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The Rulers of Central Himalaya: A Historical Perspective of British-Gorkhali War and Treaty

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Abstract:

The two regions of Central Himalaya: Kumaon and Garhwal, have ruled by the Gorkha for more than two decades. The erstwhile Gorkha Kingdom, who extended their territory even westward to the Tons River have faced major challenges from British. The Gorkha fought fearlessly and impressed British with their warrior skills. Thus, British not only employ and rectify the treaty with Gorkha and rise various Gorkha Regiments but maintain a good office with Nepal Darbar. The objective of this article is to provide first, historical account of the rise of Gorkha Kingdom as major Central Himalayan power. Then, the study seeks to engage with the courageous attitude of Gorkha against British military advancement in specific reference to Khalanga war at foothill Himalaya. Finally, paper pays attention toward British-Gorkhali Treaty that still after more than two centuries later remain as a foundation that defining Nepal relations with India and Great Britain.

Keywords: Gorkhali, Gorkhiyani, Nusseree, Territory and Central Himalaya

1. Background

The Gorkhas of Garhwal and Kumaon Himalaya, consist of various communities that come from the diverse regions of the Nepal at various point of time. They now residing as an ordinary citizen of India and done well in many spheres for the local communities and for the Indian State. In his ethnographic account on Gorkhas, Crooke (1896:468) maintained that Gorkha/Gorkhali is a name of the community that aggregates various races who internally distributed at numerous valleys of Nepal Himalaya. While in Indian context term Gurkha/Gorkha in general applied to the persons of Nepal origin (NCBC 2007:7).

Garhwal and Kumaon Himalaya has ruled in turns by various kingdoms including the Kushana, Katyuri, Guptas, Pauravas, Pals, and Gorkhas. Among all of them, the distinguish highlanders from Nepal, particularly Gorkhas and generally other hill tribes from the Nepal were control two regions of Central Himalaya; Kumaon and Garhwal, for more than twenty-five years from 1790 to 1815. Therefore, the distribution of Gorkhas in the West of the Kali River is more than two centuries old.

Last year 1st Gorkha regiment of Indian Army celebrated their bicentenary, therefore, the history of early Gorkha rulers of Central Himalaya is as interested as present Gorkha garrison's heroic saga. The Balbhadra Thapa was one of the brave Gorkha leader, who hold their position in Khalanga fort till the end and impressed British. The British, later on, imposed some treaties over Nepal Darbar and after considering the martial skill of Gorkhas, rose various Gorkha regiments. This work provides a brief historical account of the rise and westward expansion of Gorkha kingdom, then it put light on Gorkha's war against much modern and larger British army and final section describes subsequent British-Gorkha treaty that paves the way for Gorkha regiments in foreign armies.

2. Rise of the Gorkhalis

The Gorkhali first emerge in the history of Nepal in the eighteenth century. At that time, Nepal was divided and ruled by numbers of principalities. Narbhupala Sah the ruler of petty Gorkha principality, observed the defenseless condition of surrounded territories thus he encouraged to add them in the Gorkhali land (Atkinson, 1881). In his course of expansionism, he invaded in the territory of Vaisya King of Noakot. The King of Noakot defended well his territory and obliged Narbhupala to go back. Now, Narbhupala realised that his force was insufficient to subordinate surrounded valley chiefs hence, he keeps staying away themselves from all further territorial tasks. In 1742 A.D Prithvi Narayan Sah succeeded his father Narbhupala and with the conquest of Noakot he fulfilled the past unsuccessful wish of his father. Till 1768, he occupied and unified a great territory of Nepal as Gorkhali land and establish Kathmandu as the erstwhile capital of Nepal Darbar or Gorkhali kingdom. After the death of his father Prithvi Narayan Sah in 1775, Sinha Partap Sah ruled Nepal, only for three years. Since Ran Bahadur Sah succeeded his father Sinha Partap Sah quiet in young age in 1778, therefore, his mother Rani Indur Lachhmi managed all state affairs (Atkinson, 1881:608). Under her leadership, the Nepal Darbar expanded frequently in all direction. At this time, the political condition of Kumaon was not stable, so the Nepal Darbar resolved to move westward. Moreover, to this, Harak Deb Joshi a prominent figure in the kingdom of Kumaon wrote and revealed about the political instability of his country to the Gorkhas and asked for their cooperation, probably for the mutual benefits out of it.

