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MARTYR LAKHAN THAPA OF NEPAL: FROM A NATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Posted by The Himalayan Voice:

[As the people were suffering from Jung Bahadur Rana's tyranny, Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar taking some ex-army-men created a rebel force in Gorkha and started a rebellion against the government. I do not intend to go to any further details on how Jung Bahadur Rana ruled Nepal. We have huge treasure of historical documents and books on him already. In this paper, I shall discuss from another angle - the martyrdom of Lakhan Thapa himself.]

By B. K. Rana

Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar of Gorkha - though Nepal Government declared him martyr of the country on February 23,

2000 and approved a grant of 0.7 million rupees to construct his bust size statue and a memorial park in Gorkha Kahule Bhangar some 4:30 - 5.00 hours walk on foot from Pokharithok Bazar, the Gorkha Proper; a few people question his martyrdom even today. Scholars are divided on the question and hold reservations on his martyrdom. A well understood partisan thinking of this type still prevails in the country and which certainly is not useful for the growth and development of a perceived democratic society. Many native and alien writers have written on the martyr. I have also had some chances to write a few articles on the martyr in the past. In this short paper today, I shall attempt to discuss the martyr from a native perspective, in other words, from the standpoint of a native Magar from Gorkha proper. I believe Lakhan Thapa led 'country's peace disturbing rebellion' [1] for the first time in history of Nepal has been grossly devalued and misinterpreted by some historians, for instance, Bal Chandra Sharma whose books were prescribed for higher degree courses of education in Nepal until 1990. I have a feeling that there has not come any end to it yet. Also I still doubt those books

are withdrawn from university libraries in Nepal.

I shall take reference from Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana, one of the sons of Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana, who has written the latter's biography discussing also, in the last chapter, the event that led Lakhan Thapa Magar to his martyrdom for the first time in the recorded history of Nepal. This seems to me the only recorded event relating to Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar of Gorkha. The author Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana asserts that his father's biography that he has written is nothing less authentic than his own diary, sometimes in his own hand, sometimes to dictation - meaning that it is as authentic as what his father Jung Bahadur Rana would have written by himself. Checking with some other Nepalese historians how they have painted Lakhan Thapa Magar's picture on the canvas of Nepalese history; I shall attempt to explore the martyr and his martyrdom from my own observations of the surrounding areas of the village Kahule Bhangar, in Bungkot Village Development Committee where the martyr is believed to have been born and which I have also visited numerous times in my life. In one of the

visits to this village some 14 years ago in 2055 Bikram Sambat, I did happen to meet with an elderly man who told he was one of the great grandsons of Jay Singh Chumi Magar, one of the associates of the martyr, also hanged to death along with the martyr for treason.

Birth and Early childhood:

Hailing from the martyr's own community of Magar from Gorkha Proper, which I feel privileged of having come, I have had many opportunities in the past to visit the place where, Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar, as I said above, is believed today to have been born. The elderly people of Kahule Bhangar of Gorkha district, west Nepal believe the martyr was born there in 1835. But no documented information so far to ascertain this place and date is available; neither do we have any other documentation to prove that he was actually born in a village or place other than this anyway. Few Magar writers have otherwise written that the martyr was not born in Kahule Bhangar but their proposition for some other places like Lucknow of India also does not sound to me probable. The birth place of the martyr must either be Kahule Bhangar as believed by most people or Bungkot Khabdi Bhanjyang

or the surrounding area in the district. The village of Kahule Bhangar is a small settlement, on the northern slope of Batase Dada inhabited mostly by the Magars even today; understandably the village must have been totally a village of the Magars some 140 years ago when the martyr began his revolt against Jung Bahadur Rana's tyrannical rule.

Similarly, we do not have any reference of his educational achievement and career as well, however, some Nepalese historians write he was a soldier but do not disclose what position he had held in the army. Some Magar writers, in contrast, claim he was a captain in the army. Since this becomes an uncorroborated claim, therefore, few historians have contested it again recently. In the lack of any evidence, nothing can be said for sure that he had held any position like captain in the Nepalese army. Rather he has been said to be a social organizer and promising leader of the people. This sounds a possibility to me in one sense as "his graceful manners and persuasive tone procured him an armed following of 1, 500 men, at the head of whom he threatened to march to the capital, and after assassinating Jung Bahadur, to seize the

rein of government, and inaugurate the golden age of the Nepalese history"[2]. Scanning this very line with today's spectacles, in an unacceptable manner, the later day historians of Nepal have repeatedly blown it up to disqualify the martyr for his martyrdom. I intend to discuss it in the paragraphs below why those historians would have needed to blow it up ignoring the fact that the martyr's movement for social change had for the first time in history 'disturbed the peace of the country.

