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研究ノート Research Note

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## Two Aspects of Hinduism Associated with Military Labour Migration: Hinduism in the British Army's Brigade of Gurkhas before the Abolition of the Nepalese Monarchy

Taeko UESUGI\*

**Abstract:** This paper explores two aspects of Hinduism associated with the employment of Nepalese soldiers (Gurkhas) by the British Army's Brigade of Gurkhas before the abolition of the Nepalese Monarchy. Hinduism was the only religion formally authorized in the brigade. The first aspect of Hinduism explored is its role in employment policy to maintain ties between the Gurkhas and Nepal—the world's only Hindu kingdom at the time—and their allegiance to it, enabling Gurkha employment in a foreign military. The second aspect is the form of military Hinduism that was embedded in the workplace of military labour migrants; a sense of Nepalese identity was reinforced by Hindu beliefs and practices, which provided cohesion in multi-ethnic/caste Gurkha units. In army camps, Gurkhas worshiped military gods; Hindu beliefs and practices offered a way to maintain discipline and strengthen the military rank system among Gurkhas who were serving in a foreign army. Hindu symbols and practices were also appropriated by the Gurkhas to interpret their experiences in battle and the relationship between them and their British officers. However, influenced by the democratization of Nepal and the decline of the monarchy, this unitary religious policy was abandoned in 2005.

**Key words:** Military labour migration, Gurkha soldiers, British Army, military Hinduism, military culture

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### I. Introduction

This paper examines two aspects of Hinduism associated with military labour migration. I describe and analyse the religious beliefs and practices in the British Army's Brigade of Gurkhas before the abolition of the Nepalese monarchy in 2006<sup>1)</sup>. The term Gurkha covers Nepalese soldiers in the service of foreign armies, foreign police, or foreign private military and security companies.

As already pointed out, the internationalization of military organizations deserves attention in current research on war and the military sector (Moskos et al, 2000: 2; Tanaka, 2004: pp. 14-15, for example). Today's supranational military alliances require integrated chains of command among allied military forces. The idea of national armies or United Nations (UN) forces in peace keeping operations (PKO) working together with the employees of private military companies is not unusual. These private military companies are often multinational enterprises and their employees include nationals of countries other than the companies' client countries.

Within the wider field of internationalisation of the

military sector, this paper focuses on military labour migration. Although military forces composed of citizen soldiers have been considered morally just since the American Revolutionary War and the French Revolution, some of them have included enlisted men who are not citizens or nationals of the states employing them. Currently, the French, Spanish, Indian and British armies, the Singapore police and Vatican City, all employ non-national soldiers. Even while professing 'the republican ideal of the citizen-soldier' (Boëne & Martin, 2000: p. 55), France retains its Foreign Legion. Retaining their own cultural background and transnational social ties with family and friends in the mother country, foreign recruits use the language of command and remain unified under its discipline. For countries that employ foreign soldiers, transnational ties and the social space available for non-native soldiers have implications that deserve detailed research.

I describe the Hindu beliefs and practices of the Brigade of Gurkhas in the British Army as an example of military labour migration and clarify two aspects of

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\*Senshu University

Hinduism which were engendered by international military labour migration.

In the following Chapter II, I outline the Gurkha employment policy laid down by the UK and Nepal governments after the independence of India and Pakistan and describe the first aspect of Gurkha Hinduism. In Chapter III, I depict Hindu beliefs and practices in the Gurkha camps and reveal another aspect of Gurkha Hinduism, i.e. military Hinduism. This paper refers to military Hinduism as the set of Hindu beliefs and practices which are observed in a military organisation and involved with its administration and operations. Chapter IV deals with servicemen's attitudes toward the Brigade's religious policy. In Chapter V, the changes, taking place in 2005, are briefly reported.

There are some important studies on military organisation and Hinduism. Fuller has pointed out that Hindu kingdoms justified military operations and the enlargement of territory as a means of maintaining and stabilising the cosmic order (Fuller 1992, pp. 106-127). In former Hindu kingdoms, militaristic elements received some emphasis in festivals honouring the goddess Durga (Fuller 1992, pp. 106-127). Alavi (1995, pp. 56-94) reports that the East India Company, the former employer of Gurkhas until the Indian Mutiny (1857-1859), made the Company army a Hindu army to give more authority to its rule in India. Alavi also describes 'military Hinduism' in the army of the Gorkha Kingdom led by King Prithvi Narayan Shaha in the eighteenth century (Alavi, 1995, p. 90; 268). The military's adoption of Hinduism is not simply a relic from the past; present-day military forces have also appropriated Hindu ceremonies and symbols. The former Royal Nepalese Army blessed its weapons during the Dasain festival (Takahashi, 1992, p. 425). Indian missiles are named after Agni, the Hindu god of fire (Bhatt, 2001, p. 1). In addition, the discourse and representations of Hindu nationalism in India make great use of those Hindu gods, who appear in battle scenes in sacred texts and ancient epics (Bhatt, 2001, pp. 191-194).

The form of Hinduism observed in British army camps originates from these traditions. However, military Hinduism in the Brigade of Gurkhas is distinct from other commonly reported types of military Hinduism in that it was developed in the context of international military labour migration. The Gurkha case can provide useful

material for comparison and discussion in broader studies of military organisation and religion.

In studies of the Hindu diaspora, the divergence of official and popular Hinduism, the rise of ecumenical Hinduism, the amalgamation of sub-castes into single categories, and so on, are often discussed in reference to the historical background and the socio-political conditions for migrants in destination societies (Vertovec, 2000). Although my analysis is indebted to these previous studies, I turn my focus to Hinduism's embeddedness in an actual occupation, which has not received so much attention in migration studies.

The original data presented here were collected during research conducted by the author in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2007 in the UK, Brunei Darussalam and Nepal. In addition to the original data I use second-hand materials such as British officers' memoirs, newspaper articles, official documents, and so on.