In 1790, Gorkhali army under the command of Chautriya Bahadur Sah, Kazi Jagyat Pande, Amar Singh Thapa and Surbir Thapa invaded Kumaon (Atkinson, 1881:609). To defend their land, Mahendra Singh immediately prepares their army and took a position at Gangoli. At Gangoli confrontation, Mahendra Singh successfully defended his land and obliged Amar Singh Thapa to retreat toward Kali river (Atkinson, 1881). But Lal Singh an uncle of Mahendra Singh got defeat by Gorkhali at Gatera near Katolgarh and lost approximately his two hundred men while forced to run away at downstream toward Ganga plain (Atkinson 1881). Mahendra Singh was on his way to join his uncle Lal Singh but when he got news that his uncle was defeated by the Gorkhali, he was also compelled to flee to Kota, finally at Rudrapur they met each other. In the absence of proper resistance, Gorkhali able to capture Almora in 1790 and from this point they started controlling entire Kumaon.

The triumph of the Kumaon encouraged Gorkhali to move further westward and penetrate into the eastern border of Garhwal. In 1792, Gorkhali invaded at Langurgarhi probably through eastern Nayar stream. For throughout the year, Garhwali proved their courage while not allow Gorkhali to penetrate into the Garhwal. It was Chinese invasion in the Nepal that compelled Gorkhali to withdrew their positions from Garhwal and Kumaon however with impressed from the Gorkha power, Raja of Garhwal have agreed to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 25,000/ to Nepal Darbar (Walton, 1910:123). Apart from this tribute, Gorkhali compelled Raj of Garhwal to appoint their one representative at Nepal Darbar. Despite, in 1803, keeping in view the political and physical circumstances of Garhwal, Gorkhali determined to reduce Garhwal Raj. According to Rawat and Tivari (1997:19), before the Gorkhali invasion, the State of Garhwal was facing internal conspiracy against the Raja Pradhuman Sah. The younger brother of Praduman Sah was indulged in this ill practice and tried to topple down the establish regime of his brother. Unfortunately, in 1803 Garhwal jolted by the massive earthquake that the fort of Raja rendered ruin. A major chunk of Garhwal's population has died in this calamity. Due to this earthquake, the previous drains and springs were run dry and new drainage have appeared in different locations (Atkinson 1881:616, Walton, 1910:12). Eventually, in the absence of any significant obstacle, Gorkhali leaders such as Amar Singh Thapa, Hasidal Chautariya, Bam Sah Chautariya and other invaded in Garhwal. At collision of two armies, no real resistance was offered by the Garhwali and Gorkhali smoothly able to enter in the fort of Srinagar that was situated on the bank of Alaknanda river.

It has been most cited that the Gorkhali ruled Garhwal with most brutal manner. Thus, still today the world "Gorkhiyani" in the Garhwal is synonymous with cruelty (Purohit and Benjwal, 2007; 117). Atkinson (1881) noted the traveler account of British men: Caption Raper who mentioned that at the western foothill of Himalaya near the Haridwar post of Gorkhali, people from the deep interiors of the Garhwal Himalaya were forcefully used to brought and exhibited to sell in slavery toward Nepal and other regions. The Gorkha divided the Garhwal into numbers of the petty military fields and each commandant was imposed his own power to extort revenue as much as he can. The villages were left abandon, Garhwali compels to fled deep into the jungles; and from those days, the term Gorkhali forms a popular synonym for all that is cruel and tyrannical (Hunter 1985;18). Bam Sah, Hastidal and Ranjor Singh Thapa as governors of Garhwal were "disposed to indulgence", therefore, the country again started some improvement but their executive officers were cruel (Atkinson 1881; 622).

