

# A Tradition of Bartering and Selling Nepalese Youths

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“.....Gorkhas have been sold and bartered, and they have been the coin of international diplomacy at the key moments in the Nepalese history. If the Nepalese rupee is not a convertible currency, Nepalese bodies have long been a valued currency in that other market place”, Mary Des Chene, an anthropologist, rightly says. Of course, Nepalese citizens have been used in many wars, which did not essentially involve the matters of concerns of their nation. **Gurkhas**, as people of the world know them, valiantly sacrificed in the First and the Second World Wars for defeating the Japanese and Germans. The sacrifices earned to the **Gurkhas** the fame of brave soldiers in the world.

The contribution for the safeguard of international peace and order during the great wars was indeed very costly in every respect; it was awesome for the Gurkha soldiers themselves, their families and their nation. The Encyclopedia Britannica maintains that 35% of the British Soldiers died in the First World War. Evidently, based on the given figure over 1,50,000 Gurkha soldiers recruited, the number of those killed in various battlefields exceeds 50,000 men. Unfortunately, these deaths are never accounted for.

The historical accounts demonstrate that the Kingdom of Nepal had been drained on eligible youth manpower owing to massive recruitment during the war times. The killings in the wars were so dreadful that every human being gets nervous to go through the accounts. The **Gurkhas** were simple village folks; they hardly knew what politics was involved in the world wars and who they were fighting for. They were simply educated to “kill the enemies”, the Japanese and Germans. They were of course mobilized in the front lines, and so the number of casualties in the Gurkha Brigade was greater to other units of British Army.

Their communication of *Gurkha* soldiers with their families and friends were totally censored and blocked. The Rana regime instructed the British stop allowing **Gurkhas** to write to their families and friends about the casualties due to a fear that such communication might adversely affect the additional recruitment when needed. The Rana regime issued series of **Sanads** (ordinances) obliging the **Talukdars** (village leaders) to make necessarily arrangement and assistance for getting required number of recruits. The failure to duty resulted in punishment, i.e. the forfeiture of **Talukdari** ( status of village leadership and accompanied privileges). Particularly, in the early 1940s, the recruitment was carried out in such a massive sweep that the additional demand of the British, in 1944, for 12000 recruits was met only after hunting every nook and corner of the country.

At the end of both First and Second World War, the large number of survivors had been disbanded without gratuities and pensions. As the British authorities

argue, they had been recruited only for wartime, and thus the question of gratuity and pensions did not arise. If it was so, were the Nepalese simply born to serve the British purposes as “slaves”? At home, the Rana regime promised that the recruits could continue their jobs till they earned pension or come back and get government jobs in Nepal. But nothing such happened in reality. For allowing the unrestricted recruitment of **Gurkhas** in the British Army, the Rana Prime Ministers pocketed Rs. 10,000,00 every year as a royalty, the most part of which was deposited in the personal accounts. The Gurkha Brigade was therefore an institution for trading the Nepalese hill-youths.

In order to prolong the trade, the British regime, upon request of the Rana Prime Minister Chandra Sumsher, prohibited the non-military employment of the Nepalese citizens in India. Chandra Sumsher was most ruthless ruler but the most trusted friend of the British regime. The Ranas always feared that the **Gurkhas** might become the harbinger of anti-Rana consciousness in Nepal. Hence, the Ranas also suggested the British regime that the **Gurkhas** should not be promoted beyond the rank of **Subedar** (equivalent of Sergeant). Moreover, the **Gurkhas** had be restricted to learn English. The purpose behind restriction was to keep the **Gurkhas** ignorant from politics. The conspiratorial design was favorable to the British too. Hence, the suggestion was strictly followed. One Gurkha gentleman jokes, “ When the British Commander said that the water buffalo was flying over in the sky, we were supposed to say “Yes Sir” you are right”.

What the **Gurkhas** and their nation obtained from the two centuries long history is a question being debated at present. The so-called tradition gave nothing but an annual one million rupees for the personal benefit of the Ranas. Now, as an outcome of the tradition, the nation is seemingly divided into “LAHURE” (those who are recruited in the British Army are called Lahure in local folk chat) and non-Lahure people. Since only certain hill tribes had been chosen eligible for the recruitment purpose, the rest other tribes had been defined as non-martial races. The division had a great psychological bearings on both the so-called martial or non-martial races. The education, politics and civil services were taken as privileges of the non-martial races, the Bahuns, Chettris and Newars. This feeling seemingly gave predominance to these communities in the country’s life in all sectors. There was not much concern till the heavy recruitment kept going on, but when it stopped from 1970s, the hilltribes found themselves completely alienated. They were forced to seek jobs abroad. In the recent days, the division of martial and non-martial races in Nepal is now growing in a form of communal tension among the people, as the hill people have been left unable to compete educationally and politically with other races. The line drawn between martial and non-martial races has presently been emerging as a serious socio-political problem in the country, and the hill people have been the victims again.

Occasionally, the British authorities claim that they have done great many things to the Community of ex-servicemen and their children through the “Gurkha

Welfare Scheme". However, the claim is not true. The Gurkha Welfare Scheme, which is dependent on charity of the people, does not have any contribution from the British Government's Treasury. A significant part of the fund comes from mandatory donation of the personnel from the Gurkha Brigade itself. Each and every Gurkha in the active service are obliged to pay one-day salary as a donation to the "Gurkha Welfare Fund", whereas the other remaining part comes from charity of the British public.

The British Government is persistently denying equalizing the pensions and other benefits of **Gurkhas**. In contravention to the Convention of the European Human Rights and Freedoms, international bill of human rights, and the British Race Relation Act, the British Government, is paying more than 20 times less pensions to **Gurkhas** than their British counterparts. Allegedly, the Indian Pay Code is made applicable to justify the discriminatory treatment in matters of pay and pensions of **Gurkhas**. In 1996, the Defense Ministry announced the universal pay rates for **Gurkhas** without any regard to the Agreement. It did same for the issue of widows' compensation in 1999. In the both occasions, the Indian Pay Code was not considered as a concerned instrument while taking decisions to those effects. Hence, the so-called Tripartite Agreement has merely been an instrument preserved for sustaining the British vested interests in matters of Gurkha recruitment. Whenever and wherever the British Government wanted to effect changes in the Brigade and its terms and references of service to serve its interest, the British Government did not feel the existence of the 1947 Agreement as an obstacle. The British Government did not bother to take consent of the Nepalese and Indian Governments when it disbanded a large number Gurkha soldiers in 1968; when it positioned a battalion of Gurkha Brigade in Brunei; when it set up an independent unit, Gurkha Reserve Unit, out of retired Gurkhas soldiers in Brunei; and when it mobilized the Gurkhas in internal strife in Malaysia and Brunei. But when the issue of the benefit of the **Gurkhas** is raised, the British Government effectively resisted the issue on the ground of so-called Tripartite Agreement's provision of applicability of the Indian Pay Code.

The British Government is not bothered to answer a question as to how the Indian Pay Code can be applicable to British employees that directly allows the situation of racial discrimination to prevail. Moreover, many people still do not know that the so-called agreement referred to by the British Government is nothing but a bilateral agreement signed by India and UK. The Kingdom of Nepal has not been a signatory of the agreement. Indeed, while raising the issue of the applicability of the Indian Pay Code, the British Government has apparently ignored a truth that the "**Gurkhas** are citizens of an independent sovereign country".

How many **Gurkha** soldiers died in the wars is still a unanswered question. Neither the Government of Nepal nor UK have given or made honest attempts to collect the true figures of war casualties. The British Government, referring to a report of Graves Commission, has provided that 7000 **Gurkhas** died and 1068

wounded in the Second World War. Seemingly, the figure is simply ridiculous. No one can be ready to believe this figure simply on the ground that the total number of Gurkha soldiers mobilized during the Second World War exceeded two hundred thousand men. The given figure is therefore an attempt to suppress the historical facts.

The Government of Nepal is equally responsible to hide the figure of war casualties. The people of Nepal are surprised to see the Nepalese Government's unaccountable attitude to **Gurkhas**. The **Gurkhas** even had to move a petition at the Supreme Court for forcing the Government of Nepal to present the figure of its citizens who died in the Second World War under the flag of British Army. But Foreign Ministry of Nepal preferred to ignore show-cause notice of the Supreme Court. The Court too did take it normally. The Government was thus judicially excused from its accountability.

Now there is a question, who is responsible to all these issues of injustices? Is it the Government of Nepal, or the Government of UK ? The history of **Gurkhas'** pains and sufferings is getting gradually eliminated. May be, one day the sacrifice of the **Gurkhas** will be completely forgotten. The Government of the **Gurkhas'** Country has no concern with the issue, because the ruler do not come from the community of **Gurkhas**. The British Government does no longer need these people because there is no war going on, and probably the future war will have little significance of "infantry fighting skills of **Gurkhas**" with *Khukuri*.

As evident to the people of all over the world, the **Gurkhas** have played so instrumental role in victory of the Allied Force, upon which the foundation of the United Nations has been erected. However, the human rights instruments enacted by the United Nations are having no meaning to the **Gurkhas** as the discrimination based on their nationality or race continuous. During the Second World War, Nepal had a population of 8.7 million. It is evident that it was a tiny country in terms of population. However, it contributed its over 200,000 youths (approximately 1 out of four eligible male population) in the Second World War. Obviously, Nepal is a country which sacrificed the largest number of citizens in the war. The present Nepal is an economically poor, educationally and technologically backward, socially ignorant and psychologically oppressed and alienated country. Switzerland, while maintaining neutrality to the war, had been able to win the international respect. Unfortunately, Nepal, although it sacrificed so many people in the wars and played so vital role in restoring international peace and order, is forgotten. With the end of the war, the need of **Gurkhas** collapsed bringing a large segment of the **Gurkhas** to streets. The future of many innocent people was thus destroyed. The injustice done is still going on largely unnoticed.

Presently, the brave men have been left in the dark corner of the history. They are forced to struggle for lives with scant resource for livelihood. They are discriminated against, and ill treated during and after their services. The pay,

pension and other facilities they receive from the British Government are incredibly inferior compared to their counterparts, the native British soldiers. This book is, therefore, dedicated to those brave men who sacrificed their precious lives for the international peace and order, and those who have been constantly fighting for justice.