Before describing the Gurkha situation, three things should be noted. Firstly, it was in 1947, with the independence of India and Pakistan, that Gurkha soldiers became regular soldiers of the British Army. So the time span with which this paper deals is limited to post-1947 years. Secondly, since the middle of the 1990s, the transnational employment policy of the Brigade of Gurkhas has been undergoing phased unification with standard British Army policies. This paper uses the data collected during the period of transition. Thirdly, data reported in my previous papers (Uesugi, 2001; 2004; 2007; 2012) is also included in this paper to present comprehensive evidence.

## II. Hindu religious policy based on intergovernmental agreement

Gurkha soldiers have served officially in the British Crown forces since 1815, when the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816) was fought and the East India Company induced Nepalese prisoners of war to fight on its side (Table 1). Since then, Gurkha soldiers have been engaged in the defence of the UK's overseas interests and the security of the commonwealth nations. During the Second World War, the number of Gurkhas reached an all-time high of some 250,000 soldiers. With the separation and independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, however, six of the original ten Gurkha regiments were assigned to

**Table 1 An abridged chronological table of Gurkha employment**

1814-1816	Anglo-Nepalese War
1815	Some Nepalese prisoners of war started to join the East India Company's military.
1857-1859	The Indian Mutiny
1923	Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and Nepal was signed.
1947	Independence of India and Pakistan. Division of Gurkha Regiments into the British Army and Indian Army
1990	People's Movement I in Nepal
1997	Handover of Hong Kong from the UK to China
2004	The British Government announced that Gurkha soldiers who had served for four years and retired after the handover of Hong Kong be given the right to settle in the UK in 2007.
2006	People's Movement II in Nepal
2006	The Nepalese House of Representatives declared that Nepal would be a secular state.
2007	Revision of Gurkha terms and conditions (Gurkhas can select the terms and conditions equivalent to their British counterparts.)

Source: Bullock (2009), House of Commons (1989) and The Times of India. (2006).

the Indian Army and four to the British Army. Following further cutbacks in 1970 and 1994, only 3,400 Gurkhas were serving in the British Army in 2007.

Traditionally, Nepalese men between the ages of 17.5 and 22 years, who belonged to particular ethnic groups or warrior castes, are eligible for infantry selection<sup>2</sup>. Over eighty percent of recruits were from ethnic groups speaking Tibeto-Burman languages (the Gurung, Magar, Tamang Thakali, Limbu, Rai, Sunwar and others) and the rest were from Hindu high castes (Thakuri and Chhetri).

Gurkha soldiers demonstrated their martial quality as infantrymen in battle; as a result, the colonial Indian Army tried to find and recruit 'pure' Gurkhas. As such Gurkhas were believed to be found only in the Nepalese hills, the colonial Indian Army endeavoured to build an amicable relationship with Kathmandu and acceded to some of their political and economic requests. As a result, the employment policy of the colonial Indian Army and the British Army (after the independence of India and Pakistan) with regard to the Brigade of Gurkhas was conditioned not only by the general policy of the British Army but also by Kathmandu government's requests, and by UK-Nepalese relations.

The British Army's Gurkha employment policy was based on the Tripartite Agreement (TPA) signed by Britain, India and Nepal in 1947. The TPA was the first comprehensive agreement regarding Gurkha employment. It regulated the normal peacetime levels and maximum levels for wartime recruitment of Gurkhas, the terms and

conditions, recruitment process, welfare facilities, and so on. One of the TPA's aims was to authorise and maintain transnational ties between Gurkha soldiers and their society of origin in both formal and informal affairs to prevent Gurkhas from being despised as mercenaries. I characterise such employment policies for migrants to maintain these transnational ties as 'transnational employment policies'<sup>3</sup>. The brigade operated this transnational employment policy, based on the TPA, until the middle of the 1990s<sup>4</sup>. Details of the policy are summarised below<sup>5</sup>:

- 1) Gurkhas were recruited and discharged in Nepal.
- 2) Retired Gurkhas were not given UK citizenship or working visas<sup>6</sup>.
- 3) Gurkhas were paid according to the pay code of the Indian Army not the British Army.
- 4) A different system of rank structure and officer commission from that of their British counterparts was applied to Gurkha servicemen .
- 5) Families could only accompany servicemen of a certain rank or for a limited duration. For extended periods of time, most Gurkhas lived in barracks apart from their families. Consequently, Gurkhas sent money to and exchanged letters, e-mails, phone calls, and gifts with their families in Nepal across national borders.
- 6) Despite being regular soldiers of the British Army and swearing allegiance to the British Queen and

her officials, Gurkha soldiers were also allowed to remain loyal to the King of Nepal (Nehru, 1947; Uesugi, 2000, p.123).

- 7) Five month's leave in Nepal was permitted for every three years of service<sup>7)</sup>. This leave of absence made it easy for a Gurkha soldier to find and marry a bride in Nepal.
- 8) Cultural policies in Gurkha camps were based on Nepal's national culture, which sometimes differed from the ethnic cultures of individual soldiers. Use of the Nepalese language was allowed in particular situations, although the language of command was English. In camps, radio programmes in Nepalese were available on British Forces Broadcasting Services. Although Gurkha soldiers may be Buddhists or followers of other religions, only Hindu pastoral care was provided in Gurkha camps<sup>8)</sup>.

The employment policies maintained the transnational ties between the Gurkhas and Nepal and thus helped form a Nepalese community and a sociocultural boundary between the Gurkhas and the British servicemen in the camps of the British Army. It also made it possible for the British Army to save on the salaries and pensions of Gurkhas because the Gurkhas' family life was based in Nepal where the price of commodities was much cheaper than in the UK.

