scolded the Kali Gandaki project initiators (*his son Bijaya and BB Pande*) "*Yi ketaketi haruko kura sunera ... kam thaleko bhaye mero dui karod rupaiya khara jane rahechha*". Dr. Ram Saran Mahat, former finance minister, does concede in his book, *In Defence of Democracy*, that the British "*in keeping with Nepal's wish agreed to capitalize fifty per cent of the increased annual gift to assisting development programmes of the country. The actual amount was subsequently fixed at 2.5 million rupees.*" This statement is not clear at all. Dr. Harkha Gurung in his review of Dr. Mahat's book wished that the former finance minister should have done more in-depth probing of this "*perpetual gift*" that the Gurkhas are so much connected with. Similarly the whereabouts of the lump sum of three crore and thirty three lakh rupees, that Sardar Bhim Bahadur Pande mentioned, is not known. It is possible that Mohan Shumshere, while exiting from Nepal in 1951, took this "*booty*", that he so zealously considered "*mero rupaiya*", to Bangalore with him! It must be noted that while the "*Rajarshi*" Juddha, after an initial dabble at Argeli/Palpa, exited to Dehradun, his successor, Padma, under extreme pressure to abdicate from Mohan, also exited to Ranchi/India. There are no mentions of what resources from the *Mulki Khana* (national treasury) accompanied these three "*regal exits*". After the assassination of Ranoddip, his son, Dhoje Narsing Rana, escaped to India and put in a paternal claim of Rs 1,35,35,040/- (*movable and immovable properties*) on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1887 with the British Governor-General for retrieval from Bir Shumshere!<sup>45</sup> Cash claim alone amounted to IC 23 lakh rupees plus NC 5 lakh rupees! To get an idea of the then cash value, it has already been mentioned that Chandra built the Raxual-Amlekhgunj railway, Amlekhgunj-Bhimphedi motor road and the Dhorsing-Matatirtha ropeway in the early 1920s with 21 lakh rupees only!

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<sup>43</sup> BB Pande, op. cit. - page 277 Volume II

<sup>44</sup> BB Pande, op. cit. - page 302

<sup>45</sup> Digby W, op. cit. - pages 121 to 128 : cash (IC Rs 23 lakhs & NC Rs 5 lakhs), gold and silver bullion Rs 3.5 lakhs, gold coins worth Rs 4.56 lakhs and other valuables (diamonds, emeralds, gold, silver etc.) about Rs 19 lakhs!

## Gurkhas' Status in Modern Times:

After India's independence in 1947 and the Tripartite agreement on the fate of the ten Gurkha regiments, six regiments (1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>) remained in India and the other four regiments (2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>) joined the British army. It is pertinent to point here that Nehru officially requested Nepal for military assistance in July 1948. Mohan, as part of his predecessors' India appeasement policy, did send ten battalions of the Nepalese army to India. This freed the Indian army for Kashmir and Hyderabad actions. While eight Gurkha battalions joined the British army, nineteen battalions remained with the Indian army.<sup>46</sup> With the departure of the predominantly "*purbeli*" 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> regiments to Britain, India, to fill up this "*purbeli*" vacuum in her army, raised another regiment in 1947, the 11<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles<sup>47</sup>. The British Gurkhas saw immediate action with the "*communist bandits*" in Malaya and the strength swelled to 15,000 Gurkhas at the peak period. The end of the Borneo operation (*where Ram Bahadur Limbu got the VC*) in the mid-sixties led to "*redundancy*" cuts to about 8,000 Gurkhas to be followed after the 1997 Hong Kong withdrawal with more cuts. Nepalese governments of the day made not a single formal protest to the British government at these "*redundancy*" job cuts of her own citizens. The tally now is a mere 3,500 men with two Gurkha battalions and other accompanying formations.

The Indian Gurkhas also saw immediate action in October 1947 during the first Indo-Pakistan war over Kashmir. The Indian debacle in the 1962 Indo-China war (*where Dhansing Thapa got the PVC, India's VC equivalent*) taught "*non-aligned*" India to keep a strong army in fighting shape. India's military philosophy is succinctly put in by JN Dixit, India's former national security advisor to the Prime Minister, "***Where does your economic strength go if you don't have military strength?***"<sup>48</sup> The nineteen Gurkha battalions soon ballooned to more than forty pure Gurkhas battalions<sup>49</sup>. The Assam Rifles, a para-military force all manned by the Gurkhas, was also a legacy of the British Raj to maintain law and order in India's turbulent north-east. With the rise in insurgency, India had this Assam Rifles increased to twenty five battalion strength level with each battalion nearly double the size of the normal infantry battalion. Sadly about twelve years ago, again with or without the knowledge of the Nepalese government, India totally stopped recruiting Nepalese into the Assam Rifles. The Indian Gurkhas saw action in the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistan war that culminated in the creation of Bangladesh and also in the short but bloody Sri Lanka Indian Peace Keeping Force (*IPKF*) campaign. India has already adopted the policy to induct 50% of new recruits for the Indian Gurkhas from her own domiciled Nepalese. As India's army modernizes, shrinks in size to be "*right sized*" and the pressure builds up to have more job opportunities for the Indians themselves, it would be Nepal's youths to the Indian army that would be the first victims of unemployment. To

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<sup>46</sup> Khanduri CB, op. cit. – page 281

<sup>47</sup> Digby W, op. cit. – page 281

<sup>48</sup> India Today magazine, January 9, 2006 – page 146

<sup>49</sup> Khanduri CB op, cit. – page 281

quote Brigadier Khanduri “*In India’s Armed Forces of about 1.3 millions, the Gorkhas contribute about one soldier among 11 combatants.*” This indicates that the Gurkhas’ strength in the Indian armed forces towards the end of the twentieth century totaled about 1,20,000 men!

