



Battling and Rescuing as Double Heroism in *Ayo Gorkhali: A History of the Gurkhas* by Tim I. Gurung

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Abstract

*The main aim of this paper is to study the dual heroism of the Gorkhas: 'battling' and 'rescuing' in the book *Ayo Gorkhali: A History of the Gurkhas* by Tim I. Gurung from the evolutionary perspective. The book is about the Gorkhas' bravery in battling as well as rescuing exhibited in wars around the world because of which they brought victory and power to Britain. Despite their defeat in the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1816), the Gorkhas were able to impress the British authority for their bravery, dedication and discipline. The British East India Company began to recruit the Gorkhas in their army. They succeeded to suppress robberies, banditries and mutinies and establish peace and order in the society. In every theatre of war including the First and Second World Wars, the Gorkhas battled bravely for Britain and kept her name always high in the world. In this paper, the researcher has consulted books, journal articles and documentaries related to the Gorkhas and their heroic performance in wars. The Gorkhas are found to be brave in both 'fighting' as well as 'making rescue' of their co-warriors, officers and civilians during the wars. They have been known as the 'bravest of the brave' in the world. This paper will be new insights for the future researchers in the particular area of study.*

Keywords: *Battling, rescuing, double heroism, Gorkhas, British Gorkhas*

Introduction

The word 'battling' normally denotes fighting each other for something. In a wider sense, it usually means fighting in wars between two or more countries. Here, the term 'battling' indicates fighting in wars with courage, skill and intelligence in order to defeat the enemies. Every war is fought for a certain identity either it is related to territory or wealth, or nationality. Therefore, the warriors risk their lives in order to get victory over the enemies as Raksha Rai argues, "At war you either kill or get killed" (16). At the same time, they rescue their wounded co-warriors to save them from enemies. So, both actions 'battling' and 'rescuing' go side by side that are very difficult tasks. While talking about the Gorkhas, they have fought a lot of wars around the world

for Britain during her imperial movement as it mentioned, “Almost wherever was the theatre of war, Gurkhas were to be found everywhere” (Tyagi 257). They applied different war skills, intelligence and bravery while battling against the enemies. They won many wars, but at the same time hundreds of them were killed, injured and went missing. They rescued their wounded co-warriors and took them to safe places. Thus, ‘battling’ against the enemy as well as ‘rescuing’ wounded co-warriors in wars are heroic actions and, thus, the Gurkhas had double heroism.

In the book *Ayo Gorkhali: A History of the Gurkhas*, the writer Tim I. Gurung writes about the Gurkhas and their bravery shown in the wars, from the Anglo-Nepal War to the wars of present time. In the Anglo-Nepal War, the Gurkhas battled fearlessly against the imperial British East India Company. The British soldiers were well-trained and well-equipped with modern war skills and weapons. Moreover, they were in a much larger number than the Gorkha soldiers who were accompanied by women and children. The Gorkha soldiers’ weapons usually were stones, sticks, logs and khukuries. Despite their bravery, they had to lose the wars. However, the Gurkhas’ heroism, determination and loyalty towards their nation attracted the British authority who began to recruit them in their army. The Gurkhas fought a lot of wars for Britain including the First and Second World Wars. They killed many enemies and they themselves had to face deaths, injuries and missing in large numbers. They rescued their wounded co-warriors, officers and freed the civilians. Amidst a war, battling itself is not easy and on top of that rescuing somebody is really another heroic deed, which Gorkha warriors did successfully and got victories over enemies. The main concern of this paper is to study on the Gurkhas’ double heroism as ‘battling’ and ‘rescuing’ the people in wars as described in the book.