As described above, the TPA's transnational employment policy included a Hinduism-only religious policy. The religious policies of the Brigade of Gurkhas (as of 2005) are outlined below<sup>9)</sup>:

- 1) Under the terms of the TPA, the UK promised not to use Gurkha soldiers in any fight against Hindus.
- 2) The Brigade of Gurkhas had Hindu temples in the main camps in which the Gurkhas were posted.
- 3) The brigade employed three Hindu religious teachers in a civilian capacity. Unlike Christian or Jewish chaplains, they held no rank.
- 4) The Hindu temples in the camps observed Hindu festivals and holidays according to the Bikram Calendar (a lunar and solar calendar) set by the Almanac Committee in Kathmandu.
- 5) Gurkha soldiers were requested to attend the main Hindu festivals.
- 6) In the camp, Hindu temples held regular services of

worship for each company, Gurkha wives, Gurkha children, and local Hindus (in Brunei).

- 7) For religious reasons, messes for Gurkha servicemen did not serve beef dishes.

It is worth examining the background of the brigade's religious policy. The brigade's Hindu-only religious policy was adopted to facilitate the employment of soldiers from Nepal, which was the world's only Hindu kingdom and had carried out a cultural assimilation policy towards various ethnic groups in Nepal as part of nation building from the 1960s through the 1980s. It was the culture of Hindus originating from the hill areas of Nepal, e. g. the Nepalese language and *daura-suruwar* clothes that the Nepalese government adopted as part of Nepal's national culture at that time. Over eighty percent of the Gurkhas belonged to such ethnic groups. In one sense the assimilation policy was extended also to Gurkha units in the British Army.

### III. Military Hinduism in the Gurkha camps

On the other hand, during nearly 200 years of Gurkha military labour migration, Hinduism had been reconstructed as a lived culture in the Gurkha units in the British military so as to strengthen the units and to help Gurkhas adjust to the reality of military labour migration and contribute to the British Army.

#### 1. Building of coherence

##### 1-1. Nationalising from within

Gurkha soldiers were also Hinduised and nationalised from the above but also from within by Gurkha leaders. They tried to reinforce and maintain their national identity as Nepalis.

I take the Dasain festival as an example. The Dasain festival, a Gurkha version of the autumn festivals celebrated in many regions in the Indian subcontinent, was the most important official Hindu festival for Gurkha units. The festival paid homage to the two great feats performed by the Goddess Durga: the divine protection of Prince Ramchandra, who defeated the King of Lanka (a story from the ancient Indian epic *Ramayana*), and slaughtered the demon Mahishasura. The festival lasted for ten days, during which time the Gurkhas received a four-day holiday.

According to GMs and religious teachers, the purpose

of the Dasain festival was to maintain Nepalese culture. At a Dasain festival in the UK in 1997, Nepal's national anthem was sung at the outset of the cultural show at the eighth day of the festival. In addition, official Dasain cards decorated with the flags of the UK and Nepal were made and distributed at the Dasain festival. On its opening page, the special issue of the magazine for Gurkhas published a message of the Nepalese King saying that Dasain was Nepal's national festival and hoping that the Goddess Durga would inspire all Nepalese to dedicate themselves to the happiness, peace and prosperity of all humanity without being oblivious to their's duties towards the motherland (King Birendra, 1997, p.1). In 1995 the conference of GMs decided to change the name of the festival from the Indian name 'Dashera' to the Nepalese name 'Dasain.' Although 'Dashera' had been traditionally used since the colonial era, they concluded that it was not a proper name for the festival. At some events attended only by Gurkhas, the GMs made speeches in Nepalese appealing to the Gurkhas to maintain their Nepalese culture. One GM said:

'I make a speech in order to tell what Nepalese culture is. Otherwise the younger people will soon forget it' (A GM (Rai), 2003, UK).

Another speech by a Hindu religious teacher on the fourth day of the festival emphasised the unity of Nepalese culture in diverse ethnic groups:

Even in a foreign country, we Nepalis defend the honour of Nepal and take pride in ourselves. We, who have grown up in Nepal full of beauty, will not forget our culture no matter what corner of this globe we live in. All wise persons cherish their own art and culture as invaluable riches.

Nepali people have been known as Gurkha from old times all over the world. They have made temples and statues of gods both in wartime and peacetime if they had none of them. They have set a great value on their own traditions, cultures, customs and norms. These have been our treasures. Among these treasures, there is a festival which demonstrates unity in our diverse family life. That is Dasain. We

Nepalis are diverse, but we are one in such matters as festivals, traditions and life styles. Dasain shows this unity best of all (A Hindu religious teacher, 1997, UK)

Dasain was characterised as a festival signifying the unity in diversity of Nepalese culture. Nepalese identity seemed to work as a tool to unify the Gurkhas, who were from different ethnic /caste backgrounds. For those in command, this was very important, since different castes and ethnic groups were incorporated in the same unit<sup>10</sup>. In order to maintain Nepalese identity, Gurkha officers even discouraged Gurkha servicemen from marrying foreign women up until the time of the handover of Hong Kong (Uesugi, 2012)<sup>11</sup>.

However, I would like to point out that the brigade soldiers did not respect each other's caste/ethnic identity. For example, in 2003, on the occasion of a Brunei princess's formal visit to Tukur Lines in Brunei, the posted battalion made an exhibition of "Gurkha culture." The unit's family officer in charge of the exhibition had Gurkha wives prepare one table for each caste/ethnic culture and display ethnic dresses, ornaments, utensils and so on. In addition to that, one retired Rai officer said:

"An officer should not discriminate soldiers on the basis of ethnicity." (A Rai retired officer).

In the brigade, Nepalese identity worked as an umbrella identity standing over caste/ethnic identity.

## 1-2. Hinduism as an umbrella religion

In the Brigade of Gurkhas, Hinduism was given the status of an umbrella religion encompassing various indigenous religious traditions. As mentioned above, Gurkha soldiers were not all Hindus; there were sizeable minorities of Buddhists and followers of other religions. In Nepal, even Dasain is celebrated in different ways according to region, ethnicity, and so on<sup>12</sup>. The Hindu religious teachers regarded the diversity of Nepalese religions as "family traditions", or as derived from or affiliated with Hinduism. Indeed, Hindu religious teachers worshipped Buddha along with the Hindu gods. One Hindu religious teacher stated:

Although Nepal is officially a Hindu



kingdom, there is freedom of religion. People can practise any religion. There are many castes, sects and communities which have their own family customs, cultures and traditions although these sects are philosophically affiliated with the Hindu religion. That is why secularism works within the broad Hindu concept. Some people lack this understanding. In a real sense there is no difference (A Hindu religious teacher, 2003, Brunei)<sup>13</sup>.