### **Final Note:**

To conclude, let me harken back to Subedar Rekh Bahadur Thapa’s poignant note “*As Gurkhas we were known, as Nepalese we were not!*” If joining the Khalsa army or for that matter the British or Indian armies are derogatorily termed “*mercenary*” then how “*un-mercenary*” is it to be fat-salaried employees at the United Nations or the Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs/NGOs) funded by foreign donors? Aren’t they Nepal’s new breed of “*Lahures*”? While such debates would go on (*the pros and cons of being a Gurkha Lahure or a labourer in Middle East, the Gurkhas’ contributions in the retrocession of the Naya Muluk back to Nepal and the recognition of Nepal as a Sovereign State in 1923, the 1854 Mulki Ain and total exclusion of “matwales” by the Rana regime in collusion with the British, the whereabouts of the lump sum and “annual present in perpetuity” that was earned through the blood and toil of the matwales*), there is no question that the policy of “*exclusion*” of the *Matwales* by the ruling elites of Nepal indelibly sowed the seeds of discontent and disunity within the country which is now sadly fomenting. Even the scholar of the stature of MC Regmi, when referring to the pre-Anglo-Nepal war period, characterized it as the Shah-Chhetri coalition “***which retained state power in its hands in order to wring economic surpluses from the peasantry and share the proceeds.***<sup>50</sup> After the 1846 Kot massacre, the entire state power was monopolized by a single Kunwar/Rana family for over a century and this period was marked “***by unprecedented personal enrichment of the ruling family.***<sup>51</sup>

However, the dire need now for all of us, Nepalese, is to keep looking forward and moving forward in this unprecedented age of modern technology. One must, of course, learn lessons by looking backward at history, admit the mistakes made but one must keep moving forward, not backward. Nepal’s academics at countless seminars and workshops now call for an “*inclusive*” policy that distributes more equitably the nation’s “*loaves and fishes*”. Back in 1959, the just-Sandhurst-graduated second-Lieutenant Lal Bahadur Pun had gone to meet retired General Sir Francis Taker at his home in Devon, England. In the course of his talks, General Taker, who rose up from the Gurkha regiment, sighed, “***Lal Bahadur, you Gurkhas have no political voice in Nepal. What can be done about it?***” That was a genuine out-pouring, deep from the heart, of a conscience stricken British General! Yes, 47 years later what exactly can be done so that Subedar Rekh Bahadur Saru Thapa Magar’s soul rests peacefully!

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<sup>50</sup> Regmi MC op. cit. – page 46

<sup>51</sup> Dr. Mahat RS, In Defense of Democracy, Adroit New Delhi 2005 – page 31

### *Postscript:*

*The writer's father, Captain Tikajit Pun MBE, OBI, IDSM, had to run away with his "Gallowala" from his Nangi village in the then district of Char Hajaar Parbat (now Myagdi) in 1921 to be recruited as a Sepoy (a monthly salary of Rupees ten) into the 1/2 Gurkha Rifles (Sirmoor Rifles) of the then British Indian Army. Initially his regiment did active duties in the North-West Frontier skirmishing with the Pathans there. During the Second World War, while his regiment went to Middle East, North Africa and Italy, he was retained in India to help raise the new 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Second Gurkha Rifles. When the Japanese opened up the eastern front, his just-formed battalion landed up with Lord Wavell's forgotten Wingate-led Chindit Expedition, fighting the Japanese in Burma behind the Imphal frontlines as guerillas.*

*It is ironical that, though the then Maharaja Chandra SJB Rana was pocketing "an annual gift" of ten lack rupees from the British for the services rendered by the Gurkhas in the Indian army, one still had to run away from his village to be recruited. This was due to the 1860s policy of Jang Bahadur to discourage all recruiters/gallowallas in the districts that was still strictly enforced by the district administrators.. Thus, while one had to "run away" to be recruited in the 1920s, the tide had dramatically changed by the mid-1960s. This is typically exemplified by the frustrated uttering of a young Magar who failed thrice to get recruited into the Indian Gurkhas at Kunaghat/Gorakhpur, "**Why doesn't another war take place?**" He was referring to the 1962 Indo-China war when, in its immediate aftermath, he had seen even bow-legged, short and squint-eyed lads of his village getting recruited into the Indian Gurkhas. **Unfortunately in another thirty years, the war that the young Magar so badly wanted in foreign lands has now arrived at his very doorstep in his very native land. Tragically, this war is not against the Germans, Japanese or the "Malayan bandits" that his father and grandfather fought against but against his own brothers and sisters!** So it is for us, all Nepalese, to genuinely mull again "**what can be done about it!**" SB Pun*

The End

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