Double Heroism: An Evolutionary Perspective on War Heroism

In a question about how ‘war heroism’ evolved, various evolutionary psychologists and anthropologists have argued more or less similarly. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides as the psychologists link ‘war heroism’ with *homo sapiens* who would settle together, hunt animals and share food in group in the ancient time. The present ‘war heroism’ is taken as the adaptation of “this ‘old world’ of our hunter-gatherer way of living and to the adaptive challenges we were exposed to during this time” (Tooby and Cosmides 192). The hunting people of that time would sometimes engage in fighting as an “intergroup aggression” (Tooby and Cosmides 192). They would fight and safeguard their group from the opponent groups. Hannes Rusch and Charlotte Stormer consider that “most anthropologists agree that violent quarrels between human groups did accompany human prehistory continually and can be found in almost every human society that has been studied” (142). In any wars, the warriors bear risks of their lives for their group members. They try to harm the enemy groups as much as possible in order to weaken them. Their heroic deeds are destructive for selfless service to their group. In *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Charles Darwin writes:

There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection. (166)

In this way, self-sacrifice is made by individuals with loyalty, bravery and faith towards their tribe, group, community and even nation. Their heroic action is ‘double heroism.’

The concept of ‘doubling’ in heroic actions was originated with American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton. The term ‘doubling’ simply signifies the double role play of individuals’ in life. Roger Griffin states:

Lifton (1986), in order to make sense of the data he extracted from his extensive interviews with professionally trained German doctors who had performed experiments on prisoners, and selected inmates for extermination in Nazi concentration camps. Nevertheless, they had managed to maintain their original, domesticated, ‘family’ self, producing a double life. (355)

The doctors carry out double responsibilities in their life. They conduct risky experiments in sensitive places like prisons as Nazi concentration camps. At the same time, they go with their families and children. Robert Jay Lifton further admits that the Nazi doctors’ role is like of “the Mafia or ‘death squad’ chief who coldly orders (or himself carries out) the murder of a rival while remaining a loving husband, father, and churchgoer” (423). Like the portrayal of the Nazi doctors’ double life actions, the warriors’ identity also maintains of ‘double heroic’ or ‘heroic doubling.’ They cause some destruction or violence for their group, community or nation and at the same time they are making ‘self-sacrifice’ as well. About warriors’ ‘heroic doubling,’ Christopher Coker argues, “When we talk of the warrior soul, we do so because many of us must find a place for the sacred in our lives, and it is more than symbolic that the two words ‘sacred’ and ‘sacrifice’ etymologically share the same root. Sacrifice is the key to the warrior ethos” (4-5). The warriors always play ‘double roles’ in their ‘war heroism.’ They sacrifice their hardships, toil and even their lives in the wars. At the same time, their sacrifice is not for themselves, but for others in their ‘in-group,’ which is a sacred work.

The evolutionary theory of ‘heroism’ and the concept of ‘doubling’ or ‘heroic doubling’ can be observed in the ‘war heroism’ of the Gorkhas. They fought in the Anglo-Nepal War against the British East India Company heroically not just for their individual betterment but for their people and the motherland Nepal. Their ‘loyalty in heroism’ has also been proved in their successful attempts while suppressing the banditries and mutinies, battling in the various confrontations and wars including the First and Second World Wars for Britain. Hundreds of the Gorkhas died, got injured and went missing in the wars that they fought selflessly for Britain. As a result, they achieved victories in many wars just for Britain and her people, but not for the Gorkhas themselves. The Gorkhas’ altruism as Charles Darwin and other evolutionary theorists said about ‘heroism’ can be observed in their ‘war heroism.’ Moreover, the concept of ‘double heroism’ or ‘heroic doubling’ introduced by the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton and other theorists, can also be seen in the Gorkhas’ ‘war heroism.’ They exhibited their strong leadership and bravery in battling as well as heroic rescue works amidst the wars. Therefore, the Gorkhas maintain ‘double heroism’ in their altruistic ‘war heroism.’