Statements like these are thought to have provided Gurkha officers with an ideological basis for unifying Gurkhas of various ethnic/caste backgrounds.

## 2. Objects of worship

The deities worshipped in the camps included Durga, Laxmi, Saraswati, Shiva, Ramchandra, Krishna, Vishnu, Hanuman, Ganesh, Buddha, Kali, Kumar, the Sun, and the Nine Planets. Each is an entity that appears in Hindu sacred texts, astrological literature, or epic tales, and all are worshipped widely in areas of South Asia.

However, in the Hinduism of the camps, the gods and goddesses who appear in battle scenes occupied more significant positions. In particular, the Goddess Durga, an incomparable female fighter, was regarded as a guardian of military organisation. That is why the Dasain festival, the festival of the Goddess Durga, was celebrated in every Gurkha camp. During the Dasain festival, Gurkhas hang the flag of the Goddess Durga by the gate of the temple. In a Dasain festival that I witnessed, on the eighth day of Dasain, the GM of the Second Battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles (2RGR) gave the following speech to the guests of the cultural show:

‘Dasain, being a celebration of victory, has a special significance for the Gurkhas. Since we are a martial race, we have a special devotion to and pray to Goddess Durga to give us strength, courage, good will, and victory over the evil powers of the world. To the Gurkhas, the Goddess Durga plays a vital role in our lives. We pray to her for victory and protection against our enemies.’ (The GM (Rai) of the Second Battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles, 2003, Brunei).

Hanuman, who assisted Prince Ramchandra in defeating the King of Lanka, was also worshipped. In the Brigade of Gurkhas, Hanuman was regarded as both a symbol of courage and a symbol of the friendship between the Gurkhas and the British. Hanuman was also regarded as being similar to the Gurkhas. As a GM said:

‘We Gurkhas are like Hanuman. We go through jungles like Hanuman does’ (A GM (Rai), 2003, Brunei).

The flag of Hanuman was displayed in the yard of the temple in the camp in Brunei throughout the year. At the Chaite Dasain festival in spring, the birthday of Prince Ramchandra, the old flag of Hanuman was taken down and replaced with a new one.

Kumar, ‘the field marshal of the gods’ military’ (as described by a Hindu religious teacher), was also worshipped, and a small image of him was set on the altar inside one of the camp temples. However, the brigade did not celebrate a Kumar festival, because the festival of the God Kumar is not observed in Nepal,

## 3. Denationalised professionalism

In the units, all Gurkha soldiers were Nepalese, not British citizens. Therefore, appealing to patriotism was not an option when it came to boosting Gurkha morale. The brigade tried to bolster their morale by appealing to their divine professionalism not their patriotism. A religious teacher said:

Our religion is Hindu and all our rituals and rites are conducted according to the Hindu way. On various occasions we perform our day-to-day practices and festivals in our own way with some special Nepalese cultural touch. My teaching and preaching to Gurkha soldiers are based on Hindu philosophy which always emphasises Karma; I mean duty and service. Gurkhas are serving another country. They are ready to die for other nations. Why are they ready to die for other nations? They are risking their life. Why? If they die they get money, but it is of no use to them. But Gurkhas are ready to die. What philosophy is working to help them perform their duty? Our religion teaches

them that your duty is your religion. Duty always comes first. Soldiers must obey, be loyal, be brave, have courage, have discipline and be ready to die. We teach our soldiers these things as a religion. It is very important, because they are religious people. They believe in gods. So that is why they follow our preaching. So religion is very important in regimental life. (A Hindu religious teacher, 2003, Brunei).

In 2004, when a small Hindu temple was built in the Gurkha camp in Bosnia, a Hindu religious teacher was dispatched there. To boost morale, which tends to deteriorate over a long-term deployment, he emphasised 'Fulfilling your duty is to worship God. Although we are away from our families, we should not forget our main goal and the aim of our duty'.

In addition, although Nepalese national identity was emphasised on various occasions, religious symbols and practices that might encourage patriotism or excessive loyalty to the Nepalese king were excluded. This can be seen clearly by comparing the Gurkha Dasain festival with a governmental Dasain festival held in Nepal. Before the abolition of the Shaha dynasty, the Dasain festival at the old palace in Kathmandu proceeded by tracing how the founding ancestor of the Shaha Dynasty, the ruling dynasty until 2008, conquered the former ruler of Kathmandu (Ishii 1992, p. 78). It was an occasion when the great deeds of the ancestral king were reproduced, commemorated and praised. The Gurkha Dasain, on the other hand, did not include any ceremony that honoured the great deeds of the ancestral king of the Shaha dynasty. In a Gurung village, which had sent many young men to join the Brigade of Gurkhas, the village head conferred *tika* on villagers in the name of the Nepalese king (Messerschmidt 1976, p. 71). In the Gurkha Dasain, however, the GM and the Hindu religious teacher made and conferred *tika*, and no authority beyond the British Army was involved. The worship of Lord Vishnu, who was the symbol of Hindu kingship and was said to be reincarnated in the Nepalese king, did not occupy any significant place in the military Hinduism of the brigade.

Hinduism in the brigade emphasised divine professionalism, putting aside excessive patriotism and loyalty to the Nepalese king. It can be said, therefore, that

military Hinduism in the brigade denationalised Gurkhas in one sense. Hinduism, used both as a means to reinforce national identity but also to denationalise the Gurkhas, provided an ideology that could help them adjust to the reality of military labour migration.

#### 4. The role of religious teachers

Hindu religious teachers were from families which had sent Hindu priests to Gurkha units since the colonial era. Although they were rarely despatched to battlefields, they played an indispensable role in the brigade.