3. British-Gorkhali War

After succeeding Garhwal, the confidence of the Gorkhali grows high and it has been said that Gorkhali also started little but frequent encroachments on British territory at Tarai region of foothill Himalaya (Atkinson 1881:629). The Butwal pargana in Gorakhpur district faced a massive strike from the Gorkhali. The Nepal Darbar claim that pargana had formerly come under the Raja of Palpa, whose territory has occupied by them and thus it provides them inherent right to took possession and revenue collection at Butwal (Atkinson 1881). The claim that put forward by Gorkhali was unacceptable for the British government. On April 1814, the Governor General, Lord Hastings, ordered to occupy Butwal and with a negotiation, Nepal Darbar were agreed to withdraw their troops from there (Atkinson 1881:631). But later on, the Nepal Darbar refused to follow due negotiation and planned for reduce British administration from the Butwal once again.

On 29th May 1814, a large number of Gorkhali troops have suddenly made a massive attack on Butwal police post which rendered eighteen British men died and six wounded (Atkinson 1881:633). Now, Gorkhali were enabled to reoccupied disputed territory of Butwal. In consequent of this cold pursuit, British government have resolved to counter Gorkhali army and on October 1814, British troops were mobilized toward their concerned strategic locations (Fraser, 1820:13). On 1 November 1814, British government officially declare war against Gorkhali (Katoch, 2010:323). Three major locations were chosen to make a strike on them; Kathmandu, Gorakhpur and Dehradun. For its war plan, British Army was decorated in four divisions; Ludhiana, Meerut, Banaras and Dinapur. According to Fraser (1820), Ludhiana division, consisting around three thousand men. While Atkinson (1881:634) and Smith (1852:215) noted this number around six thousand. To this division that was under the command of Major-General Ochterlony, allocated a task to move northwestern part of Shivalik Himalaya and size territory lay between Satlaj and Yamuna. The Meerut division with three thousand five hundred men put under the command of Major-General Gillespie. It was expected that division would move toward Dehradun to occupy Khalanga fort and if succeed then supposed to move further eastward and seizure the Gorkha post of Shrinagar Garhwal or to move westward to gain entry into Jaitak fort near Nahan, where Ranjor Singh Thapa held a position (Fraser, 1820). Leading Banaras division, Major General John Sullivan Wood with his four thousand five hundred soldiers moved from Gorakhpur to disputed territory of Butwal (Smith, 1852). It was expected that after the occupation of Butwal-Palpa area, the division would move eastward and cooperate with Dinapur division to reduce Gorkhali at Kathmandu (Fraser, 1820). It was also assumed that this division was strategically essential for bifurcate Gorkhali territory in eastern and western part. While, cutting off, Gorkhali communication from mainland Nepal and render Garhwal-Kumaon isolated. Finally, at the most eastern part of the Gorkha-British frontier, the Dinapur (Bihar) division held the position. The travel record of Fraser (1820), depicts that the Dinapur division was one of the largest division among four divisions that comprise around six thousand men under the leadership of Major-General

Marley. While Atkinson (1881:634) and Smith (1852:215) argue that the division consisted of almost eight thousand men. Based on the nearest location from Kathmandu, the division was assigned the task to seize the Muckwanpur pass and bring the war to the heartland of Nepal.

In the task of Kathmandu, the Banaras and Dinapur divisions were entirely collapsed due to the pathetic leadership of Major-General Wood and Marley. It is well cited that on 10th February 1815, General Marley shamefully abandoned battlefield without given any information to his seniors and even make no alternative arrangement to his command (Atkinson, 1881:634). On this courageless act, Atkinson (1881:634) mentioned: "*operation of General Wood and Marley were nothing short of disgraceful, betraying a carelessness, timidity and want of scientific knowledge which happily seldom occurs in the annals of British army...*" It was computed that General Wood and Marley comprise around thirteen thousand men in against of four thousand Gorkhali garrisons, however, Gorkhali not only able to defend their heartland but manage to cause severe damage to their enemy. British army loss nearly a thousand men and two guns in this operation.