He was a follower of Mokshya Mandal, Josmani Saint Sect of religion, a native religious belief practised by both of the disenchanted followers of Buddhism and Hinduism in the county. This Mokshya Mandal Josmani Saint sect seems to me to have played a major role in the Lakhan Thapa Magar led rebellion against Jung Bahadur Rana. Some writers have portrayed the martyr as peasant's leader also. The martyr more precisely seems to be a religious leader of his time as well as a leader who could voice for the cause of the people. His voice for the cause of people had 'disturbed the peace of the country for the first time in the history' [3]. A sad part of Nepalese

history is that incident of such gravity and intensity has either received no attention of historians for further research or remained deliberately ignored until today.

Rebel Disturbs the Peace of the Country:

As the people were suffering from Jung Bahadur Rana's tyranny, Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar taking some ex-army-men created a rebel force in Gorkha and started a rebellion against the government. I do not intend to go to any further details on how Jung Bahadur Rana ruled Nepal. We have huge treasure of historical documents and books on him already. In this paper, I shall discuss from another angle - the martyrdom of Lakhan Thapa himself.

Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana writes, "Shortly after Jung Bahadur Rana returned from Godavari to his Thapathali Durbar, a rebellion of a somewhat curious nature disturbed the peace of the country. A certain Gorkha, formerly a soldier in the army, set himself up as king, calling himself an incarnation of the renowned Lakhan Thapa of ancient times. He imposed upon a large number of ignorant classes,

whom he induced to put faith in his imposture and join under his banner, in order to subvert the government of Jung Bahadur. He pretended that he was specially commissioned by the goddess Manokamana to overthrow Jung Bahadur, and put himself in his place"[4]

Here we should take note, from the authors' lines above, of two names:

- i) Lakhan Thapa and,
- ii) Goddess Manokamana.

There used to be two Lakhan Thapa Magars in the history of Nepal. The former Lakhan Thapa Magar was a famous saint and seems to have very cordial relationship with the King Ram Shah (1606 -1636) of Gorkha. There is a detailed discussion between King Ram Shah and Saint Lakhan Thapa Magar in Gorkha Vanshavali, the only authoritative genealogy of Shah Kings of Nepal. The Gorkha Vanshavali clearly mentions King Ram Shah had a royal edict that the priests of Manakaman Temple must only be the descendants of Saint Lakhan Thapa Magar, whom ethno-historians also designate Lakhan Thapa Magar - I. And the martyr, whom those historians write Lakhan Thapa Magar - II, seems to me very much closely related by blood to Saint

Lakhan Thapa Magar - I. Therefore, he undoubtedly received his name 'Lakhan Thapa Magar' after his famous great-great grandfather Saint Lakhan Thapa Magar - I. It also provides a proof that Lakhan Thapa Magar -II was born either in Kahule Bhangar or in Manokamana area[5]. Like Rana Magars, Thapa Magars were also very powerful Bhardars (Nobles in the King's council) in Gorkha Kingdom. Kaji Biraj Thapa Magar had played an important role in making Narbhupal Shah the king of Gorkha. He had secretly offered a 3 month shelter to Queen Malikavati who was then pregnant with King Narbhupal Shah. There were numerous other Thapa Magar Bhardars in the Gorkha Kingdom. They had great respect for the Kings, Goddess Kalika of Gorkha and Goddess Manokama of Southern Gorkha. Until 2008, Shah Kings used to worship Goddess Kali of Gorkha, Goddess Manokama in Southern Gorkha and Alam Devi of Lasargha, Syangja as their guardian deities.

Now, had ever Lakhan Thapa Magar 'set himself up as king' actually as claimed by Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana? No supporting documentation to this claim is available to this date. It is also understandable that Thapa Magars of Gorkha had very close

relationships with Shah Kings in Gorkha Durbar. They should never have thought of overthrowing Shah Kings and 'set themselves up' as kings. To me, Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana appears to be blowing up the motive of Lakhan Thapa's Gorkha Rebellion. His description doesn't fit into the cultural milieu of then Nepal.