They were instrumental in enforcing and keeping discipline among the soldiers. In Nepal, they presided over the attestation parade held for the soldiers newly recruited to the British Army. In one Dasain festival, a religious teacher praised Prince Ramchandra for having obeyed the orders of the elders (i.e. his father's and stepmother's), which seemed to suggest that, in the military, it is right for subordinates to obey the orders of their superiors. In the Maha Shiva Ratri festival in spring, religious teachers told the story of a hunter who was changed by the grace of Lord Shiva and quit his sinful occupation. The story's climax was a scene where four deer explain about sin to the hunter. The teachings consisted of four parts: humanity, public morality, admonition to men, and admonition to women. The third deer spoke about the vocational ethics of soldiers in her lessons about public morality as follows:

If a soldier is afraid of going into battle or tries to avoid a battle, it is a sin. Now that he is employed as a soldier, he is supposed to serve society. To desert is to betray his country and society (A Hindu religious teacher, 2005, Brunei).

Gurkha soldiers themselves recognised the role of Hindu religious teachers. A retired Gurkha with a critical attitude toward the brigade's policy told me:

'Religious teachers always tell us to fight and defeat the enemy.' (A retired Gurung soldier, 1999, Nepal).

The Hindu religious teachers mediated between the British officers and the Gurkhas. British officers newly

commissioned into the Brigade of Gurkhas were obliged to attend classes to learn about Gurkha culture. The class instructor was a Hindu religious teacher who delivered lectures on Hindu culture and society. When a subordinate Gurkha seemed to have a personal problem, it was not unusual for a British officer to obtain information on the Gurkha's private life from the Hindu religious teacher.

### 5. Rites of the military

The Hindu ceremonies had military characteristics and was aligned with structure of units. Here again, I would like to mention the Dasain festival.

The Dasain festival was celebrated at three levels: garrison level, company (or platoon) level, and family level. These three levels of Dasain were connected by the bestowal of the *tika*, a mark of blessing. The *tika* was a paste made from red pigment, yoghurt, boiled rice, water and banana. Customarily, the *tika* was conferred by a superior on a subordinate. On the last day of Dasain, in the *tika* ceremony at the garrison level, the GM and the Hindu religious teacher blessed subordinate Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers by putting *tika* on their foreheads. These officers then made more *tika* to add to the original mixture and bestowed it on their men and the men's wives who visited their houses later in the day. During this visit, the officers gave a present to each of their subordinates. The officers' wives presented cloth for a sari to each of the wives of their husbands' men. In the same way, once the men returned home, they made more *tika* to add to what they had been given, and conferred this *tika* on their wives and their children. The order in which the *tika* was bestowed represented the rank hierarchy in the camp; it also showed that the private realm was subordinate to the public realm within the camp hierarchy.

Gurkha leaders demonstrated Nepalese culture in the camp by making efficient use of the unit structure. It was a Gurkha Major (GM) that was responsible for planning and performing the events and ceremonies in each battalion. A GM was 'the Commanding Officer's principal adviser on all specifically Gurkha affairs, including cultural, religious and family matters (House of Commons, 1989, p. xxxvii)'. Every Gurkha battalion had one GM whose military rank was also Major (QGO)<sup>14</sup>. The GM nominated members of a Dasain committee, which was responsible for planning and

performing the events and ceremonies. Dasain was an opportunity for a GM to demonstrate his leadership to British officers as well as to fellow Gurkhas. During the festival, the GM refrained from eating meat and drinking liquor, bathed every day, and attended every event and ceremony<sup>15</sup>.

Besides the Dasain committee, to serve at rituals and ceremonies as a *pujari* (worshipper) and as a singer of sacred hymns during Dasain, two of the most junior recruits were selected from each of five groups, i.e. the enlisted men in four companies, and the officers. They served the Goddess as a representative of the groups to which they belonged.

On the ninth day of the Dasain festival, each company brought its own weapons and equipment to the temple to have them blessed by the Hindu religious teacher.

### 6. Exemption from the *Pani Patya* ritual

The *Pani Patya* ritual, which was once required for readmission to the caste when Hindus returned to their homeland from foreign soil 'beyond black water', was not required for Gurkha soldiers returning to Nepal<sup>16</sup>. One religious teacher said:

'If the heart is pure, the *Pani Patya* ritual is not necessary'. (A Hindu religious teacher, 2003, Brunei).

This idea made it possible for Gurkhas to engage in overseas duty without worrying about becoming outcastes.

### 7. Integrating Gurkhas with the British across the sociocultural boundary

The Hindu belief and practices offered opportunities, symbols, and rhetoric to help make it possible for Gurkhas to understand and accept the differences between the Gurkhas and the British servicemen. It also helped integrate the two nationalities as complementary constituents of the Gurkha units. A Hindu religious teacher explained this as follows:

The regiment belongs to the British Army. But the people who work in it are Nepali citizens. How can we coordinate these communities? The coordinating force or mediator between the



two communities is the Gurkha Hindu faith and tradition. That is why the Hindu faith is very significant in regimental life. It works internally. You can't see it openly but it works very internally and is inspiring. (A Hindu religious teacher, 2003, Brunei).

I can vouch for the validity of his words through my observations. For example, in the second battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles, Hanuman was regarded both as the symbol of the friendship between the Gurkhas and the British, and as similar to the Gurkhas themselves, as described above. This might have suggested that the relationship between the Gurkhas and the British officers was comparable to that between Hanuman and Prince Ramchandra.

Among all festivals, Dasain in particular offered a convivial opportunity for Gurkhas and British officers to socialize which both Gurkhas and British officers shared. During the festival, the commanding officer (usually British) of a battalion joined in the main events and ceremonies. At the Mar ceremony on the ninth day of the Dasain festival, both Gurkha and British officers, standing in line, released doves into the sky in a prayer for peace. On the same day, the *tika* blessing was carried out and *tika* was bestowed on the British officers by the GM and the Hindu religious teacher<sup>17</sup>).