New  
1814-16:  
**Anglo-Nepal War and the Emergence of Gurkha Recruitment**

In 1816, with the defeat in war with East India Company, the agent of British Colonial Government in India, the military ambition of the Kingdom of Nepal<sup>1</sup> came to an end. It was a significant turning point in the military history of Nepal. As Dr. Surendra K.C. points out, "The halt of war created many impacts for

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<sup>1</sup> Modern Nepal came into being under leadership of Gorkha's King Prithwi Narayan Shaha, who integrated several principalities existing independently throughout the later part of medieval era. Gorkha was one of these several principalities which was ruled by father and forefathers of Prithwi Narayan, the ancestor of the present King. After his death, Nepal entered upon a period of rapid expansion. His officers and successors, using his efficient war strategies and wisdom, brought Sikkim, including Darjeeling, in the east and Garhwal and Kumaon in the far west into mainland. The ultimate frontier in the west was fixed at Kangra. The troops under wise and dynamic leadership of the Great Prime Minister Bhim Sen Thapa, Nepal was prepared to face a war with the Colonial Power but to accept their dominance. As rightly remarked by A.D. Smith, the writer of Johnny Gurkha, the fire-eating Prime Minister of Nepal was no friend of the British. One day addressing the young king in Kathmandu he said "How will the British be able to penetrate into our hills? The small fort of Bhurtpore was of the work of man, yet the English desisted from the attempt to conquer it. Our hills and fastness are formed by the hand of God and are impregnable". The British were wary of the building power of Nepal and took it a great threat to their colonial ambition in India, which was paying them so much wealth. The British had no excuse to declare war with Nepal, and could foresee terrible battle ahead. The British already had the test of fight in Sindhuligadhi, where they lost 1500 men. In subsequent days they were building their force to confront with the Nepalese soldiers. To create an excuse for war, the British raised an issue of incursion by Nepal of territory around Butwal. They made attempt to occupy the land of Nepal. The Nepalese Army retaliated by attacking three British police posts engaged in occupying the land of Nepal. Subsequent to the incident, Prime Minister Bhim Sen Thapa received an ultimatum from Lord Moria, the colonial governor general of India. The response of Thapa was "If the English want war against Nepal, they can have it". Lord Moria began assembling his forces at five centers to invade Nepal at four columns. From Dinapore area General Marley with 8000 men was to march on Kathmandu; from Benaras General Wood with 4,400 men was to march toward Butwal and then to Palpa; from Saharanapore area, general Gillespie with 4000 men was to invade the valley of Doon, then to attack the capital of Gahrwal and Srinager; and finally General Ochterlony with 6000 men was to confront with Amar Singh's main force at Malaun. The British force, including its allies and detachments, consisted of 30,000 men and 60 guns. Against this formidable strength of the British, Nepal had only 12000 men. The shortage of arms and ammunition to defend against the militarily rich colonial power was the formidable constraint of the Nepalese Army. Lack of means for efficient communication was a terrible problem too. The Nepalese force had been able to force General Wood to withdraw back at Butwal. General Marley was unsuccessful too. In the west, Nepal had to fight in difficult circumstances, the communication with center at Kathamndu being one of the most serious obstacle. The reinforcement was thus became impossible. In Nalapani the men and women struggled hard against fire vomited by the British Guns. When Kalunga, known as Nalapani was captured and British entered the place there was no one there save the dead and grievously wounded, among them women and children. Nepal had lost 520 people and the British 31 officers and 750 men. Men and women sacrificed bravely, but could live no longer without food and water blocked by the British force. The British force blocked the sources of water the Nepalese army used. The enemy was reinforced with weapons from Delhi. Nepal was helpless. The Nepalese army had nothing left but their lives. The uncompromised allegiance to the independence of the country was the only source of courage they had. Finally, Nepal had no option but to sign a peace treaty. The treaty stole Nepal of its major part of the territory. The Kumaon and Gahrwal and large part of Terai was lost to British. Darjeeling in the east was lost too. More humiliating was the Nepal had to accept the British Resident at Kathamndu. See for details of casualties, A.D. Smith, Johnny Gurkha, Friends in Hills, 1985. P 3-11.

Nepal, the severe cut in the military recruitment being one of the most significant one."<sup>2</sup>

The historians describe that the Anglo-Nepalese war, 1814-1816, was one of the most brutal wars fought in the history of South Asia. It was hard for the both sides. The Kingdom of Nepal encountered with a strongly organized and equipped colonial army. It proved to be heavy for the British Colonial army too, as it had to confront with army<sup>3</sup>, which was patriotically tough. Although, the Nepalese army had only rudimentary local weapons, the casualties met by colonial army were grave. In the war fought at *Sindhuligadi* in 1767, the East India Company's armed force sustained a major setback resulting in the death toll of 1600 colonial military men. It was an extremely humiliating defeat for British Empire to a tiny Himalayan Kingdom. The casualty on the side of Nepal was also not smaller. It lost the lives of thousands of citizens in fighting with an enemy, which was stronger in every respects. Nevertheless, the war proved to be an unusual lesson to the British Empire. It was equally true that the war stood as a heavy stopover against unlimited ambition of British Empire to invade Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal.

The casualties and lessons learned from wars rendered the colonial rulers to change their strategies to Nepal from wars to conspiratorial diplomacy. The Treaty of Sugauli, 1816, is an example. Nepal's defeat in wars with British was mainly due to its military structure, which was primarily good in defensive wars. The soldiers were good and tough, but they had no proper and adequate arms and skills of strategic planing of warfare operation. The country made rifles and few other weapons smuggled from India could fire comparatively short distance, and the powder used was of low quality too. The weapons the Nepalese army then possessed were good enough to defeat the local principalities, but not the soundly equipped European power. Obviously, the Nepalese soldiers had to depend on the defensive strategy for protecting the territories. Probably, it was the most obvious reason for Nepal to surrender and being obliged to sign the treaty of Sugauli, which deprived Nepal of its 75% of the territory.

### **Photo of Greater Nepal and Present Nepal: ( Comparison)**

The end of war through a treaty was a cleverly calculated strategy of the colonial rulers for obtaining the supply of 'cheap and reliable manpower' to the colonial

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Surendra K.C. A Brief Historical Observation of the Military History of British-Gurkha, GAESO. "*Sainik Awaj* ( Military Voice), A Special Issue. Vol. 5, No. 1. Feb. 1997. Page, 12.

<sup>3</sup> An account written by Daniel Writght in 1877 on Nepal gives a true description of the Nepalese Military, and also sheds light on reasons of defeat of the Nepalese army in the war with the British colonial army in the past. He points out: " As regards the efficiency of the army, there is on doubt that the material is good, and for defensive purposes, in their own hills and forests, the soldiers would fight well, and be formidable foes; but for purposes of aggression it is doubtful if they would be of any use against Europeans. The officers are in general uneducated and ignorant young men... Their weapons are very poor. Their rifles are rusty and dirty-looking outside. Many of the rifles said to be manufactured in Nepal, especially the breech-loaders of the recent date, are undoubtedly smuggled into the country through Bombay by the aid of some Parasi merchants there" – History of Nepal, with an Introductory Sketch of the Country and People of Nepal. Asian Educational Service, Second AES Reprint, 1993. PP 48 and 49.

armed force, which was so essential for consolidating grips of colonial rule in India. Attributed with valiant fighting skills and taintless loyalty to employers, Nepalese citizens would be the best choice for that purpose. The history of Gurkha Brigade thus began from the wake of wars 185 years ago. Seemingly, the tradition of **Gurkha** recruitment has its origin in Anglo-Nepal war. Mary Des Chene says : “The first of those the British would call “**Gurkhas**” were culled from among prisoners of war and deserters from the army of “Gorkha” state<sup>4</sup> during the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-16.”<sup>5</sup>

The real cause of Anglo-Nepalese war is difficult to state. Some historians argue that it was a part of the greater design of the East India Company to attach Nepal to the colony, whereas the others view that it was just a result of disagreement regarding control over several border regions. Mary Des Chene points out : “Although records show that the British had no interest in taking over all Gorkhali territory, sovereignty over particular regions was very much in dispute”. The opinion is partially true. The British already had ‘bad eyes’ upon Nepal. They were not happy with the development in their northern frontier where Himalayan Kingdom was growing up a stronger power. To let the development take unobstructed pace could be dangerous for the sustainability of the colony in India. The past incidents of collisions before the territorial dispute arose around Butwal in 1814, do also reject the theory that British did not have interest of colonizing the Kingdom of Nepal.

The two Governments first came into collision as early as the Nepalese unification march was progressing to the end. Heads of some principalities applied to the British for Assistance to stop the march of Prithwi Narayan, which provided a sound excuse for the British to move northward. A British Captain Kinloch with a few companies of “Sepoys” advanced into the Terai in 1765, but was driven back by the Gorkha’s troops. After this incident, governments of Nepal and the British India maintained some diplomatic relations, which included Nepal’s permission for the British resident in Kathmandu. The British resident, however, could achieve nothing since the Nepalese Government’s policy of denying entry to the British nationals into Nepal continued despite hard pressure. Hence, in 1804, Lord Wellesely formally dissolved the treaty between Nepal and British India, that permitted limited commercial activities between them.

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<sup>4</sup> “Gorkha” was one of the several Mid Western independent principalities. Its King Prithwi Narayan Shaha adopted an ambitious plan of unifying the country by merger of several principalities or bringing them under its control. His plan was quite successful. The military success gave a great fame to Gorkha. However, British Colonial Rulers were aware of the development in the Himalayan Kingdom. They were cautious of danger the consolidated Nepal could bring to it. Hence, the British rulers adopted a policy of halting the unification process of Nepal. To materialize their plan, a force was dispatched to Kathmandu in order to assist the King Jayaprakash Malla of Kantipur, the present day Kathmandu district. However, the British force was blocked at Sindhulgadi with heavy loss. Consequently, the British force had to withdraw back to India. This defeat instigated tremendous humiliation among the British officers. The relation between the newly unified Nepal and East India Company continued to be deteriorated leading towards deadly war from 1814.

<sup>5</sup> See for further detail, Mary Des Chene: Soldiers, Sovereignty and Silence: Gorkha as Diplomatic Currency, South Asia Bulletin, Vol. XIII Nos. 1&2, 1993.

The British sought diplomatic intrusion time and again, without success. In May 1810, the British made the last attempt unsuccessfully. In the following days, the relations between Nepal and East India Company worsened further eventually leading to the proclamation of war against Nepal by the British in 1814. These accounts evidently indicate to calculated move of the East India Company to invade Nepal. Many accounts of British writers, on which the greater part of the historical description of the then Anglo-Nepalese relation is dependent, are biased against Nepal. They indirectly make attempt to justify British wars to invade Nepal. However, no grounds of invasion can sustain to justify occupation of a country. The British colonial presence in India as a colony was never founded on legal and moral basis, and thus its movement to invade Nepal can not be argued in the line if it had just grounds or not.

Whatever the cause of invasion or war might have been, it ended with irreparable losses to the Kingdom of Nepal. It lost to the British the larger part of its territory and natural wealth. Although, the sovereignty of Nepal remained intact in principle, the status of the Nepalese nation got reduced to a state of the British suzerainty. The British colonial rulers obtained unlimited access to youth human resource of Nepal for their army. The recruitment of the Nepalese youths in the British Imperial Army then became openly established phenomenon.

**New**

### **A Century of Tyranny Anglo-Rana Diplomacy and the Nepalese Politics Before 1950**

The Nepalese unification phenomena came to a halt in 1816, when Nepal was forced to sign a treaty with the East India Company. In subsequent era, the *Durabari* conspiratorial politics, accompanied by a series of Durabari vendetta and cruelties, replaced the Nepalese military adventure maneuverability. The descendants of Prithivi Narayan Shah, who volunteered the movement for the national unification, gradually lost their identity or prominence in the political scene. One of the major reasons was that from 1770 onwards the successors to throne were invariably minors and as such the administration came under control of *Durbari* (Palace court) aristocracy that was composed of Pande, Thapa and Basnet - all rival groups with their selfish and vested interests. The *Durabari* conspiracy then became a main feature of the Nepalese politics. The internal rivalries and associated conspiracies hatched out to eliminate each other cleared the way for the advent of Junga Bahadur, founder of the ruthless Rana family oligarchy.