Again, can religious preacher become a rebel who would have publicly told that he wanted to assassinate Jung Bahadur Rana and 'set him up as king' from quite a distance in Gorkha?[6]. Had Nepalese people revered Jung Bahadur Rana as much as the Shah Kings of Nepal? Should we believe what Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana has said that the martyr had declared himself a king ? Should Lakhan Thapa have declared himself a king there would have been a 'royal palace' also. Where was it then ? Had the martyr built a palace and security forces also in Kahule Bhangar ? But, the ruins I had seen through my own eyes of an old building, which people tell was Martyr Lakhan Thapa's palace(?) in Kahule Bhangar, doesn't speak so. I have also seen some broken stone slabs among the ruins of the building that do not seem to be of a palace certainly. There now stands a primary school dedicated in reverence to

the martyr as: Lakhan Primary School[7]. The author Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's description above sounds very much unconvincing to me. Most historians of Nepal have cited Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's description of Lakhan Thapa's rebellion in their works. Therefore, it is no use discussing what later day historians have written so far about the martyr.

The Martyr Lakhan Thapa had wanted to transform the society through Josmani Sect, a religious movement which didn't have any difficult set of rules as in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism also. And, a religious leader of 'graceful manners and persuasive tone'[8] could have organized people and politically challenged Jung Bahadur Rana, as the people were suffering from the tyranny of the ruler.

Rebellion Falls Apart and Follows Capture of Lakhan Thapa Magar:

Jung Bahadur Rana seems to have been reported quite lately of the growing insurgency in Gorkha or he should have paid no actual heed to it. This does not sound correct. It is yes, he had to be worried about the insurgency. According to

what Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana has discussed the rebels had a plan to 'fall upon the Maharaja' in other words, kill Jung Bahadur Rana and the people in Kathmandu would proclaim Lakhan Thapa a king, does sound fictitious to some extent because when someone was accused of subverting a government and then after becoming a king, that would work as a tool for convincing people that the accused stood punishable for such a treason.

Pudma Jung Rana further writes[9], Jung Bahadur Rana had sent a few companies of Devi Dutta Regiment to crush the rebellion and offers details how those rebels were treated later. It seems a year or so earlier that Jung Bahadur Rana was 'passing through the mountain path at Deorali on his way back from princes hunting trip' to Banbassa, west Nepal in February 1876[10] and Lakhan Thapa had planned to mount an attack on the former at Deorali which lies across Daraudi river, west of present day Manokamana temple in Gorkha district of Nepal and declare him the king of the country. But, I am at a loss to understand why would have Jung Bahadur Rana remained unknown of the Gorkhali Rebellion of such a magnitude led by Lakahn Thapa Magar ? And why would,

in contrast, Pudma Jung Rana write Martyr Lakhan Thapa's rebellion against Jung Bahadur Rana had reached far and wide in the country ?

It was not just a random mob or conspiracy from Gorkha against anyone. It looks the rebellion had lasted more than a year already. Let's now assume for few seconds that Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana has written true story about the capture of Lakhan Thapa Magar and his supporters. Should we believe Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar and other six of his supporters being transported in a bamboo cage to Kathmandu to be indicted and later sometime sent to Manokamana Temple from Kathmandu to be hanged? How would have a dangerous dictator like Jung Bahadur Rana, thought of transporting rebels back and forth in a bamboo cage to hang in front of Manokamana Shrine alleging that the goddess had inspired them to revolt, instead killing up his front at once?

This all is enough to understand that Lakhan Thapa's rebellion, as described by Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana, was not just a conspiracy against the head of the government. It was a well-planned political movement very much fitting to

that time. And a person hanged for a political cause simply qualifies for becoming a martyr of the country.

Why to Claim Lakhan Thapa the First Martyr ?

It does not seem to me well justified and appropriate to label Lakhan Thapa Magar, the 'first martyr' of Nepal and demand for him to be declared so as well. To be recognized already a martyr by the concerned government is enough in all respects. A martyr is always greatest among the greatest people. The Magar Community of Nepal and around the world seems to be demanding a governmental declaration for Lakhan Thapa Magar the first martyr of Nepal, while some other people negatively think he does not qualify even for a martyr. There is no question for him to be a martyr of the country. We should thank Nepal Government for declaring him the martyr of the country. He was hanged by a dictatorial regime for raising voice of the people. Those who disqualify Lakhan Thapa Magar on the description of Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana flatly hold harmful partisan view. The author Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's description is in support of his father

Jung Bahadur Rana's order to hang Lakhan Thapa Magar to death. It is like a cat standing witness of milk[11].