For Gurkhas, the most important duty during Dasain was to treat the British officers; accordingly, the British officers were invited to the parties held during the festival and were regaled with Nepalese cuisine. They also attended a cultural show held on the eighth night, when they enjoyed Nepalese dances and songs. In the cultural show of Dasain at the First Battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles (1RGR), a Gurkha soldier comedian would mimic British officers on the stage and made the audience, including British officers and VIPs, break into laughter. At a Dasain festival that I observed, Gurkhas and British officers danced together on the stage at the end of the cultural show and the commanding officer expressed his thanks for the Gurkhas' hospitality and invited them to a party in the Officers' Mess in return, while British officers and Gurkhas formed a scrum. A retired British officer of very high rank said:

'Drinking and parties. There are only happy

memories of Dasain'. (A retired British officer, 2005, UK).

The Dasain festival offered an opportunity for the Gurkhas and the British to be united emotionally. Gurkha leaders have succeeded in fashioning Dasain not only into an ethnic festival for Gurkha soldiers but also into a social festival for the Gurkha units as a whole, including British officers. The Dasain festival made the retired British officer quoted earlier feel 'It is us' (2005, UK).

Furthermore, British officers used to attend the Hindu festivals to better 'understand Gurkha tradition'. For example, some British officers newly commissioned into the 2RGR also attended Sansarimai Puja (the festival for the Nepalese New Year), in many cases, the first Hindu festival that they had experienced. In this festival for paying homage to Mother Nature, a goat is sacrificed. Both Gurkhas and British soldiers enjoyed eating, drinking, singing and dancing out in the open air.

#### **IV. Servicemen's attitudes towards the religious policy of the Brigade of Gurkhas**

##### **1. Gurkha soldiers' attitudes towards the religious policy of the brigade**

###### **1-1. Attitudes toward the Hinduism-only policy**

According to interviews I carried out between 1997 and 2005, when the religious policy was changing, soldiers' attitudes to the Hinduism-only policy varied. They can be roughly classified into three groups.

The first group shared the view of religious teachers. For example, some soldiers said that Hinduism and Buddhism had a common root:

'Buddhism diverged from Hinduism. Vishnu was reincarnated into Buddha. It was his ninth and last reincarnation. So there is no difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. However, Buddhists have their original tenet.' (A Chhetri soldier, 2005, Brunei)

'Hinduism and Buddhism are the same' (A Rai soldier, 2005, Brunei).

Another Gurung soldier told me enthusiastically about what dharma and karma are (2005, Brunei).

The second group of soldiers did not share the view with the Brigade of Gurkhas. One Limbu soldier said

that his ethnic religion and culture were different from his regiment's ones. Some Gurkhas insisted that they were not Hindus and refrained from attending Hindu ceremonies. In 1997, one Gurkha said:

‘In Nepal both people of Aryan race and people of Mongoloid race live. Dasain is the festival for Aryan people, so it has nothing to do with us Mongoloids’<sup>18)</sup> (A soldier, 1997, UK).

For these soldiers, Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions were different and independent religions. Some soldiers showed their discontent by whispering during a religious teacher's speech at a Hindu festival which they were requested to attend. Such opinions seemed to reflect the political circumstances in Nepal after the 1990s, when various ethnic groups began to insist that their indigenous cultures were different from that of the Hindus.

Gurkha leaders did not voice any concern at these voices of the second group, just saying that younger generations were not interested in religion. However, although they showed their concern to me, the Gurkha officers had considered the voices as worthy of concern and had made approaches to high-level British officers to reflect these voices in the later policy change, judging from later events.

Lastly, the third group adopted a realistic or flexible attitude. One soldier said:

‘I understand that many religions are there. But we are too busy in jungle exercises and other things to perform the rituals and festivals of all the religions. Gurkha culture is Nepalese culture, although it is modified in the military’. (A Rai soldier, 2005, Brunei)

He suggested that working conditions in the military sometimes made it expedient for many religious traditions to be combined into one. Another Limbu soldier also said:

‘When a soldier is killed in war, the unit conducts a Hindu funeral. I think that it is problematic, but it is difficult in the military (to perform a funeral in the Kiranti way.)’<sup>19)</sup> (A Limbu soldier, 2005, Brunei).

Some soldiers valued a flexible and generous attitude towards other religions, which they thought was an attitude shown by British officers as described below. A soldier said:

‘British officers are flexible. They observe their own faith at home. But they even go to a mosque when they work with Muslims’ (A soldier of unknown ethnicity, 2005, Brunei)

Another soldier also said:

‘Unlike Muslims we are not hard about religion.’ (A Limbu soldier, 2005, Brunei)

‘God is one. Human beings give him different names’<sup>20)</sup> (A soldier, 1998, UK).

‘I am mainly a Hindu, but sometimes Buddhist. I go to both temples. God is one, only prayers are different.’ (A Gurung soldier, 2005, Brunei)

Others accepted a distinction between the religion of duty (i.e. Hinduism) and their own personal religion (i.e. Buddhism, Christianity or the Kiranti religion). Thus, one Buddhist soldier could play a very important role as *pujari* in Dasain although he confessed he hated the animal sacrifices characteristic of Hindu festivals. Another Sherpa Buddhist soldier attended a Hindu festival on his superior's request, but he neither accepted the blessing of red *tika* symbolizing blood nor prayed (2005, Brunei). Also a Rai Gurkha attended Dasain because it is a “party,” but did not accept the blessing of *tika* (2005, Brunei).

## 1-2. Interpreting military experience in a Hindu framework

Some of my Gurkha informants used Hindu symbols and discourse to explain and interpret their military experience within the framework of Hinduism. A soldier who had returned after a three-month tour of duty in Iraq said:

‘Why do we celebrate Dasain? Because the aim of Dasain is fighting for freedom (for the abducted wife of Prince Ramchandra)’. (A Magar soldier, 2003, Brunei)

The word ‘freedom’ was often referred to when the

US and the UK held press conferences during Operation Enduring Freedom in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack. I think the soldier must have kept this in mind. Thus, the epic battle of Prince Ramchandra was connected to the actual experience of duty in Iraq through the use of the common word 'freedom'.