4. British-Gorkhali War at Khalanga

Khalanga fort was situated nearly three and a half miles north-east of Dehra and locally known as Nalapani or Nalagarhi (Katoch, 2010:333). In Nepali, the word Khalanga stands for an army camp or a camp of soldiers. Among all of the battlefields, Khalanga was more prominent as it established Gorkha as one of the best soldiers in the high altitude warfare in front of the British army. A small fort of Khalanga was under construction on an isolated hill of just five or six hundred feet high that covered with thick shrubs and Sal forest (Fraser, 1820:14; Katoch, 2010: 333). The hill consisted a flatten top with three-quarters of a mile in length and steep slopes from three sides which appear gentle in southward, where the construction of the fort was under process and Gorkhali garrisons were busily engaged in to raise its boundary walls (Fraser, 1820; Atkinson 1881:635).

Major-General Gillespie from the Meerut ordered to seize the valley of Dun. On 19th October 1814, Lieutenant Colonel Mawby of the 53rd regiment moved from Saharanpur to annex the valley (Atkinson 1881:635). On 22nd October, a detachment, under the command of Colonel Carpenter clear Timli pass. Hence, successfully able to cross first range of Shivalik Himalaya and capable of hold a position at Dehra, located just five miles away from the Khalang fort (Fraser, 1820). Leading the main party of the British army, Lieutenant Colonel Mawby also took a smooth passage from Mohan pass and reunite their soldier at Dehra on the 24th October (Atkinson 1881).

For the war preparation, Gorkhali also took a position at Khalang. As it aforementioned the Khalang fort was under the construction with hasty manner but Gorkhali were still strived to raise its boundary walls. In front of relatively much larger British army, the Gorkhali have only three to four hundred regular troops under the command of Balbhadra Thapa, a nephew of Amar Singh Thapa who was the governor of Garhwal, based on Srinagar (Fraser, 1820:14; Atkinson 1881:635). Lieutenant-Colonel Mawby sent a messenger to surrender the fort but Balbhadra Thapa tore up his letter and send a strong message read as "*Salam...he would soon pay him a visit in his camp*" (Fraser, 1820:15; Atkinson 1881:635). Colonel Mawby, on very next day, led his troop to capture the fort but no result has come out of this pursuit and British force returned to the Dehra with first disappointment.

General Gillespie, who ordered to moved his division but could not able to join same immediately: probably due to distance related cause between Meerut to Dehra, which is one hundred and eighty kilometers approximately, however, he joined his troops at Dehra on 26th October 1814. As more precise war strategy, General Gillespie, divided his officers and men into the four columns, and a reserve force (Fraser, 1820:15). The first column consisted of 611 garrisons were commanded by Colonel Carpenter. The second column was placed under Captain Fast with the allocation of 363 officers and men. The subsequent column led by Major Kelly with 541 soldiers. While Captain Campbell lead the fourth column with 283 men and finally, a reserve battalion of 939 officers and men were put under the command of Major Ludlow.

On 31st October, with great appreciation, around nine o'clock morning, raid of Khalang fort was begun. As Atkinson (1881) mention that enemy had done everything to stop the advancement of the British force. Gorkhali fired bullets and throw boulders over the enemy. However, with great courage General Gillespie took his position and receive a shot on his chest and killed on the spot. In this attack, Gorkhali completely obliged British to retreat. The Gorkhali women were in the forefront to protect the entrance of the fort and throw boulders down over the English troops (Atkinson 1881:635; Katoch,2010:333). While Gorkhali garrison took a position in boundary walls of the fort and kept heavy gunfire, arrows and stones throwing over the opponent. In consequence, of this attack, British army lost around fifty officers and soldiers while two fifty officers and soldiers were seriously wounded. As noted by Katoch (2010: 333), General Gillespie did several unsuccessful attempts to capture the fort from 26 to 31 October.