There are some people out there who demand Birdhowj Basnyat, who was also put to death in 1846 immediately after the Kot Massacre, to be declared the martyr of the country. Likewise Bal Dev Shah 'Bakabir' was also hanged to death in 1850. Karbir Khatri, Jaya Bahadur Kunwar, and Badri Narshing Kunwar were also put to death on February 17, 1859 for having plotted to kill Jung Bahadur Rana. These people had plotted to kill the head of the government who had just recently taken over the rein of the government. Vengeance against anyone doesn't qualify a person for the martyrdom. These people had plotted to revenge. So, these people's conspiracy was not a political programme. That was not a programme for the cause of the people in the country either. So, they can't be treated as martyrs.

People of Gorkha Recognized Lakhan Thapa Magar Long Time Ago:

The fall of Rana regime in 1950 brought about some changes in the country. Dashrath Chand, Sukra Raj Shastri, Dharma Bhakta and Ganga Lal were

officially declared martyrs of the country and are offered due respect until today. But Lakhan Thapa Magar was not declared martyr of the country. The Nepal Magar Association led a campaign demanding Lakhan Thapa Magar be declared martyr of the country. It took long, for Nepal Government, to declare him, martyr of the country only recently in 2000.

Some people used to say until few years ago, "only in compelling circumstances should one go after Lakhan Thapa, otherwise must be avoided" [12]. The avoidance unfortunately still persists in the country. But on the other hand local people receive the martyr with great respect even today. Long before being declared the martyr, in memory of Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar the people of Kahule Bhangar, Khabdi and Bungkot Village established a Higher Secondary School in Khabdi Bhanjyang and named it *Shaheed Smrity Higher Secondary School* (शहीद स्मृति उच्च माध्यमिक विद्यालय) but the political situation did not allow them to name the school *Shaheed Lakhan Thapa Smrity Higher Secondary School* (शहीद लखन थापा स्मृति उच्च माध्यमिक विद्यालय). Likewise, the people of Kahule

Bhangar were also allowed to name a school: Lakhan Thapa Primary School only (लखन प्राथमिक विद्यालय) but not, Martyr Lakhan Thapa Primary School (शहीद लखन प्राथमिक विद्यालय). It can be hoped the Government of Nepal will allow local people change names of schools in the name of Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar.

Inscription on a Bell in front of Gorkha Kalika Temple:

It is said that after hanging Lakhan Thapa Magar to death Jung Bahadur Rana had sent some prize-money to some people of Gorkha. The money was given to those people so that they could spend it and have some fun and joyous moments, as they had helped 'crush the people's rebellion'. But those saddened people of Gorkha instead, made a bronze bell in memory of the martyr and offered it to Gorkha Kalika Temple on Magh Shudi 8 Sambat 1933

(श्री सम्बत १९३३माघ शुदी ८ रोज ४ मा). The bell is still there in the temple complex. This is also suggestive of Lakhan Thapa Magar's popularity and extent of the rebellion.

Conclusion:

Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar is a source of

inspiration to all to fight for a greater cause. In those days, before a tyrant like Jung Bahadur Rana he stood strong and resilient. Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's description of the event speaks so. Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's description of Lakhan Thapa declaring himself a king, copied by most of the historians of Nepal, is unfounded, baseless and provoking. The Thapa Magars of Gorkha never stood against Shah Kings of Nepal. The Thapa Magars of Gorkha have shed no lesser blood than any other group of people in the making of modern Nepal. In the same light, Lakhan Thapa's sacrifice and martyrdom needs to be judged and recognized. The martyr can't be judged by today's definition of what makes a martyr and what not? We have to see him through his own time when Nepal had mostly illiterate society that would have believed in superstitions instead of any modern day science. The author Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's another description of the Martyr Lakhan Thapa as "in the habit of masquerading as a saint about the streets of Gorkha and extorting money from the simple minded rustics who gave ordinance to his pretensions" is also totally baseless and unacceptable. Lakhan Thapa Magar was a popular leader of the people, he could not have done so.

Likewise accusation hurled against the martyr as "assuming that disguise merely for bread" is horribly wrong because Martyr Lakhan Thapa belonged to the family of Saint Lakhan Thapa - I, the advisor of King Ram Shah and priests of Manokamana Temple discussed above or a well-to-do family of the Magars. There is a huge plot of land consecrated to the deity and which is still cultivated only by her priests - the Thapa Magars of Manokamana, Gorkha. The Thapa Magars of Gorkha held highest political positions in the Gorkha Kingdom. So accusations like those certainly make Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's description, the only and acclaimed authentic description, baseless and biased. This very author, Pudma Jung Rana's description blocked Martyr Lakhan Thapa from being recognized as a martyr of Nepal for a long time.