The period of Rana regime is historically a period of curse for Nepal's independence, development and people's well being. It was absolutely a dark period in every aspects of a nation's life. In certain part of the history, especially before the rise of the Rana regime, the country had been able of obtaining the service of Prime Ministers like Bhimsen Thapa, who not only uninterruptedly ruled the country for 30 years but also consistently defended her independence.

He unequivocally refused to accept the British supremacy. As a consequence, the country had to plunge into wars and sustain severe losses, nevertheless, the people had been ably prepared and educated to defend their nation and reject the foreign subjection.

But, in the meantime, the *Durbari* politics took a nasty turn, where a nationalist statesman like Bhimsen Thapa had to undergo a humiliating death. The Pandes, without a little regard to his gracious courage to defend the nation's independence, condemned him to a cruel death, allegedly to serve the interest of the British regime. Since then, for a considerable long time, it appeared as a feature of the Nepalese political history that not a single Prime Minister of Nepal met a natural death. Sometime one family after another faced total extinction in process of one condemning the other. This went on, as far as, 1846, when the King's power was finally taken away by the *Rana* dictator, Jung Bahadur.

Following the death of Bhim Sen Thapa, the country ceased to have a matured and dynamic leadership. The establishment of British resident following the Treaty of Sugauli opened the doors for direct interference of the British regime in the Nepalese politics. The rivalry among the ruling echelons in the King's court became increasingly nasty, the only goal of each gang being the usurpation of power from other. The politics of physical extermination of rivals became phenomenal. The British regime encouraged such things to happen, as it would be easier for fishing in muddy water. The instability and uninterrupted political feuds in the court of the King brought this or that group under loyalty of the British Resident at Kathmandu making the penetration comfortable and meaningful.

It is evident from the "Kot" massacre incident, where the British Resident took side of Junga Bahadur, who murdered dozens of his opponents and potential rivals. The British regime supported his mission covertly. The following statement of Dr. Oldfield, the then Resident at Kathmandu, makes it clear:

" There had been high words passing below among the *Sirdars* of different parties as the Queen withdrew, and it is probable that in the excitement of the wrangling, one or more of Junga's younger brothers, who were present, on seeing Abhiman Rana's soldiers loading their muskets in accordance with that General's orders imagined that this was preliminary to some treachery against them and rashly gave the order to fire in Abhiman and his friends".<sup>6</sup>

The Resident's statement does not deplore the dastardly act of Junga Bahadur, but indirectly makes attempt to justify what Junga Bahadur had done.

The British Resident's indirect involvement in the incident is supported by two more facts; firstly, the Resident refused to see the King at his residence exactly

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<sup>6</sup> D.R. Regmi, A Century of Family Aristocracy in Nepal. Published by the Nepali National Congress, 1950. P.59

when the incident was progressing towards worse, and secondly, following the incident, Junga Bahadur submitted a report of the massacre to the Resident. In this connection, the following description of D.R. Regmi is worth mentioning:

“Junga’s success in the Nepal Durbar was a triumph of British diplomacy. Thereafter, they had nothing to be apprehensive about developments in Nepal. Their opponents, the erstwhile anti-British Pandes, Thapas and Chautarias were totally eliminated. It is said that Junga Bahadur entered into a secret pact with the then British Governor General renouncing the previous policy of distrust. Henceforth, the Nepal Government became not only the faithful ally of the British Imperialists, but also began to function as a collaborator in the act of subjugating the Indian sub-continent. Its rulers could not seek external contact without permission of the British”.<sup>3b7</sup>

The political feud and instability in the Government’s court was a desired instrument for British keeping the Nepalese rulers loyal to their regime. In this wake, the Nepalese feudal court politics continued to be divided into factions, the repetition of the conspiracy and counter conspiracy being the feature of the court. Rana, Thapa, Pande and Basnet groups were always busy to keep the King and the British Resident in their favor. This politics left the country far behind even as compared to the contemporary Indian states. Although, the Rana clan emerged victorious in the wake of the politics of conspiracy, it did not spare the Ranas themselves. In this course, the British regime found a group of Ranas led by Bir Sumsher, who challenged the heirs of Junga Bahadur, as more useful for their vested interests. Hence, Hence, the coup of Bir Sumsher received recognition legitimacy from the British regime. In return, the Bir Sumsher, the new Prime Minister, withdrew restrictions whatsoever imposed on recruitment of **Gurkhas**.

In course of time, Dev Sumsher, one of the heirs of Bir Sumsher, became the Prime Minister of the country. Known as a progressive and liberal man, he wished to have changes brought about in the government system. He wanted to make it popular with the wider participation of the people. He seems to have been overwhelmingly inspired by the model of development in Japan in respect of education, agriculture and industry. Promulgation of a constitution for opening the way to democracy was another most ambitious agenda. However, the British regime overtly rejected his proposal of reforms, including the idea of building a constitutional Government. Disgustingly enough, the British regime, against Dev’s proposal of progressive changes in Nepal, supported the coup of Chandra Sumsher, one of the most notorious Rana Prime Ministers. This guy, who came in power ousting and banishing Dev Sumsher, was taken as one of the best Nepalese friends of the British regime in India. It is, therefore, not surprising that Chandra Sumsher became the Rana Prime Minister to obtain the highest honors and official decorations from the British Government.

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Ibid.

Conspiratorial feuds and allegiance to foreign power did not only characterize the Nepalese politics, but it was also corrupt, and cruel for the sake of people. The people had been treated as an exportable commodity. The Ranas' unrestricted allowance for recruitment of the Nepalese youths in the British Army gave rise to a culture of employment in the foreign military service. The people saw no prospect of progress in the country itself. The Rana regime openly educated the youth populace to seek employment in the British colonial Army. The hill youths, in particular, had been given a psychology that they had been born to fight in the wars, and the British were their masters. The psychology very badly affected the process of "emerging emotional integration of the Nepalese nation".

Since the integration of the country was still at primary stage, the subjects of different past autonomous feudal principalities had nothing concrete to keep them in "oneness". The Kathmandu valley viewed the unification as an "occupation of Gorkha". The "Kirat land" in the east, too, felt similarly. While the concepts of, and processes for, integrated administration, common language and a kind of "common Nepalese cultural identity" were in the wake of taking a shape, the country had to face a shattering war with British. And when the war came to an end, the politics turned into a series of nasty *Durbari* conspiratorial feuds. Most unfortunately, the role of the people in development was totally disregarded. Hatefully enough, the youths of the country, who were to work for the consolidation of the national integration and development, had been exported to India for the service of British colony in India. The suppression of the process of emerging national integration and the consolidation of the nationhood of Nepal is, therefore, one of the most pernicious outcome of the Anglo-Rana relations.

As pointed out by D.R. Regmi, the Ranas' friendship was an asset assiduously exploited by the British colonial regime. During the ensuing period when the British fought some decisive battles to suppress the Indian states, Jung Bahadur's policy of detachment, which kept Nepal away from the main stream of political events in India, was one of the decisive factors facilitating the British conquest.<sup>8</sup> For the reason, British could easily deal with the Sikhs in 1848. The policy of Jung Bahadur in relation to other states in India rendered Nepal virtually sterilized internationally. The following three affairs of Anglo-Rana diplomatic relations were largely detrimental in the creation of a glorious history of nationhood, and the consolidation of the national integration:

- The Rana regime not only detached itself from the political developments in the South Asia – the raising consciousness of the people of the region for democracy and ousting of colonial power- but also actively participated in suppression of the independence movement of the people in the region. This pro-imperialist diplomacy of the Ranas under guidance of the British regime apparently undermined the independent nationhood of Nepal. The historical records show that the Ranas not only kept them neutral to the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. P. 79

peoples' movement in the region, but they, Junga Bahadur in particular, offered themselves to join the British expedition to suppress the people and the independence of states in India.<sup>9</sup> This affair amply tarnished the image of Nepal an independent sovereign state.

- The hundreds of thousands of Nepalese youths had been for no cause offered to British war adventure in India and other countries. If Switzerland could stay neutral avoiding war, Nepal could do very much the same utilizing the manpower for the purpose of building the nation. The recruitment tradition not only divided the country into martial and non-martial races, but also destroyed the potentiality of people's participation in education and spiritual development. It created a psychology among Nepalese people that 'to fight war irrespective of causes is their profession'. Hence, the country was turned into a nation of mercenary soldiers .
- Draining on youths of certain ethnic communities like Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar etc. for war purposes seriously hampered in their political participation even as of date. These communities were therefore not only alienated from national development mainstream, but were obviously put into verge of extinction politically, culturally and educationally.

These stigmas are still very much reflective in the socio-cultural behaviors of the Nepalese people. The monopoly of Bahun, Chettris and Newars in politics, civil service, professions, business, etc. is an outcome of thus emerged socio-cultural behaviors. Since certain communities for generations have been recruited in the British Army, they take the soldiers' job as the most preferred one. But in the changed perspectives, the soldiery has come down to such a limitation that a large number of hill youths are forced to seek jobs in foreign countries.

Dependency in trade, commerce, politics and diplomacy on accounts what take place in India is a legacy of British domination in the past. None of the political parties even at present have made attempts to investigate the dynamics of the Nepalese nation independent of Indian influence. The leadership of the Nepal, as a country with limited national resources and smaller territory, is driving the nation without a bit consideration of potential danger of the migration of a huge Indian populace with a obvious threat of total collapse of the state machinery. This happens due to sheer lack of vision and goals among the political leadership, but not because the country lacks intelligence for formulating sound

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<sup>9</sup> . Junga Bahadur offered to join along with a force of eight battalions Nepalese Army in the Anglo Sikhs war in 1848. However, the British refused to take help for want of that much confidence in his sincerity so as to invite him to India with a contingent of troops which they had not tested so far. During the ten years which followed, Junga Bahadur had given ample proof of his servitude to British, and as a reward he was invited to suppress the Mutiny in India. So he commanded a troops of eight thousand. The troops committed all forms of cruelties and extremities against civilians in Luknow and many other places subjecting not only the nation but also each citizen of Nepal to condemnation. This way Nepal was used not only protect the British colonial interest, but also to cause atrocities to the common populace. Nepal's face as a civilized nation was thus greatly tarnished.

policies and plans. The psychology that Nepal should do nothing without dictates of the southern neighbor is something inherited from Anglo-Rana friendship era.

The historical evidences amply demonstrate that the Anglo-Rana diplomacy was built on edifice of plan for sheer exploitation of the Nepalese hill tribes. The British regime wanted to keep Nepal under its complete disposal. The recruitment was the used as a means for fishing two fishes simultaneously with a single hook. The British rulers did not trust the Indian nationals for their Imperial armed force. And in such a circumstance the hardy hill-men from Nepal would be the best choice to defend the colony in India. There was only a minimum risk of these men being interested in the politics of Indian liberation movement. At the meantime, the recruitment would provide the best check against the re-emergence of a military strength of Nepal posing a potential threat to the British regime in India.