## **2. British officers' attitudes toward military Hinduism in the Brigade of Gurkhas**

According to my interviews, many active British officers and at least one chaplain accepted the idea of Hindu Gurkhas as prescribed by the original TPA. They did not seem so interested in the diversity of Gurkha religious faiths. A British officer explained his reason for taking part in a Hindu festival as being:

'Because our battalion is a Hindu battalion' (A British officer, 2005, UK).

British officers joined in Hindu ceremonies and played roles in the celebrations in order to express their respect towards the culture of the Gurkhas. One officer said to me:

'It is difficult to explain. Dasain is a Hindu festival and we are Christian. It might be better for us not to attend Dasain. But we work closely with Gurkhas. We would like to see and understand how they feel and behave in their own culture... So, in order to understand Gurkhas, as the first step, we attend the language course. As the second step we go and see the Nepalese hills. As the third step we visit Dasain... It is important to go to Dasain. If we don't attend [the] Dasain festival, the Gurkhas may think that we don't care about them. It is necessary for good organisation. So, newly-commissioned officers also attend ceremonies' (A British officer, 2005, Brunei).

Another British officer said that he attended the festivals for the same reason although he was not happy to see animals sacrificed.

Gurkha soldiers understood why the British officers attended Hindu festivals:

'It is because we work together (that the British officers attend Dasain). They want to know about our culture and system. Since we are in the same group, they attend. They want to become friends with us' (A Rai soldier, 2005, Brunei)

At the same time, they regarded the Hindu religious policy in the brigade as part of the general religious policy of the British Army. The British Army provided soldiers with the opportunity and staff to observe their personal religious faith. A British officer admitted the importance of pastoral care in the military, saying:

'We worry about many things on the battlefield. We think about big things, about death, for example. Chaplains save us. Like spiritual doctors' (A British officer, 2005, Brunei).

Chaplains with military rank provided pastoral care near battlefields in the British Army. They represented Anglican, Roman Catholic, Church of Scotland, Presbyterian and other faiths. The Territorial Army had one Jewish chaplain. A lieutenant said the religion in the British Army is 'ecumenical' (2005, Brunei).

The British Army had Hindu religious teachers take courses on counselling and other matters like chaplains. Actually, a Senior Chaplain of the Church of England whom I met in 2005 regarded Hindu religious teachers as his colleagues who shared common values. He added:

'We have worked with Hindu and Muslim soldiers of various religions since the colonial era. We are doing the same things. It's not new. The army is multicultural. The Anglican Church is liberal' (A Christian chaplain, 2005, Brunei).

## **V. 2005 changes to religious policy**

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the religious policy of the Brigade of Gurkhas changed dramatically. It was democratisation in Nepal after People's Movement I (1990) that triggered the change. Freedom of speech enabled ethnic groups to insist that their cultures were different from the Hill Hindus' culture, which ultimately led to the abolition of the Hindu monarchy and the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal in 2008. The freedom of speech also

allowed the retired Gurkhas to campaign for Gurkha terms and conditions equivalent to their British counterpart.

Considering the requirements of the Race Relations Act and active Gurkhas' proposals, the British Army accepted some of their requests and decided that the Gurkha terms and conditions should be integrated into those of the wider British Army (Land Forces Secretariat, 2006). As a result, in 2007 the Gurkhas who had served more than four years and retired after the handover of Hong Kong were given the right to settle in the UK and to choose terms and conditions equivalent to British servicemen.

The revision of the unitary religious policy was part of the wider change of employment policy. Not missing this opportunity, Gurkha active officers proposed to the Brigade of Gurkhas that, like their British counterparts, they should have pastoral care administered by uniform-wearing chaplains who could work close to battlefields. The review team which conducted a survey regarding changes to Gurkha policy wrote:

‘The review team could see no valid reason why the provision of Gurkha religious arrangements should not be under the same general superintendence of the Chaplain General for the Army as the principles of the service to be provided are not fundamentally different’ (Land Forces Secretariat, 2006, p.11-8)<sup>21)</sup>.

Accordingly in 2005, two Nepalese Buddhist chaplains started to work as civil servants without military rank. They were posted to Buddhist *mandirs* (temples) in Gurkha camps and provided Buddhist Gurkhas with pastoral care, though it was limited to celebrating family rites of passage as of 2011. Five Hindu chaplains were also given posts as civil servants rather than Hindu religious teachers. Hinduism seems to have lost some of its status as an umbrella religion for the various Gurkha religious traditions and is becoming one of many religions in the wider British Army, such as Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism and Buddhism.

## VI. Conclusion

The Hinduism of the Brigade of Gurkhas showed two different aspects in the intergovernmental agreement

and within the Gurkha camps.

One aspect of Gurkha Hinduism was Nepal's official national culture, which was inserted into the Gurkha employment policy to maintain the allegiance of Gurkha soldiers to Nepal and transnational ties between Nepal and the Gurkha soldiers who had left their home country at a younger age. This enabled the continued employment of Gurkha soldiers from Nepal, then the world's only Hindu state. Consequently, the policy shaped the Nepalese expatriate community and built a sociocultural and institutional boundary between the Gurkhas and the British in the units.