Annex: Family Tree of Martyr Lakhan Thapa
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Lakhan Thapa's Siblings:

- Ram Thapa (older brother) and;
- Dhana Mala sister.

When the regime hanged Thapa to death, his family fled Gorkha. His wife and children

took refuge in Rumjatar, east Nepal at some Limbu household for some time and then again to Darjeeling, India.

- Thapa's wife and Children : Both his wife and son's name is not known.
- Martyr Thapas' Grandson: His grandson was Karbir Thapa Magar who had a son: Hem Dal Thapa and a daughter (name unknown). Hem Dal Thapa had a son Padam Bahadur Thapa and daughter Shuva Kumari Thapa.

Padam Bahadur Thapa has two sons: Binod Thapa Magar, Bidhan Thapa Magar and four daughters: Shakun Thapa, Rukmini Thapa, Malati Thapa and Sudha Thapa. They all live in Darjeeling today.

Shuva Kumari Thapa has also two sons Rohit Thapa Magar, Shyam Thapa Magar and four daughters: Pawitra Thapa, Sumitra Thapa, Sabita Thapa and Lalita Thapa.

Shuva Kumari Thapa was in Kathmandu in 2002. She was honoured by Martyr Lakhan Thapa Memorial Foundation amidst a function in Kathmandu, Nepal.

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[1] Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana 1909 - 302: "Shortly after his return to Thapathali from Godavari, a rebellion of somewhat curious nature disturbed the peace of the country."

[2] Pudma Jung Rana, 1909 - 302: Life of Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur of Nepal. The Pioneer Press Allahbad

[3] *Ibid* - 302

[4] *Ibid* -302

[5] Kahule Bhangar is some 4 hours walk east from Manokaman Temple.

[6] In those days it would take 3 days to travel from Gorkha to Kathmandu.

[7] The government did not name it Martyr Lakhan Thapa Primary School.

[8] *Ibid* -302

[9] "On receiving news of this insurrection, the Maharaja at once dispatched a few companies of Devi Dutta Regiment to put down the fanatic, instructing them not to use force unless they were met with force. Happily the rebels surrendered their arms after a brief resistance, and were soon caught and sent over to Kathmandu in chains. The ringleader "Lakhan" and twelve of his firmest supporters, whom he probably called his 'apostles", were brought in bamboo cages, and rest on foot. Subsequent investigation brought light the details of the whole plot. The purpose was to fall upon the Maharaja while he was passing the mountain path at Deorali, on his way back from Prince's hunting trip. They were then to march to the capital, where Lakhan was to be proclaimed king amidst the shouts of the whole population, and every opposition was to be ruthlessly put down. Lakhan and six of his followers, who had taken an active part in the conspiracy, were sentenced to death; the others whose offence was merely that of passive participation were pardoned, and allowed to go back to their homes. Lakhan was hanged on a tree in front of the shrine of the goddess Manokama who, as he had

alleged, had inspired him to the deed of blood."

[10] REMEMBERING THE ROYAL HUNTS : In February 1876 A.D. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, (later King Edward VII), son of Queen Victoria came to hunt in Banbassa in west Nepal hosted by Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana and bagged 23 tigers in a 2 week shooting spree. He had presided over the Delhi Durbar in celebration of his mother Queen Victoria having been proclaimed the Empress of India on 1st January 1876 A.D. It is written that he was so bored with the formalities of state that coming to shoot in the Terai was the highlight of his India sojourn. Jung Bahadur considered himself fortunate to be able to return the regal hospitality showered on him by the British royal family 25 years earlier.

[11] As a saying goes: cat standing witness of the milk (दुधको साक्षी विरालोको उखान)

[12] (पाए अन्त नपाए लखन थापाको जन्त)
or (पाए अन्त नपाए लखन्या जन्त)

Comment (s)

----- Forwarded message -----
From: Jyotithapa <jyotithapamani@rediffma>

[il.com](#)>

Date: Fri, Apr 20, 2012 at 7:48 AM
Subject: Re: MARTYR LAKHAN THAPA OF NEPAL:
FROM A NATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Just to let you know that I visited the site of Martyr Lakhan Thapa Magar Memorial Park in the first week of this month at Bungkot, Gorkha.

To me, a native who rebels against the rule of an outsider and is hung for it is a martyr for his land and people. As Jung Bahadur Rana claims descent from the house of Mewar, Rajasthan it would make him an outsider to the mountains so as to speak.

Ms Jyoti Thapa Mani
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