Bravery in Battle Tasks

The Gorkha soldiers did their best in battling for Nepal against the British soldiers during the Anglo-Nepal War. The British soldiers were trying to weaken the Gorkha soldiers so that they would not be a danger for the British East India Company. They were far stronger than the Gorkhas in terms of war skills, weapons and logistic support. However, it was not easy for them to defeat the “exceedingly brave” (Farwell 39). Gorkha soldiers, so the British soldiers had to apply cruel tricks over the Gorkha soldiers. In Khalanga War, the 600 Gorkha soldiers under the command of Bir Balbhadra was back-supported by women and children. The British soldiers could not defeat the Gorkhas easily. Instead, they cruelly “cut off their water supply to suffocate them”

(Gurung 9) into the Khalanga fort. The women, children and many other soldiers died of thirst and hunger. For Vijaya Kumar Tiwary, it was “a bloody war with heavy casualties on both sides” (802). In Deuthal, Bhakti Thapa fought his best, but got defeated eventually. Similarly, the Gorkha soldiers had to lose wars at Jaithak and Malau as well. Both sides faced a lot of loss of life. Though the Gorkhas lost the wars, their “unparalleled bravery and determination” (Gurung 9) that they showed in the wars became the high point of attraction for the British authority. After the Sugauli Treaty (1815), they recruited the Gorkhas in their army. They thought that the brave Gorkhas would be a big support for them in their establishment of imperialism.

Initially, the Gorkha soldiers were to maintain peace and order in the communities. They had to control dacoits (armed robbers) and suppress the mutinies. They were able to exploit banditries and robberies and give relief to the civilians. They fought Maratha War (1817-1818). As “courageous and indomitable” (Gould 116), the Gorkha soldiers easily defeated Maratha soldiers. They got victory over the Siege of Bharatpur (1824-1826) as well in which “The number of casualties during the fighting was said to have been around 13,000 to the enemy while the British suffered 1,100 fatalities” (Gurung 16). The popularity of “the fighting qualities of the Gurkhas” (Kalita 489) increased as they continued winning wars one after another. Tim I. Gurung asserts, “General Sir Hugh Gough, openly praised the determined hardiness and bravery of the Gurkhas in his battle report” (17). The involvement of the Gorkhas in other wars became of high demand. Their presence in the Sepoy Mutiny (1857-1858) succeeded to suppress the protest for Indian independence. They were regarded “as something more than good ‘native infantry,’ as something special” (Farwell 40). The Gorkhas’ closeness with British authority became stronger. Tim I. Gurung writes, “After the end of the 1857 War of Indian Independence, nobody doubted the bravery, commitment, and loyalty of the Gurkhas again. The Gurkhas had firmly established themselves as one of the best in the services” (19). The Gorkhas’ grand role to exploit the mutinies won the trust of the British institution to their expertise in wars.

The Gorkhas had an opportunity to popularize their bravery internationally as they participated in the First World War (1914-1918). Tony Gould notes, “During the First World War, Gurkhas fought in all the main theatres of war, from the fields of Flanders to the hills of Gallipoli and the deserts of Mesopotamia and Palestine” (176). The early experience of wars in Europe was depressing for them. In the wars of Flanders, Festubert and Neuve Chappelle, they had to face heavy casualties due to some technical as well as climate problems. However, the situation became a little encouraging later on. Tim I. Gurung asserts, “Havildar (Sergeant) Bahadur Thapa, led his men into a house storming through a barricade, killed sixteen Germans and captured two machine guns” (39). It was in the war of Neuve Chappelle in the spring of 1915. He was awarded the Indian Order of Merit for his courage. Similarly, in the second time battle of Ypres, Rifleman Motilal Thapa was seriously injured, but even in such a miserable condition, “he kept saying to himself ‘I must not cry out, I am a Gurkha” (Gurung 40). His devotion is like what Kailash Limbu writes, “This is the Gurkha motto. ‘It is better to die than be a coward’” (208). Another Rifleman Kulbir Thapa fought the war at Loos in France. He also had remarkably fearful fighting against the Germans for which he received the Victoria Cross. According to Byron Farwell, General Sir James Willcocks compliments the Gorkhas, “I have now come to the conclusion that the best of my troops in France were the Gurkhas” (94). The Gorkhas never lost their confidence even though they were the strangers to the places and the climate there, but they continued fighting as it is mentioned here: “Wherever they went, the Gurkhas have earned glory and fame for their bravery, integrity and discipline of a very high order” (Tiwary 808). Moreover, the

Gorkhas were awarded about 2000 gallantry medals including two Victoria Crosses making their fame worldwide.