It was the reason that the British regime left nothing to press the Ranas to grant an unrestricted access for recruitment of the Nepalese youths in its army. Both the British and their enemies were very much aware of the military potentiality of the Kingdom of Nepal. The Amir of Afghanistan and the King of Punjab had approached the Rana Prime Minister with a proposal of an alliance against the British Empire. The Japan and Germany too made efforts to forge such an alliance to defeat Britain in Asia. To block these events taking place, the British Government employed all the necessary strategic diplomatic apparatus. The recognition of the legitimacy of the Rana family autocracy without any reservation was the most powerful diplomatic apparatus used by the British to avoid Nepal's participation on anti-British alliance. The payment of annual royalty of one million rupees was another equally significant instrument to keep the Ranas quelled. As part of the design to let the Ranas feel trusted friendship, the British regime, in 1923, agreed to sign an agreement that recognized the so-called independence of the Kingdom of Nepal what the Ranas always insisted for. The treaty was double-edged sword: on the one hand it fooled the Ranas by officially recognizing the independence of Nepal, and on the other hand, in reciprocity of consideration made, Nepal was put under strict obligation of avoiding contacts with other countries save in permission of the British rulers. Of course, it was a great diplomatic achievement of the British regime in the cost of freedoms of the Nepalese people.

Rise of patriotic consciousness among the Nepalese people would have been a problem for the Ranas and the British equally. To keep the Nepalese people far from the opportunity of educational and other development opportunities was thought to be an important instrument of sustaining the aristocracy. therefore felt designed need of the both regimes. The two regimes, therefore, employed well-thought scheme of prolonging the ignorance of the Nepalese people. The British Government, despite invaluable service for exceptionally long period of time, offered no opportunity for promotion of the **Gurkhas** to the ranks of commissioned officers. Prior to 1947, even the promotion to the rank of the

Gurkha Major was just an impossible dream. The promotion of the **Gurkhas** in the colonial Indian Army was limited to “*Subedar*”. The Rana Prime Minister Chandra Sumsher had explicitly urged the British Government to avoid promotion of the **Gurkhas** beyond the rank of “*Subedar*”. On the other hand, the Rana Government perpetuated the ignorance mainly through two ways: firstly, it restricted in education for common people; and secondly, it totally alienated the country from access of foreigners and media. Even the reading of newspaper was made a crime.

The Ranas took the British recognition of their legitimacy as the best safeguard for their sustainability. It is why, they made all efforts to please the British even in the cost of lives of people. On the other hand, the British also felt that the Ranas would be their best choice for execution of their interest in Nepal. Hence, the British Government never showed concerns to the cruelties imposed by the Ranas on the people. The rule of law and ideals of democracy did not bother them while backing the most despotic rule in the world. To please the Ranas, the British Government exercised the practice of decorating the Rana Prime Ministers with British Titles and insignias. Junga Bahadur was one of the first and rare persons to be knighted outside of the British jurisdiction.

Due to exceptional support of the British Government, the Ranas totally forgot their accountability to the nation and the people. “As a result, a total monopolization of all services of state accompanied by despicable dishonesty in appropriation of public revenues and later acquirement of private right over its disbursement by a family oligarchy is the gift of the British backed Rana rule in Nepal.”<sup>10</sup>

## **New**

### **Wars and Gurkhas Origin and Growth of the Gurkha Recruitment:**

Quite before the Treaty of Sugauli was signed in 1816, the East India Company had covertly commenced to execute the plan of raising Gurkha troops. Captain Hearsay was the first British officer to propose the idea, and General Ochterlony, who commanded the British force at Far Western front, was one of the high ranking military officers to support the idea. It is said that a small **Gurkha** company was raised comprising of Nepalese soldiers held as prisoners of wars as early as the war was still active. Lieutenant Robert Ross and Frederic Young, from 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry respectively, led the mission of raising the Gurkha Brigade.

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<sup>10</sup> . Ibid, P. 83.

The wartime armed force of Nepal also comprised of the people from Garhwal and Kumaon, which were Nepalese territories before occupied by the British. So that the larger number of captive soldiers enlisted in the first Gurkha troops came from these territories. Although they spoke different dialect, they were perfectly Nepalese in manner, loyalty and military discipline.<sup>11</sup> The outfits and ethnological appearance too were similar. Dr. Surendra K.C. says, “ They ( captive soldiers) had similarities in characters with *Gorkhalis*”<sup>5</sup>. The first contingent of **Gurkhas** thus constituted was called "Shirmore Battalion", which was subsequently renamed as 2<sup>nd</sup> King Edward's 7<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles. Governor General Lord Moria approved the establishment of Shirmore Battalion on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1815,<sup>12</sup> which can be taken as an official date of the origin of the Gurkha Brigade<sup>13</sup>. The number of the Battalion was 3000 men- all of them were captive soldiers. The size of the Battalion kept growing as volunteers from war prisons were constantly supplied in. The mission of building the strength of Shirmore Battalion lied on Lieutenant Young, who died in the war of Khalanga, one of the deadliest encounter British colonial army met during Anglo-Nepalese war. It is the reason why the English writers praise Lieutenant Young as a father of the Gurkha Brigade.

The course of raising the Gurkha Brigade was expedited in the following days. Three more battalions were added before the end 1816. Second to Shirmore Battalion was Nasiri Battalion raised at Simla. Kumaon Battalion in Almora and Malau Battalion in Punjab were added in 1816 too. The momentum of raising more battalions took place upon cessation of war. Fhatepur Levy, Cuttak Legion, Sylhet Local Battalion, Assam Sebnun division Core, Extra Gurkha Regiment, and Hazara Battalion came into being immediately after 1816 . With such a pace of recruitment, Nepal, a thinly populated Himalayan Kingdom, began to drain on its youths soon.

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<sup>11</sup> The citizens and military persons of Gorkha State were called “Gorkhali”. They were so called till unified Nepal was founded. The first Gorkhali enlisted in the colonial army were called “**Gurkhas**”, literally meaning people who belonged or had loyalty to “Gorkha State”. The term is consistently used even today to mean Nepalese soldiers in the British Army.

<sup>5</sup> .Dr. Surendra K. C. A Brief Historical Observation of the Military History of British-Gurkha, GAESO. “*Sainik Awaj* ( Military Voice), A Special Issue. Vol. 5, No. 1. Feb. 1997. Page, 13.

<sup>12</sup> The **Gurkhas** were first recruited in the Indian Army in 1815-16, when there was a war between the East India Company and Nepal. It is said that even earlier the **Gurkhas** had taken service under the foreign rulers for example, there was a Gurkha Crops in the Sikh Army under Ranjit Singh. It is also said that the **Gurkhas** had been recruited in the Army of Shah Shuja, the exiled Amir of Afaganstan. The Khan of Khelat had a crops of Gurkha Bodyguards. See, C.G. Bruce, Himalayan Wanderer. ( London) 1934. P. 200.

The history of **Gurkhas** is often distorted. Many writers knowingly or unknowingly have made attempt to present the Nepalese as a “military race” and has tried to show that they engaged in military of many countries. This is a part of conspiracy to camouflage the “mercenary practice” of the British regime. The British have violated the basic rules of international law by employing prisoners of war in active force. Might be, many Nepalese took service in the foreign military including Ranjit Singh of Punjab. However, many of them did not volunteer to join the foreign military for employment, but they did volunteer to help fight against colonial power. Even the Nepalese historians have not seen this aspect carefully. The British writers have used this fact to provide legitimacy of their action to recruit hundred of thousand Nepalese. They have cleverly tried to show that “ Nepalese cannot leave without war”. There should not misunderstand that “ the **Gurkhas** joined British army not because of the war was their profession, rather they were forced to join the British colonial army. The Ranas sold them and the British purchased them. Hence, they were reduced to commodity by the Ranas and the colonial British rulers.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Surendra K.C. A Brief Historical Observation of the Military History of British-Gurkha. P. 13.

Subsequently, the Nasiri Battalion was reorganized into Gurkha Rifles. The change in the battalions was envisaged for giving an organized shape to the Gurkha Brigade. In this process, the Shirmore battalion was renamed as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles, and the Kumaon Battalion as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gurkha Rifles. The Extra Gurkha Regiment created in Pithauraghad in 1857 was changed into 4<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles and the Cuttak Legion the 8<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles. Out of the Sylhet Local Battalion, Fathepur Levy and Bulan Infantry Regiment were created the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles. The Hazara Gurkha Battalion was changed into 5<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles.

**New**

### **Nepalese Home Perspective Recruitment Maneuvers and Size of Gurkha Brigade**

The emergence of the Gurkha Brigade is preceded by a significant historical transition in the Indian sub-continent. Nepal was emerging as a powerful Himalayan Kingdom, whereas the rise of the British Imperial power was progressing towards complete colonization of India. Nepal was conscious of the development taking place in India, and was determined to defend its independence and territorial integrity. However, it had only limited resource and strength to block the rapidly expanding colonial power. The determination or preparedness to give sacrifice was the only weapon Nepal had in its disposal. Of course, it was not possible to fight a war solely on the basis of 'readiness to sacrifice'- the war in fact required weapons, strategy and skills for using the weapons, which Nepal had a great dearth of. Consequently, Nepal could not go long time with fighting to prevent the British invasion. Hence, there was no option but to agree on the terms and conditions of the enemy, when the resource for war got fully exhausted. Unfortunately, Nepal also could not resist the British imperial power's ill-designed strategy of draining its youths. The Gurkha Brigade was therefore a colonial imposition on Nepal, and it was also an outcome of the severe exhaustion of strength.

The recruitment of Nepalese in the British colonial army was then induced by several factors:

- The captive soldiers had been forced to join the enemy army and serve it. In such a circumstance, it was just reasonable for large number of them to suspect action from the Government of Nepal. Moreover, it was too humiliating for them to return home with 'defeated emotion'. They were therefore forced to continue serving the imperial army.
- With its reduced size and wealth due to wars, Nepal had not been in position to continue maintaining a large contingent of military manpower. The years that followed were a time of rebuilding and evaluating the

- position of Nepal. Economically, the country was fully shattered, and it was, therefore, natural for people to be attracted to the enticement of the colonial army for recruitment.
- Those who had joined the colonial army served it with taintless loyalty, and thus had been able to win over the respect of the British Officers. They were fully convinced that their decision to raise Gurkha Brigade was a right decision. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 enlarged the scope of recruitment since the incident practically proved that employment of the Nepalese citizens would be an intelligent decision. The decision was therefore taken for largely enlarged recruitment of the Nepalese youths on permanent basis.
  - The suspicion of another war between Nepal and British Colonial rulers in the Government circle in Nepal came to an end after the Indian Mutiny in 1857. In this Mutiny, the colonial rulers happily took help from Nepal. A stronger military force of Nepal participated in support of British rulers to suppress the mutiny. In this context, the Rana Government of Nepal viewed that providing Nepalese subjects to serve as soldiers for the British army would have been an intelligent idea to obtain the support of British in order to protect their regime. It is why the regime encouraged the Nepalese people to seek job in the British Army.
  - Mary Des Chene points out: “The details of recruitment maneuvers are complex, but the essential dynamic was very simple. The Nepalese rulers became gradually willing to exchange hill peasants for things they wanted from the British. The things they wanted included, at different times, assurances of Nepalese independence, restoration of territory, honors and title, money and guns and ammunition.” The British were willing to give to the Nepalese Government things it wanted in exchange for the “raw materials” for their Gurkha regiments”.<sup>14</sup> With this simple dynamic, the recruitment in the British army became more easier and lucrative.
  - Nepal could grow a military power again was hunting the mind of British in India. Its hardy hill youths could pose a threat to the colonial rule in India. Mr. Brian Houghton Hodgson has raised this argument in private version of his paper “military tribes” submitted to British Government in his capacity of British resident at Kathmandu. From 1920 and 1930, he made it his project to persuade the British of the wisdom of increasing the number of **Gurkhas** in the East India Company’s army<sup>15</sup>. The main

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Des Chene, page 68.