Colonel Carpenter succeeded General Gillespie and ordered to retreat their army at Dehra without any further disappointment. On 24th November, a Siege battery with heavy guns' arrival at Dehra from Delhi. At very next day, British again resume their attack on Khalanga fort and that was consistent till the night of 26 November. But on 27th November, the commander, Colonel Manly, satisfied with the besiege of fort and practicability of the breach, ordered a storm under the leadership of Major W. Ingleby of the 53rd regiment at midnight (Fraser, 1820:27). Again Gorkhali produced commendable resistance and British lost their three officers (including Lieutenant Luxford and Lieutenant Harington) and eight were wounded and 38 men killed and 445 wounded (Atkinson 1881; 638).

At last on 27 November itself, it was noted that continues water supply, somehow assisting Gorkhali to take shelter in the fort thus unethically British resolve to occupied water spring. Therefore, just three days later due to water scarcity, it became difficult for Gorkhali to hold their position in the fort. Thus, on the night of 30th November Balbhadra with his 70 garrisons evacuated from the fort. Balbhadra with his great bravery cut their way through the chain of British soldiers: which placed to intercept them, and successfully escaped to a nearby hill. Katoch (2010: 333), mention that after the conquest, Khalanga fort was got destroyed completely. As an acknowledgment to this great illustration of bravery by Gorkhali, Atkinson (1881; 639) wrote "*The determined*

resolution of the small party which held this small post for more than a month, against so comparatively large a force, must surely wring admiration from every voice,". After successful evacuation from Khalanga, Balbhadra Thapa joined another three hundred Gorkhali troops with his seventy men and move to Jauntgarh (a principality/*Garh* out of fifty-two) and encounter with Major Baldeck. Here too, Balbhadra shows his potential and defend themselves from the British army and approached toward Jaithak fort and joined the Gorkhali force. Finally, after the surrender at Jaithak, he joined Sikh army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and became first Gorkha who serve the foreign army. So in this way, Balbhadra was the first Gorkha ho joined Indian force under the flag of Sikh army and fought Afghan War.



Figure 1: Photograph of ruin structure of Khalanga Fort, Published by Rai (2013)

5. British-Gorkhali Treaty

The successful occupation of Garhwal from the Gorkhas now paved the way to Kumaon annexation for the British. Subsequently, with mild assault, British captured a most primary city: Almora of Kumaon Himalaya. On 27th April 1815, after more than a month serious battle for Kumaon, the British Representative E. Gardner and Gorkhali Sardars (leaders) such as Bam Sah, Chamu Bhandari, and Jasmadan Thapa came in a convention at Almora for the evacuation and surrender of the Gorkhas and their posts at Kumaon. In this convention, to confined the western limit of Gorkhali territory, the Kali river was used as a prominent marker of the boundary between British and Gorkhali Kingdom. On 15th May 1815, Amar Singh Thapa also surrendered the Malaun fort of Solan to General Ochterlony and signed over a convention. The convention compelled Gorkhali to delivered the Malaun and Jaithak forts to the British and simultaneously evacuate the whole region lay between Satlaj and Kali (Atkinson,1881; 671).

A treaty of peace between East India Company and Maharaja Bikram Sah, King of Nepal was signed on 2nd December 1815 at Sugauli, situated in East Champaran district of North Bihar. As a representative of Maharaja, Raj Guru Gajaraj Mishra accompanies with Chandra Sekher Upadhyaya was appointed as signatory while Lieutenant-Colonel Paris Bradshaw signed on behalf of the British. In the treaty, it was agreed that the treaty should be ratified by the Maharaja of Nepal within fifteen days but Amar Singh Thapa was still not in a fever of any kind of negotiation thus treaty remain unratified up to the due time (Atkinson,1881; 677). In consequence of this, at Makwanpur, situated around thirty kilometers away from Kathmandu, on 28 February 1816, Gorkhali strike over the British but defeated subsequently. In this battle, around eight hundred Gorkhali soldiers were died and wounded. The casualties of British were around two hundred and twenty men. Finally, on 4 March 1816, the treaty of Sugauli ratified between the East India Company and King of Nepal and immediately a signed copy of treaty been exchanged at Makawanpur (Atkinson,1881). As per treaty, in the west, Kumaon and Garhwal while in the east, Sikkim have overtaken by the British from the Nepal Darbar. Apart from this, the land of Tarai on the foothill of Nepal was also incorporated in the British territory.