The other aspect of Gurkha Hinduism was the religious belief and practice which was embedded in the immigrant soldiers' camp and contributed to the attainment of the military's goal. In the camps, Hinduism did not just replicate the official national culture which the Nepalese government had intended to establish as a national culture since the 1960s. It shared common characteristics with the military Hinduism of Hindu kingdoms which have been described by Fuller (1992) and others in that it justified and celebrated military organisation and its activities with supernatural power. Moreover, Hindu festivals provided opportunities for Gurkha leaders to support the military rank system and their leadership. Therefore, the term 'military Hinduism' (Alavi 1995, p. 90, 268) is applicable to the beliefs and practices of the soldiers in the Brigade of Gurkhas. However, it had many characteristics not reported in the past literature on military Hinduism. It was a type of military Hinduism formed in the specific context of military labour migration. It reinforced the collective identity of Gurkhas which was different from that of the receiving army (the UK) and gave cohesion to Gurkha units. Hindu narratives provided a framework with which Gurkhas could interpret their experience in battle for a foreign country's cause, and the relationship between them and the British officers. By stressing divine professionalism rather than patriotism, official Hinduism in the brigade helped Gurkhas to adjust to the reality of life as military labour migrants. Hindu symbols and festivals were also appropriated to define and build friendly relations between the Gurkhas and the British, and to integrate and socialise Gurkhas into the British Army.

The Hinduism associated with the Gurkha employment involved multifaceted cultural beliefs and practices



which were produced in the specific context of military labour migration based on the intergovernmental agreement in the era of citizen soldiers.

The religion appears to have provided two governments and the Gurkhas with a cultural resource that was appropriated and exploited to manipulate the migrants' dual sense of belonging. At times, across real national boundaries, it strengthened their ties with their country of origin and helped them sustain institutionally and socially linked communities. At other times, it integrated them into the receiving military body across the socio-cultural boundary. Such boundary work (Lan, 2003) observed in migrant workplaces deserves attention in any discussion of the cultural dynamics associated with labour migration, especially with regard to the military sector, where management depends upon manipulation of the soldier's sense of belonging.

Gurkha religious policy was revised in 2005. While the revision reflected the change in Nepalese politics, such as democratization in Nepal and the resultant decline of the Hindu monarchy, it has led to an unexpected result-integrating the Gurkhas into the wider British Army and British society.

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- [End Note]**
- 1) On 18 May 2006, the Nepalese House of Representatives declared that Nepal would be a secular state. It also announced that the government's name would be changed from the Royal Government of Nepal to the Government of Nepal, and that the name of the army would also be changed from the Royal Nepal Army to the Nepal Army (Americans United for Separation of Church and State, 2006; Cline, 2006; The Times of India, 2006; Tsujii, 2006, p. 16). On May 28, 2008, Nepal was formally declared a federal democratic republic (Nihon-Nepal Kyokai, 2008, p. 14).
  - 2) Collette wrote that the ethnic groups and warrior castes qualified to apply for infantry selection were the Gurung, Magar, Thakali, Tamang, Thakuri, Limbu, Rai, Sunwar, and Chetri (sic.) (Collette, 1994, p. 99). However, some Nepalese of other ethnic groups or castes (e.g. the Newar and Bahun) were also employed.
  - 3) See Uesugi (2004; 2007) for more information about the transnational employment policies of the Brigade of Gurkhas.
  - 4) Since the middle of the 1990s, the brigade's policies have gradually changed associated with the cutbacks following the end of the Cold War and the handover of Hong Kong. For details, see Uesugi (2004).
  - 5) The following description is based on Symon (1947) and my original data.
  - 6) In 2007, the British Government announced that Gurkhas who were discharged after 1 July 1997 could apply for UK citizenship.
  - 7) Six month's leave in Nepal after three years of service was permitted before 1995 (House of Commons, 1989, p. xxxiii)
  - 8) According to a retired British officer of distinguished status, most Gurkhas once used to state that they were Hindus when they appeared for selection of recruits. He guessed the reason was that they thought Hindus were more likely to be selected than Buddhists. However, of the 274 Gurkhas that enlisted in 2002, 144 declared that they were Hindus, while there were 73 Buddhists, 54 Kiranti dharma followers and 4 Christians. Kiranti dharma is the name used recently by the Kiranti people (the Rais and the Limbus) when referring to their indigenous religious tradition.
  - 9) The following description is based on Symon (1947), Brigade of Gurkhas (n. d.) and my original data.
  - 10) Before the Second World War, Gurkhas of two warrior castes (i.e. Chhetris and Thakuris) constituted a distinct regiment.
  - 11) Although intra-ethnic/caste marriages were preferred, the Gurkha leaders did not discourage interethnic/caste marriages of soldiers so much as international marriages. While soldiers wanting an international marriage received hints about the impossibility of contract renewal, a soldier married to an ethnically different women could be highly promoted.
  - 12) For instance, according to a Rai soldier, some Magars worship a deity of the land during Dasain.
  - 13) As a matter of fact, before democratisation in the 1990s, it was prohibited by *Muluki Ain* (the Nation's Law) to convert Nepalese from their religious faith to another one (Brigade of Gurkhas, n. d.).
  - 14) All of the five Gurkha Majors that I met were men from ethnic groups speaking Tibeto-Burman languages.
  - 15) Therefore I wondered whether Christian Gurkha Majors will perform these Hindu rituals in the future. A Christian Gurkha answered that he did not think that he could become a Gurkha

Major.

- 16) In 1913 a retired Gurkha officer went back to Nepal to find that he had become outcaste. The Nepalese religious authority had not admitted the validity of the Pany Patya ritual conducted in the camp (Farwell 1933, p.44).
- 17) While the bestowal of *tika* normally reflects the hierarchy, in this case, the British officers are blessed not because they are subordinates but because they are the most important guests.
- 18) Mongoloid in this context refers to ethnic groups such as the Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu, Thakali, Tamang, Sunwar and others, which represent nearly ninety percent of Gurkha soldiers.
- 19) Kiranti is the generic term for the Rais and the Limbus.
- 20) Such a view seems to me to have also been commonly held by British officers. According to a British officer, the British Army employed chaplains of various Christian sects and also Jewish ones, but it thought that God was one and the difference lay only in methods of worship (A British officer). Also a Hindu religious teacher said that the British officers thought that God was one (2005, Brunei).
- 21) The Land Forces Secretariat uses the term "Hindu pandits" instead of "Hindu religious teachers." The word "Pandit" is an honorary term of address for a Hindu priest.  
(2014年11月6日受付)  
(2015年1月23日受理)