<sup>15</sup> Hodgson vigorously advocated the policy of Gurkha recruitment. The policy had multi-dimensional hidden objectives. Apart from weakening the Kingdom of Nepal militarily, it would have been a means of wearing out the **Gurkhas**’s deep seated distrust towards the British. Besides, the **Gurkhas** could be held as a pledge for the Nepalese Government’s supportive behavior during any emergency. Hodgson also pointed out that if the martial tribesmen were drained off the country, the military character of the Nepalese Government and its turbulence would also be diminished. He averred: “If we could draw off the surplus soldiery of Nepal into our army, we might do her an immense service, enabling her to adapt her institutions to her circumstances, at the same time that we provided ourselves with the best materials in Asia for making soldiers out of”. See Hodgson’s Memorandum Relative to the Gurkha Army, 14 Feb. 1825. (at this time Hodgson was assistant to Edward Gardner, the Resident). FM. Vol. 125. Hodgson elaborated his ideas about Gurkha Recruitment in his report to Government, Oct. 1832, which is printed in “Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal”, No. XXIII.

purpose behind the project was to drain Nepal of its surplus youth population, which, as he believed, could be a resurgent threat to British colony. This threat could be avoided by raising enormous Gurkha armed force under colonial regime.

All these factors contributed to the growth of the **Gurkha** Brigade, a permanent stigma in the sovereignty of Nepal. The advent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to growing potentiality of world war, further increased significance of the **Gurkha** Brigade. They were cheap manpower for dreadful war. By using Gurkhas in the war, the British government could avoid large recruitment of the British nationals in the army, and thus could escape casualties of its native population. Therefore, with the growth of potentiality of the world war, the British regime in India opened all rooms for recruitment of the Gurkhas. The Ranas in Nepal helped the venture with open hearts.

**Aaaaaaaa Box Begins.**

**At Pokhara, while attending a meeting of ex-servicemen, I had a chance to chat with a old veteran. He and his son, who nearly had a age difference of 40 years, had been recruited together at Gorahkpur, an Indian city in Uttarpradesh. As he said he, along with his son, had been to Gorkahpur to purchase domestic commodities. They were caught by recruiters and persuaded to join the British army. In fact, their interest was with the son, but to detract the recruiters, I proposed to recruit both of us, he said. They, beyond my imagination, agreed to my proposal leaving no other alternatives for excuse, he added.**

**Unbelievably, he was recruited at an age of 40 years, together with his 16 years old son. His son's age was increased by two years as the minimum required age was 18 years. The old man spent 12 years in the Brigade. His son got promotion above him. He too now has retired. It was so nice to have both the father and son in the same company, but very uneasy to "pay salute" to son, he said.**

**Aaaaaaaa close box:**

No accurate figure of men recruited in the Gurkha Brigade before 1870 is available. It is said that the number of Gurkha soldiers in 1870 was as smaller as 4, 685 men. The figure, however, kept increasing subsequently. It exceeded 7000 men in 1895. It dramatically increased when the Rana Prime Minister Bir Sumsher officially lifted the ban on recruitment in 1885. The number of recruits

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Henry Maine and Sir Charles Napier, both the Commander in-Chief in the Indian Army, and Henry Lawarance, Resident in Nepal ( 1843-46) urged the Governemnt to recruit **Gurkhas** with these objectives in view.

It is clear that the fundamental objective behind the Gurkha recruitment was to destroy the Kingdom of Nepal silently. The idea of totally darning on the eligible manpower of Nepal was practiced mercilessly. The so-called employment opportunity for the hill-youths was never a policy of the British Government. Their sacrifice, therefore, meant nothing. They were there to be exploited, and they were exploited.

doubled in a very short span of time during Bir Sumsher's reign.<sup>16</sup> The number got rapidly increased with growing potentiality of world war. Prime Minister Chandra Sumsher Rana dispatched a contingent of 24,469 men for first world war. Another contingent of 5,500 men was dispatched again during active war period. These figures, however, do not include men who were directly recruited by the British depots in

India. As Dr. Surendra K.C. mentions, in total two hundred thousand Nepalese had been recruited during the First World War. Out of them twenty four thousand are reportedly identified to have lost lives. However, the number is just

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<sup>16</sup> . In 1846, The Rana Regime was established by Junga Bahadur Rana. He declared himself the Prime Minister of Nepal and introduced a system of hereditary Prime Ministership in Nepal. Before winning the Power from crown, on 14 September, 1846, he committed a heinous massacre of all top leaders and courtiers of the State. At that time he was a high ranking military officer in charge of the security of the royalty. He is alleged to have his maternal Uncle Mathbar Singh Thapa, the then Prime Minister of Nepal, murdered to clear the way for his induction in power. Mathbar's murder was executed in a plot designed by the Queen, wife of the King Rajendra Bira Bikram. Gagan Singh was a close aide to the Queen was involved in executing the assassination of Mathabar. The Queen and Gagan Singh used Junga Bahadur to carry out the assassination. He too found it a nice occasion to raise his influence and gain power. After Mathbar's assassination, Mr. Gagan Singh assumed prominent role in State's affairs. He was, however, strongly despised by the King and his party, comprising the Pandey and Basnayet clans. At 10 P.M. on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 1846, Gagan Singh was shot dead through a window while he was engaged in prayers. The Queen, as a leader of the gang of courtiers against the King, suspected that Gagan's assassination was an act of the King's gang. She had not the least idea of how Junga Bahadur was playing games to weaken the power of both gangs. The Queen falsely believed that he was her confidant, and hence she consulted with him to address the moment of crisis created by Gagan's assassination. The murder of Gagan Singh left Queen in terribly critical moment, who was raising young sons. Junga Bahadur advised the Queen to summon all the Courtiers to her presence immediately which was complied with then and there. By 1 A.M. the courtiers assembled at the Palace Courtyard, called "Kot". The queen passed an order to Junga Bahadur for investigation of the Gagan's murder and identify the murderer. Junga Bahadur assured the queen of identification of the murderer, and requested her to go to "Kot". The meeting was fixed by Junga Bahadur for midnight intentionally. However, non-of the courtiers had noticed the cause of Queen's order. So all of them had appeared at the Courtyard without smelling any danger of foul happenings. Junga Bahadur alone had brought his regiments, who were lying in ambush and were ready to meet the contingency. At the meeting he incited the Queen to avenge the murder. He said to the Queen, " Madam I am a close friend of the late general ( Gagan). On that account my life is not safe. But I feel, Madam you and your son, too, are not out of danger. Therefore, you should act according to your own responsibility according to the powers you are invested with since 1843" . Bir Kishor Pandey, a member of the King's gang was arrested and chained by order of the Queen...After sometime his party (king's party) who stood in danger of life quietly left the place for British Legation to inform the Resident of happening at the Court, where he found the doors closed. Col. Lawrance, the then Resident, had not even the courtesy to come down and give a hearing to the Royal Visitor. At the Court, the matters took serious turn. Junga Bahadur, as per his well hatched conspiracy for coup, followed by serious debates, allegations and counter allegations on Gagan's murder, asked his brothers and supporters to murder the courtiers indiscriminately. Accordingly, his brothers and supporters opened the arms and slaughtered several dozens of his rivals and the supporters of the king and queen. The queen was informally detained and forced to sign the declaration appointing him as Prime Minister. The Rana regime was thus established with a bloody coup. The history of Nepal witnesses several such bloody incidents. The Ranas were never honest and accountable to the people. The court politics was absolutely selfish and anti-people. The officials of the state never felt accountable to the people. The only common object of each gang was to exploit and fool the people in order to retain in power. The account indicates to involvement of the British Resident at Kot massacre as he refused audience to the King. As the Junga Bahadur had strong hand in the Army and politics built would be a best person to them. The following days proved that they had connections established to get Junga Bahadur come in power. Since 1846, the Ranas ruled for 104 years with all brutalities, sycophancy to the British colonial rulers in India and terrible exploitation of the Nepalese people. In 1856, Junga Bahadur obtained from the King of Nepal a *Sanad* giving him the de-facto sovereign power of the State with the official title of Maharaja (King). The Maharaja Prime Minister was the virtual ruler of the country, the monarch being only a figurehead. The British in India supported this regime for the sake of recruitment of hill-youths in its colonial army. The succeeding Ranas were given away several decorations by the British.. The Rana Regime was an absolute autocracy, which lasted over a century with continuous support of the British Regime. For more details see, Satish Kumar, Rana Polity in Nepal, Origin and Growth ( New Delhi), 1967. Also see, D.R. Regmi, A Century of Family Autocracy in Nepal ( VaRanashi), 1958.

a minimum estimation. The number of recruits further increased in the Second World War as two hundred and fifty thousand men had been mobilized in different war fronts. In his book “ The **Gurkhas**”, Mr. Byron Farwell mentions 9000 deaths in the wars. However, Dr. K.C. rules out the credibility of these figures. He cites: “ Total 10 million armed service men across the world lost their lives and 20 million suffered injuries. 1.1 million Germans and six hundred thousand Englishmen are reported to have lost their lives. America in the Philippines alone eliminated Five hundred and fifty thousand Japanese.<sup>17</sup> In the light of these figures, the lost of lives of **Gurkhas** can be estimated many times more than what Mr. Byron has suggested.

**New**

### **Lifting of Ban on Recruitment Two World Wars and the Financial Benefits Earned by Ranas**

The Rana Durbar (palace) politics took dramatic change towards British during 1880s, when Bir Sumsher came to power through a coup.<sup>18</sup> The British chose to maintain themselves neutral by ignoring appeals for aid from those who had been ousted. Bir Sumsher did read it a favor to him. The diplomacy of British was successful to drag Bir Sumsher to concede with their proposal of opening the Gurkha recruitment. Ultimately, this happened as per the British desire- Bir Sumsher issued a *Rukka* (prime minister's ordinance) calling upon the citizens of Nepal to volunteer for recruitment in the British Army. In return of official permission of the Gurkha recruitment, the British Government recognized the legitimacy of the Government of Bir Sumsher.

The 1885 Rukka of Bir Sumsher reads as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> See for more details, Dr. Surendra K.C. PP. 16, 67,58 and 59.

<sup>18</sup> Bir Sumsher had 17 brothers. With their help, he took the power from the hands of Junga's heirs. Junga Bahadur was comparatively conservative to give more concessions to the British. The country was kept not opened for foreigners. Similarly, the Nepalese citizens were not allowed to travel abroad. The recruitment in the British army was not allowed, and the citizens volunteering to recruitment were not allowed to return, and were punished. The British kept insisting to bring about changes in the policy. While the British Resident urged to effect change in the policy, Junga Bahadur outrightly rejected. In response he mentioned: “ We desire to preserve our independence. We attribute independence solely to our own peculiar policy ( you may call it selfish if you like, but we cannot alter it to please you). We know that you are the stronger power..... You can force us to change our policy. You can take our country, if it pleases you to do so, but we will make no change in that policy, owing to the strict observance of which, we believe, that we have preserved our independence as a nation to the present time”.

During his reign, even the British representative was treated as a virtual prisoner, not being allowed either freedom of movement or social relations with any one. See, R.L. Kennion ( Envoy at Kathamndu, 1920-21), “ England and Nepal”, The Nineteenth Century and After, 1922. P. 51.