There is no doubt that the British were so impressed with the fighting skills of the Gorkhali. Therefore, before concluding the Anglo-Gorkha war, General Ochterlony himself promoted the idea to recruit Gorkhalis in the British army (Parker, J, 2013).Parker (2013), noted that Lieutenant Frederick Young of the 13th Native Infantry was the first British officer who developed the informal relations with the Gorkhali garrisons and able to raise two Gorkhali rifles: 1st and 2nd Nasiri/Nusseree (meaning of Nusseree is friendly and loyal) in 1815, under the British flag, even before the treaty of Sugauli. However, on 24th April 1816, Lieutenant Young officially received permission to form first Gorkha battalion (Parker, 2013). After fifteen years of service, the 2nd Nussereewas merged with 1st Nusseree. Since 1st Nusseree rifles were raised from the Gorkhali prisoners of Malaun fort war thus in 1903, the title of Nusseree rifles replaced with 1st Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment) that was further amended as King George's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment) in 1910. According to Chappell (1994:12), in 1950, when India become a republic, the regiment renounce the title "King George V's Own Gurkha" and adopted the present title as 1st Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment).

Kansakar (1984) described that even after the treaty of Sugauli, Nepal Darbar was not principally agreed to allow their Gorkhas in the British army. When the British started secret recruitment of Gorkhas in Nepal, the Nepal Darbar not liked this undercover act and took strong measures like a sentence to death for some of the Gorkhas on their return at home and seizes their properties

(Mojumdar,1973:11; Kansakar, 1984:51). It was the establishment of the Rana regime in 1846 that begin the new era of confidence building and end up the century-old rivalry between the Nepal Darbar and British.

In 1846, Jang Bahadur Rana assumed the office of the prime minister of Nepal and for the thirty one years, he served successfully (Waller, D, 1990:176). He managed a good office with the British government and visited England in 1850. During the time of 1857 revolt, he assisted East India Company and led 12,000 Nepalese soldiers to quell the rebels (Kansakar, 1984:51). In the pretext of this corporation, British returned the land of Tarai to the Nepal in 1860, which they were controlled since 1815. Since, at the time of World War-I, the British Gorkha army maintained the high values of bravery and loyalty therefore on 21st December 1923, a fresh "treaty of perpetual peace and friendship" were signed between the Great Britain and Nepal (Tripathi,2012:247). The treaty, not only open up Tarai region of Nepal for India traders but it recognised Nepal as independent sovereign State. After the independence of India, on 31st July 1950, this treaty was replaced with the "India and Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship" that still after decades remains a foundation that defining Nepal-India relation.

6. Conclusion

The fearless character of the Balbhadra Thapa and his garrisons not only impress British army officers but scholars such as Atkinson, Fraser, Smith and many more. The previous literature that focused on British-Gorkhali war history have believed Gorkhas, as most skill warriors in mountain warfare. It is also most familiar that to pay tribute to the gallant Balbhadra Thapa, British set unique example of respect and raise a War Memorial on Shastradhara Road at Dehradun. It is often said that it is a single memorial in the world of its kind where victorious party even commemorates Martyr of their gallant adversary.

The Gorkhas, including other Nepali hill tribes, have done well in many spheres for the local communities and for the Indian State. It is most accepted fact that they are one of the brave and fearless soldiers in the world. Historically, they participated in Anglo-Sikh war, Afghan war, first and second World War with British Indian Army. While, Gorkhas as a vital part of the Indian army, engaged in all major wars and conflicts that India fought against their enemies. They are currently recruit in the various regiments of the Indian, Nepali and British army. The skilled and courageous soldiers of these regiments are serving in one of the deadliest war zones of the world such as Afghanistan. Today, the Gorkha who join Indian army have served in seven (1st Gorkha Rifles, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9th and 11th Gorkha Rifles) separate regiments that matter of pride not only for Gorkhas, Indian Army but as common highlander of Central Himalaya.

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