Form the description it seems that Junga Bahadur was a nationalist dictator. His sense of independence is profound and his fearless encounter with British diplomats is commendable. Due to his tough stand to the British, the Resident at Kathamndu did not interfere in the coup carried out by Bir Sumsher. To gain the support of the British power, Bir Sumsher submitted himself at the hand of the British Resident. To please Bir Sumsher, the British recognized the legitimacy of Bir Shamsher's illegal takeover of Prime Ministership, and for that obtained from Bir Sumsher the declaration of the lifting the ban on Gurkha Recruitment.

“ Whereas the British Government wishes to obtain subjects of the Nepalese Government as recruits for service in the British Army; the Nepalese Government desiring to show its friendship for the British Government hereby notifies that if you wish to enlist in the British Army you should present yourselves to the nearest Nepalese Officer, from whom you will learn all particulars as to the terms of pay, service, and pension etc. There is full permission from my Government to enlist in the British service and there is no restriction whatever about it. Nepalese Government will be pleased with those who go to enlist. The persons going to enlist should present themselves to the British Recruiting Agents on the frontier”<sup>19</sup>.

With this *Rukka* the selling of the Nepalese youths fully was legitimized by the Rana Government, which officially gave rise to a strange tradition stigmatizing the sovereignty of Nepal. Bir Sumsher and his clique were immensely happy to the development as they could foresee a huge financial benefits along with required guarantee to their regime. For the people, the day is recorded in the history as a “dark day”.

However, the British Government was not perfectly happy with the wording of the order inserted in the *Rukka*. It, therefore, compelled Bir Sumsher and his clique to issue a fresh and more enthusiastic order in 1888. The British Resident at Kathmandu helped to draft the *Rukka*, which reads as follows:

“The British Government wishes to have Nepalese recruits for British regiments. British Government is our friend. Therefore, we wish this notification, that if you wish to enlist in the British regiments we give full permission to go and take British service. There is no prohibition whatever. We shall not be displeased with those who go to enlist. We shall be much pleased with them. See those who served there and gained military talents have on their return here been so lucky as to have been raised to Captainship here, and in future also deserving people will be given such posts. This order is issued with the view that many good people may go and return after qualifying themselves in military talents and thus render benefit to their other countrymen and that they may after doing full service gain pension. Therefore go to the British Recruiting Agents on the frontier.”<sup>20</sup>

With lifting of ban on the recruitment by the Rana Prime Minister, the number of Gurkha recruits in the British army increased in unparalleled way. Seemingly, Nepal, on the other hand, faced a terrible drain on eligible population. The Rana regime was not concerned with country's development and welfare of the people.

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<sup>19</sup> Rukka from the Prime Minister and Commander- In-Chief of Nepal. L/P&S/12/3093/Coll.21.File 78/1. India Office Library and Records.

<sup>20</sup> .Order from Maharaja Bir Sumsher Junga Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister and Commander –In-Chief of Nepal, and from the Commander In-Chief Deb Sumsher Junga Bahadur to all the inhabitants and subjects of Nepal. L/ P&S/ 12/ 3093/ Coll. 21/ File 78/1. IOLR

As a matter of fact, the continuous draining on the eligible population and its grave impacts on the development in the country did not matter to them. As the First World War became more obvious, the British Government was anxious of getting more support from the Rana regime for the purpose of facilitating the enlistment of the desired number of recruits. The Ranas were positively responsive to the interest, which is evident from their declaration: "The whole military resources of Nepal are at His Majesty's disposal".<sup>21</sup> Further, the Nepalese Government agreed to fulfill the British need of wartime armed force in two forms: firstly, it agreed to the loan of part of the Nepalese Army; and secondly, it promised to supply at least 65,000 recruits.

Mary Des Chene mentions that these provisions were in addition to about 18,000 soldiers already serving in the British Army. To compare with 47,383 recruits serving in the period of 1866-1913, the First World War time recruitment is implausibly huge. Basically, the recruitment was made out of eligible youths from so-called "martial race", i.e. Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Saundra etc. From an estimate based on a 1911 census, in Nepal there were about 433,000 men between 15 and 50 years of age who had been eligible for recruitment. With the given figure of recruits, one can gather that there was one recruit in every six eligible Nepalese men. However, since the British did not recruit men as old as 50 years, the ration further comes down.

According to Prem Raman Uperety, the recruiters and village headmen were given rewards by the number of recruits they collected. The Ranas gave Rs. 4 for 10 recruits and Rs. 5 for 25 or more. Anyone bringing in over 25 recruits could choose the reward of reduction of the tax by 50% on his land.<sup>22</sup>

The Second World War also saw extremely huge size of recruitment. It is said that over 1,24,000 youths were recruited in the Second World War, which is seven time increase compared to the preceding four-year's period. The kinds of incentive to recruiters and village leaders, however, were similar. Mary Des Chene rightly says, "The Rana emphasized the great cost to the country of this recruitment, but only in order to remind the British that they would soon expect their reward". The following response of the Prime Minister Joodha Sumsher to the British requesting for additional 12,000 in 1944-45 is worth mentioning here for uncovering the vested interest of the Ranas behind the acceptance of huge recruitment:

"It is indeed very gratifying that the efforts to see the supply of full compliments of Gurkha Recruits from my country for the last four year has all along been successful and nothing will be left undone in trying to meet the present demand for 12,000 recruits. The heavy recruiting

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<sup>21</sup> Resident to the Secretary, Government of India, Foreign and Political Department Secret Internal, Sept. 1914. Quoted in Mary Des Chene, 1993-71.

<sup>22</sup> See for further detail, Prem Raman Uperety, Nepal, a Small Nation in the Vortex of International Conflicts, 1984. P. 133-34.

program for the last four years has drained the manpower of the country to such an extent that I am afraid the quality of the recruits that can be made available now will be poorer... please direct the Recruiting Officers for the **Gurkhas** to instruct the Gurkha Recruiters to explore even the remotest corners of the hills where intensive recruiting has so far not been carried out. My local Officers will have instructions to render these Gurkha Recruiters every help in their work... Nepal has been heart and soul with Britain. With victory in the sight it is only natural that she should feel hopeful that great friend like your Excellency will continue to have in mind what she, as a well tried staunch friend of Britain, has done and that some tangible tokens of appreciation will be coming when the right time for that comes. A strong Nepal is a great asset to Britain. I suppose, I need hardly say that at all."<sup>12</sup>

The above correspondence between Rana Prime Minister Joodha Sumsher and Claude Auchinleck, Commander In-Chief of India, in 1944, reveals many important facts on Gurkha recruitment and situation Nepal.

- The heavy recruitment in the preceding years had drained the manpower in Nepal exhaustively.
- British were not ready to leave a single eligible man in Nepal.
- The sycophancy the Ranas performed to British was beyond the limit of shame.
- The Ranas had no meaning of the country and citizens beyond their personal interest.
- Neither the Ranas nor the British were concerned with the lives of recruits and hardship their families would undergo upon leaving home by the working members.
- **Gurkhas** were the need and means of Britain to maintain its imperial supremacy. It was never an opportunity of employment for the Nepalese people.
- The Ranas were greedy to receive benefits from Britain by allowing them to use **Gurkhas** as cheap soldiers.
- The recruitment was not voluntary but mandatory.

The Ranas received a gift of 10 *Lakhs* rupees per annum as a price for blood and sweat of Nepalese youths, and the money was never accounted for. The money was taken as personal gift to the Ranas. With the growing pace of independent movement in India, the Ranas were wary of losing the money. So that through out the war time years, they had lobbied for the capitalization of it. The British were not bit willing to change the form of payment, as they were suspicious of cessation of their hold over the Ranas. The British were not ready to recognize the contribution made by **Gurkhas** to consolidate their power in India and win the

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<sup>12</sup> Joodha Sumsher to H.E. General Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander In-Chief, India 21, 1944. L/WS/1/37/File W.S. 337.IOLR.

world wars as an assistance of Nepal. They rather defined the gift as a price paid for access to recruits. For British, the recruitment was more a manpower trade than something else. They viewed that the recruitment was a consideration of the British regime for their recognition of the so-called independence of Nepal. This was also taken by British as insurance premium against Rana's involvement in anti- British activities.<sup>13</sup>

The historical account of some people that the supply of **Gurkhas** to the British Army in India was an act of policy to avoid internal insecurity by releasing the pressure that could otherwise generate on the Government by these men due to paucity of employment, is nothing but a conjecture<sup>9a</sup>. Such accounts are calculated arguments to justify engagement of the **Gurkhas** in the British Army. It is a simple uncoated fact that the recruitments were made for the war needs of the British regime in India. The opportunity of employment for the Nepalese citizens was never a basis for recruitment. Generally, the British and their supporter writers often make attempt to depict the recruitments as a “Mercy done by the colonial power to the poor people of Nepal”. The truth is, however, other way round. The Kingdom of Nepal and its citizens obtained nothing out of the recruitment but to lose always. The British Empire, however, earned immeasurable wealth from the Indian subcontinent using the service of **Gurkhas** to maintain the colony.

**New**

### **First World War's Consequences and Post First World War Diplomacy of Recruitment**

A severe lost of manpower was felt in Nepal immediately after the end of the First World War. The Ranas used **Gurkhas** for their personal benefits. By selling youths to British, the Ranas earned adequate wealth to purchase luxuries at par of the British Lords. Dozens of majestic Rana places in Kathmandu were built on the cost of Gurkha blood. In the people's front, however, they created extreme hardship. The villages in the hills were empty of youth population. A large number of whom died or disappeared in the wars. With the lapse of time, the tradition of recruitment has given rise to more problems of multi-fold dimensions. The post first world war years saw tremendous migration of the Nepalese people to India causing difficulties in agricultural operations in the hill districts. People wanted to escape the poverty and forced recruitment facing the hills. The “acute scarcity and bordering on famine” was an Anglo-Ranas gift to the Nepalese people.

The situation was so acute that the Rana Prime Minister Chandra Sumsher was forced to make the following view out :

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Des Chene, P. 72. Also See for more information in this regard, Draft Paper . From Secretary of State , Foreign Affairs to H.M. Minister, Nepal. C. 1935. L/P&S/12/3017/IOLR.

<sup>9a</sup> See for Instance, Nepal and the Indian Nationalist Movement, Kanchanmoy Mojumdar. 1975. Calcutta.

“...that the big drain on the manpower could not only retard and hamper the gradual recovery of the economic condition ( of the country), but may also prove a source of serious anxiety to the Government of Nepal in the near future”.<sup>23</sup>

The country was thus forced to face a potential “grave economic disaster”. The country’s military was also worst hit by the acute migration. It found no recruits. Interestingly, only 3,838 soldiers returned home following the disband of **Gurkhas** after end of first world war.<sup>24</sup>

The British too realized the terror created by the migration and consequent drain on the manpower in the hills. The project to check migration was therefore launched jointly by the two Governments. On being pressed by Chandra Sumsher, the British Government in India banned the employment of **Gurkhas** in the military police, in the tea gardens and other non-military services.<sup>25</sup> The British rulers, however, did not show consideration towards protecting the Nepalese people from coming into grips of the economic disasters. The ban on non-military employment of Nepalese in India was motivated by the vested interest of preserving the manpower for military recruitment whenever the need aroused. Chandra Sumsher was able to convince to put a ban on employment of **Gurkhas** at non-military services on the ground that “ the non- military employment would affect the fighting standard of the **Gurkhas**”.<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, the attempt to prevent unregulated migration of the hill-people was not motivated by the idea of well being of the people, but by the following various vested interests of the Ranas and the British authorities:

- Unrestricted migration of eligible population to India would reduce the British dependence on the Rana Government for military manpower. It would, therefore, have adverse impact on the sustainability of the Rana Government. The British rulers would begin defying the proposals of the Ranas, and also there was danger of them supporting the anti-Rana movement. Hence, the Ranas wanted to keep control over the supply of **Gurkhas** so that they could force the British to comply with what they wanted time to time.
- The British wanted to prevent the migration for non-military services because it would drain the eligible **Gurkhas** thereby creating a danger of the shortage of required number of recruits whenever the need occurred. Hence, the British wanted to prevent migration in order to ensure that adequate number of the eligible recruits is available in the hills.
- The migration to India would also expose the Nepalese people to the independence movement of Indian people. The migrating Nepalese

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<sup>23</sup> IFP. Vol. 10890, Sept. 1920, No. 17. Chandra Shamsher’s Memo to W.F. O’Conner, Envoy.

<sup>24</sup> Kanchanmoy Mojumdar, Nepal and the Indian Nationalist Movement, 1975. P. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

- therefore could be vehicle of the upsurge of anti-Rana consciousness. Hence, the Ranas wanted to prevent the migration as much as possible.
- The democratic government would not be friendly to the British as it could stop selling the citizens. The British regime in India was aware of this fact. Hence, they too wanted to block the access of the Nepalese people to revolutionaries of India.

The statement that neither the Ranas nor the British was concerned with welfare and economic well being of the Nepalese people, is very much supported by the post first world war events. The Ranas agreed subsequently to supply hundreds of thousand of youths to the British Colonial Army. The Prime Minister Joodha Sumsher's letter to Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of India, is an explicit evidence of the fact. If the Ranas were so anxious of the country and people's well being, why did they agree to unlimited supply of recruits to British army even after so much casualties during the First World War? The history has yet to unfold many of such hidden facts.

However, the recruitment also had some positive impacts. The post war period saw increasing consciousness of the Nepalese people against the absolutist regime. The **Gurkhas** who served in India and abroad had opportunities to see the developments and progress achieved by other countries. They were intelligent enough to notice that their own country was subjected to tyranny and despotic rule. The experience they gained while serving in foreign countries aroused in them a sense of need and interest for social and political changes in their own country. The formation of All India Gurkha League was an example of the rising consciousness of the **Gurkhas** against the Rana regime. Organized in 1921, the League was the most popular association of the Nepalese people in India. For some years at the outset, the League deliberately avoided indulgence in political activities, but it gradually assumed a strongly anti-British and anti-Rana tone. The league drew its majority of membership from Gurkha ex-servicemen.<sup>27</sup>

The second annual session of the League at Dehra Dun in 1926 was attended by many retired Gurkha *Subedars* and complimentary message were received from various Gurkha regiments. Messages had been received from the rulers of Garhwal and Sikkim. In this meeting, the participants adopted resolutions urging the Rana Government to lift the ban on freedoms of traveling other countries. The League wanted the modernization of Nepal by extensive reforms of the kinds undertaken by Amir Amanullah in Afaganstan. In 1927, a new branch of the League was opened at Dibrugarh in Assam where there was a large Gurkha population. Bahadur Sumsher, a son of Dev Sumsher, was the president of the League.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> HPP, File No. 258/1931.EC, 21/2 :Reg. N0.489/1932.

<sup>28</sup> . Quoted from Knachonmoy Mojumdar. P.27-28.

Thakur Chandan Singh, a retired **Gurkha** soldier led the organization in the days to come. He edited a newspaper called “Himalayan Times”, which was later on renamed as **Gorkha Sansar** (Gorkha World). Because of growing popularity of the newspaper among Nepalese people in India, the circulation of the same was banned in the Gurkha cantonments. The Gurkha League was increasingly concerned with the interest of the **Gurkhas**, and as such had spelt out its demands in 1931-32 in a Memorial Function. The main demand concerned with the issue of representation of **Gurkhas** in the Round Table Conference and the suitable guarantees of their rights and interests in the future constitution of India. The League also expressed its concern over the economic backwardness of Nepal and resulting exodus of the people to India. It criticized the Government of India for having taken no interest for the economic development of Nepal, and unequivocally condemned the Ranas for their sheer inaction and indifference to the economic sufferings of people.

The British regime was gradually coming to vortex of collapse in wake of rising political movement of the Indian people following the end of the First World War. Moreover, the Khilafat movement<sup>29</sup> led the British regime to feel a “great uncertainty” of its future military position. In June 1920, the army authorities of Government of India met at a conference with a view of adopting the suitable measures to check the Khalifat agitators. In fact, the Khalifat agitation raised a serious suspicion of unrest in future among the Muslim sections of the Army. In this backdrop, the British rulers of India considered it unsafe to rely too much on Indians, and thus came to a decision of increasing the number of Gurkhas<sup>30</sup>. Chandra Sumsher was aware of this situation, and took it as a high time to bargain for his benefits.

The possibilities of another world war was unfolding presupposing the engagement of several thousands of **Gurkhas**. The country, therefore, was foreseeing a fresh catastrophe. Chandra Sumsher Rana seriously took up before the British regime the issue of the capitalization of the subsidy or the gift obtained for the sake of Gurkha recruitment. The concept of self-government by Indians after the Montford Reforms<sup>31</sup> caused the Ranas to worry about the money they were receiving from the British. The issue that the future native Government of India might repudiate the annual subsidy was terribly hunting the minds of the Ranas. The probability of the Gurkha recruitment coming to an end was also looming large thereby threatening an elimination of a great financial source for luxury of the Ranas. The British colonial authorities did understand this “issue”, and did not want to annoy the Ranas as the need of a huge supply of Gurkha recruits was obvious in the light of the growing adventures of Germany

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<sup>29</sup> The Khalifat Movement was a Muslim Protest against the British role in dismemberment of Turkey after the First World War and the treatment meted out to its Sultan, the Caliph of the Islamic World. The Movement was supported by Gandhi.

<sup>30</sup> HPP (Confidential) Vol. 64. Feb. 1921. File Nos. 341-54.

<sup>31</sup> The Montford Reforms were the recognition of the principles of the self Government in India. It was a process of the British Colony withdrawing from India. The self –Government meant Government by Parliament elected by the Indian People.

and Japan for building their military capacity. Hence, in order to keep the Ranas happy, the British regime was interested in paying the gift in the form of “annual subsidy”. Accordingly, the Government of India, in 1919, India decided to change the subsidy of 10 *Lakhs* into an annual royalty payable to Nepal. But Mr. B.N. Basu, a member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council, opposed the decision of capitalization of the subsidy as an unnecessary financial burden on the Government of India.

In the succeeding years, the issue of the capitalization of the subsidy was deliberately held by the British Government for rendering the Ranas dependent on it. The subsidy constituted an effective economic hold on the Nepalese Government and a guarantee of its friendly policy in future. The subsidy was a conditional gift: a recurring “*quid pro quo*” for the recurring condition, viz., the maintenance of good behavior on the part of the Nepalese Government. The good behavior meant “constant supply of **Gurkhas**” in accordance with the need of the British regime. Turning this conditional gift into an absolute one would result in the loss of an important lever for the British Government.

The successors of Chandra Sumsher also constantly put forth the issue of the capitalization of the subsidy for consideration. The Resident of UK in Kathmandu always supported the idea. Colonel F.M. Bailey, the British Resident at Kathmandu, like his predecessors, urged the British Government to concede the Nepalese demand for “subsidy capitalization scheme”. He once wrote to the Indian Government as follows:

“I still feel that the cession of at least some land is the best solution..... It would give immense satisfaction to the Nepalese who are daily performing services to us in discouraging all agitation against the Government of India which would easily find a focus in this Hindu Kingdom. Even a passive attitude in the matter would give us immense trouble”.<sup>32</sup>

The British were so kind in talking about return of some territories to Nepal, as they could see the German-Japan military movement being constantly built up was leading to the obvious potentiality of another world war. Moreover, this was all the more, so, when Italy, Germany, China, Soviet Union and France seemed keen on establishing relations with Kathmandu. The Resident’s letter to the Indian Government was an outcome of the increasing potentiality of another world war. It was by no means a changed attitude of the British regime to Nepal. The diplomacy between the Ranas and the British therefore revolved at need of “Money and Men”.

- Because of new developments leading to second world war, the British wanted to hold the issue of subsidy pending for the time being, so that the Ranas could be dragged to provide a fresh supply of recruits on

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<sup>32</sup> EC, 21-10:Reg. No. 7526/1935, Bailey to Government, 23 Sept. 1935.

- assumption that the British would definitely reward for their help. The British had the full knowledge of the hidden agenda of the Ranas, i.e. the greed for money. This is obvious from the letter of the Prime Minister Joodha Sumsher to Commander-in-Chief of the British Imperial Army in India, where the former expressly put forward his expectation of tangible reward.
- The Ranas in the greed of subsidy and in order to please their masters unhesitatingly agreed to provide a fresh supply of over one hundred thousand recruits. The country was fully exhausted of youths. They had been deployed in all dangerous battlefronts in many parts of the world. Thousands of them died in the wars. However, the Ranas had to contend themselves with nothing from the British.

The Second World War was catastrophic to Nepal in every respects. Its eligible youth population was eliminated in the war. Those who had luck to get back home, had to return empty hands and mutilated bodies. A large number of them were lost while fighting in places not familiar to them. Some of them were subsequently found struggling for lives in mountains of Burma, Thailand and Laos, and jungles of Malaysia. Since they had nothing earned to get back home, so that many of them stayed in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Burma. In fact, the Kingdom of Nepal lost its youth population to such an extent that the country had no manpower for carrying out development projects.

## **New**

### **Second World War and Uncertain Future of the Gurkhas in the Post War Games of Hidden Diplomacy.**

By the end of the Second World War, the day for the British to quit India neared rapidly giving rise to a state of a great confusion regarding the future of **Gurkhas**. They were then no longer needed to the British regime. Painfully enough, the Gurkhas themselves had nothing with them but their shattered homes in the hills of Nepal. After the end of the war, thousands of **Gurkhas** were disbanded, and deceptively sent back home empty handed. An assurance was given by the British officers that they would be called back some time in future, the time that never came.

With the end of the Second World War, the Indian Independence movement for forcing the British regime to quit from India caught a great momentum. This political development in India brought the 'Gurkha Brigade into a forefront of the complex situation. In the perspective of quitting India, the British regime ceased to have need of the Gurkha Brigade. It, therefore, became a burden for them to get rid as soon as possible and without much hassles. The easiest solution conceived by the British government in the regard was to pursue the Indian government to take over the Brigade as an integral part of the Indian Army. The stigma attached to sovereignty of Nepal due to the tradition of recruitment was

nowhere an issue of concern for the British. The communal fights between Hindus and Muslims and the circumstances leading to partition of India created a desired situation for the British to bargain, about the continuity of the Gurkha Brigade, with the newly formed Indian Government. The given circumstances provided comfortable environment for British negotiators convincing the Indian leaders, the Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru in particular, that the **Gurkha** Brigade was an indispensable force to protect the Indian frontiers against militant Pakistan.

The Ranas were not bit concerned with bargaining going on between the British and the Indian Governments. The sole issue they were interested about was to protect their regime. The matter of welfare and justice to the Gurkhas did not constitute an agenda of importance for the Ranas. Unfortunately, the Congress Party of Nepal too remained unconcerned with this issue. Moreover, amazingly enough, the Ranas were still busy in unsuccessful bid of lobbying for the capitalization of the annual Rs. 10 *Lakhs* “gift” that was receivable in return of the service of Gurkhas. They took this issue resolutely since 1920, since when the anti-British agitation in India became increasingly widespread. The Ranas realized that, if the capitalization of the subsidy was not done, they might lose this annual income once the British left India. Since the money mostly went to the private pockets of the Rana Prime Ministers and their courtiers, they were madly running behind issue. During the inter-war years the Ranas insistently geared up the diplomacy of lobbying for the capitalization of the amount. As Mary Des points out, “The point of change was to end the hold over them, which this gift gave to the British”.<sup>33</sup> Exactly on the same ground the British were unwilling to change the form of payment of the so-called gift. The British also believed that the capitalization would destroy an insurance premium against Rana involvement in anti-British activities. The Indian politicians also maintained negative view towards capitalization of the “so-called gift”.<sup>34</sup>

Obviously, the future of the **Gurkhas** at the end of the Second World War was messed up with confusion and uncertainties- they were no longer need of British on the one hand, and on the other Indian populace considered the Gurkha Brigade as an instrument of British imperialism. The Indian people had not forgotten the atrocious role of Gurkha Brigade to suppress “Sepohy Mutiny” and many other events. The suppression of Indian freedom movement at *Jalialabagh* was condemned as one of the most heinous action of Gurkha Brigade. Owing to such incidents in the past, the Indian people were not psychologically prepared to accept the Gurkha Brigade as a friendly force of the independent India. The Indian people’s negative perception towards the Gurkha Brigade was one of the several serious dilemmas that the British wanted to skip the open deliberation of the issue.

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<sup>33</sup> Soldiers, Sovereignty and Silence: Gorkhas as Diplomatic Currency. South Asia Bulletin, Vol. XIII Nos. 1 & 2 (1993)

<sup>34</sup> See Draft Paper. From Secretary of State, Foreign Affairs to H.M. Minister, Nepal. C. 1935 L/P&S/12/3017.IOLR.

Pensions and other benefits of **Gurkhas** were also vital issues that might cause the Government of India decline to take over the Brigade. Till 1947, Gurkha pensions were paid out from the (British) Legation Treasury in Kathmandu. Since the amount of pension to pay each year was huge, the British were trying to find out ways out to relieve the burden. Continuity of the Brigade in the Imperial Army in future would keep accruing a huge amount for the British Treasury, which the British government wanted to avoid outright. Even the regular cost was thought as a unnecessary financial burden. Hence, the idea of having the **Gurkhas** absorbed in the Imperial Army and get stationed in India was something not desired.

However, the **Gurkhas** were not even little aware of what secret diplomatic games were being played between the Governments of UK and India about their future. There were rumors spreading out in the barracks that they going across the “sea” to serve the British Queen. For many of them it was not a acceptable message as they had to miss “*dalbhat*” (the Nepalese common dish of rice and lentil) and probably had to eat “beef”. Many retired soldiers have plenty of reminiscent to say in these connection. Despite these concerns, the **Gurkhas** were calm, and had not been worried of their future as they believed that British would not leave them “helpless”. These innocent people, with their taintless honesty through out the service period, never had chance to learn that they were going to receive unusually degraded treatment from their employer in return of their taintless service of 150 years. Their unfathomable faith to the British that they were their true ‘godfathers’ was about to be mercilessly crushed during negotiation that was taking place soon between the British and Indian Diplomats. Some of them had been dreaming to receive letters of call back to service from their homes. While dreaming so, they seldom suspected that they would be getting nothing in the days to come. In fact, while leaving barracks for “*chutti*” (home leave), they even had not a faint idea that they were being sent back home on cut-off scheme without gratuity, pensions and any forms of benefit for their service.

#### **Photo of Few men who have no pensions:**

Check Purnajan

Till February 1947, the British Government was not certain about what it was going to do regarding the **Gurkhas**. A complete state of confusion existed at every level and section of the British Government. This can be well seen from the following paragraph of a letter written by F.J. Bellenger to Lord Pethick-Lawrance:<sup>35</sup>

“Since 1945 the conditions have changed and the indications are that the Army vote will scarcely be sufficient to provide for the British Troops required for vital defense and internal security commitments. The cost of **Gurkhas** could not be justified at the expense of cutting

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<sup>35</sup> . Bellenger was a high army official and also a M.P. Mr. Lawrance in his letter back to Bellenger has addressed with designation of “M.P.” See for more detail, L/P&S/3093. IOLR

down the number of British units below what is considered essential for the peace commitments and war expensation. The problem of training and the general shortage of manpower also make it difficult to decide at the present time whether it is desirable to include a Gurkha element within the Post War Army”.

The above letter clearly establishes that the **Gurkhas** were not the "need" of peacetime, and so that the honorable settlement of the issue was not an agenda for the British Government. The immediate post war events adequately prove that the subsequent decision to include the Gurkha Brigade within the 'Post War British Army' was not an outcome of the respect of the British Government for taintless service of the **Gurkhas**. Rather it was an outcome of the "need" of war, which occurred again in the course of time. The events of bargaining and diplomatic games between UK and India following the end of the war amply show that the so-called relation of honor between **Gurkhas** and its employers is simply “ a myth”. The reality is that the edifice of the history of the **Gurkha** Brigade is erected on the “ foundation of war time need of cheap manpower” .

The treatment of **Gurkhas** as an 'commodity for war' is not merely an inference drawn from the history of huge recruitment during wars. It is equally proved by post war policies of the British Government. The War Office, the supreme military body in UK, wanted the negotiation on the **Gurkhas** put off until the size and shape of the post war army was fully examined. The question of **Gurkha** Troops was therefore governed by the fact of necessity in the future, but not by the need of the **Gurkhas**. A few British officers disliked this policy of the government. General Scoones, for example, opposed the proposal of wait and see policy of the War Office, which put the future of the Gurkhas in utter chaos and uncertainty. There is no doubt that the British Government caused a great harm to Nepal and the Gurkhas by its policy of "wait and see".

It is equally true that the Indian stand on **Gurkhas** too lacked the clarity of vision. The issue of negotiation on future of the **Gurkhas** was pending for a long time. The Dominion Government of India was not prepared for negotiations on Gurkhas for several reasons, one of them being its dislike of troops as an instrument of colonial rule, and so that no open negotiations took place for long time even after the declaration of the independence of India. Mr. Bellenger, subsequently, had hinted out in his letter to Lawrence that the Government of India was becoming ready for negotiations. However, nothing tangible development in this regard took place till 25<sup>th</sup> February 1947, when an intention to open negotiation on employment issue of the **Gurkhas** was announced in the House of Lords in UK.

The secret diplomacy then began to raise its head. On 11 March 1947, the Cabinet Office (UK) dispatched a secret Cycpher Telegram to High Commissioner for UK in India stating that the papers to guide the negotiations were enroute. The said telegram specifically instructed that the negotiations

should be limited simply to settle the general principles, and concluded in few days. The discussion on details of the issue was deliberately avoided. The telegraph also specifically instructed the British officers at Delhi to avoid negotiations in details with the Government of Nepal, with added emphasis that the negotiation should follow immediately and last no more than a few days. The telegraph is an evidence that the British were not interested in concrete resolution of the issue.

The British intention behind the brief negotiations is clear. They wanted to settle issues without giving much time given to the **Gurkhas** themselves and the Government of Nepal for scrutiny of plans thought about impacts thereof in of future. Equally valid reason was that they wanted to prevent deliberation among **Gurkhas** on the terms and conditions of their service, including pay and pensions. All the available facts and the prevailing circumstances indicate that the British Government was in no way interested to consult with the **Gurkhas** on terms and conditions of their service.

When the formal negotiations between British and Indian authorities were likely to open in sooner future, a series of schemes were being thought at various governmental as well as the individual level, which amply demonstrate the feelings or attitude of the British to the **Gurkhas**. On 15 April 1947, R.N.W. Bishop, a Captain from 2nd Gurkha Regiment, wrote a letter to Mr. Tom William, M.P. Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries recommending an idea of raising agriculture battalions out of Gurkha Regiments. His letter contains a scheme as follows:

“ In view of the present and prospective shortage of labor in the agricultural industry in this country (UK), I venture to lay before you for consideration a proposal which I think deserves careful and sympathetic examination. During the war, I have had the privilege of serving for some three years with Gurkha troops, and I claim to know them well. The Gurkha is a hard worker, always willing and cheerful, has been brought up in peasant surroundings and is by nature and agriculturist, and by tradition loves the British. There is a great wealth of labor in Nepal, for which in the past the natural outlet has been the service in the Indian Army under British Officers. This outlet must, if necessity be circumscribed if not entirely stopped in the coming years, and there is already a feeling that the British, who have been magnificently served by **Gurkhas** in times past, are going to ‘let them down’ when the change comes in India. I am quite certain that if **Gurkhas** were invited, under suitable conditions, to do agricultural work in Great Britain , they could be recruited in large numbers and to our mutual advantage. The following points arise:

1. It would ease negotiations with the Nepal Government if the **Gurkhas** were recruited on a military basis in Agricultural Battalions for a definite terms overseas, say two years.

2. Feeding would present no difficulty; rice would be necessary but **Gurkhas** can eat anything except beef.
3. They would prefer to work for their keep only, but they should be paid a lump sum on completion of term Rs. 1,000 ( 77 Pound) per annum. They like to take lump sum back to Nepal.
4. Climate presents no difficulty, they are hardy hill- men.
5. Accommodation: **Gurkhas** are used to build their houses and therefore where camps are not already available they could provide for themselves with the minimum of materials. They are well disciplined and would cause no trouble if billeted in farms or eve outhouses, barns & cottage.
6. Camp supervisors could be found amongst demobilized British Officers who have served in Gurkha Regiments. It might necessary to bring a few religious teachers from Nepal.

No doubt this proposal would have to be considered by the Indian office; but I feel confident that there are not insuperable difficulties; and that if properly handled the project would be welcomed in Nepal, and would go far to solve the labor difficulties which face British Agriculture during the next few years”.

This letter presents a typical feudal attitude of the British Officer to **Gurkhas**. It has the smell of “white color superiority”. The expressions found in the letter, for instance, that “they prefer to work keep only “; “a lump sum of 77 pound per annum can be paid”, “can stay at outhouses, barns and cottages”, etc. plainly demonstrate the degree of status the British officers used to think hold about **Gurkhas**. The scheme proposes such a derogatory benefit to Gurkhas, who so much sacrificed to the British interests, that it hardly puts them above the level of "uncivilized human being." It implies that the **Gurkhas** should take every thing positively what the British decide for them. The expression used in the letter is a general reflection of the British Government’s attitude towards **Gurkhas**. Moreover, the letter is a good evidence of the implicit design of the British armed force concerning the use of the **Gurkhas**.