The Second World War (1939-1945) also became a crucial war theatre for the Gorkhas to continue their legacy of war heroism in the world. They fought for Britain on two fronts i.e. in Europe with Hitler's army and in the Eastern front in Asia with the Japanese force (Gurung 54). The Gorkhas were a big challenge for the German soldiers in Europe. Though they lost the initial wars against the Germans in the African Western Desert, they became victorious over them later on with their "valour and fighting skill" (Updety 7). In the rugged mountains of central Tunisia, they defeated the Germans as Tim I. Gurung writes, "They approached them quietly and killed many by slitting their throats with the kukri" (53). The Germans had to run away from there. Subedar (Major) Lal Bahadur Thapa earned the Victoria Cross for his excellent leadership and courage. He was the second-in-command of his D Company. Maurice Biggs asserts, "The next machine gun posts were dealt with, Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa personally killing two men with his kukri and two more with his revolver. This Gurkha officer continued to fight his way up the narrow bullet swept approaches to the crest" (50). The Gorkhas were empowered when they chased away the Germans in the war of Tunisia. It increased their psychological strength to fight further. The war with the Germans at Monte Cassino, Italy was equally ferocious. Appreciating Sergeant Havildar Raimansing's gallantry, Tim I. Gurung states, "He not only led a bayonet charge against the heavy German fire but also blew up a German machine-gun post with a grenade in his dying moments, which forced the Germans to surrender" (57). He received the Indian Order of Merit for his exceptional courage.

In the Eastern front, Havildar (Sergeant) Gaje Ghale fought ferociously against the Japanese force at Chin Hills, Burma. He was injured in the arm, leg and chest, but continued charging the enemies and showed his unbeatable leadership to his co-warriors (Gurung 60). He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his "self-sacrifice" (Cook 38). Another Rifleman Ganju Lama had a clash with the Japanese soldiers near Ningthaoukhong, Burma. He was a fearless warrior, who "with complete disregard for his safety, crawled forward and engaged the tanks single-handedly" (Gurung 65). He was honoured with the Victoria Cross for his bravery. The Japanese force was also not weak. The Gorkhas had a very harsh time in the war with them. In the war at Taungdaw, on the West bank of the Irrawaddy River, Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung was on the front line with "his outstanding gallantry and extreme devotion to duty" (Biggs 74). It was the night when the Japanese soldiers attacked them. Tim I. Gurung notes, "Before the attack, a grenade fell into his trench. He picked it up and hurled it back. Another followed, and he threw it back again. The third grenade exploded in his hand, blowing his fingers off, shattering his right hand and severely wounding him on the face, body, and leg" (68). For his tremendous heroic action, he also got an award, the Victoria Cross. The Gorkhas' role was central in Britain's victory with a total of 2734 bravery awards including ten Victoria Crosses. Vijaya Kumar Tiwary claims, "They proved their mettle, bravery and undaunted spirit of sacrifice in later years in the Second World War" (811). Despite the fact that they were brave, they had to face deaths, injuries and missing by the end of the war.

Even after the Second World War, Britain deployed the Gorkhas to suppress some confrontations in the east such as Viet Minh War, Java War and conflicts in Malaya and Borneo. They battled against the Viet Minh, ending successfully as "the Gurkhas had to fight hard charging with kukri and completed the mission on the same day" (Gurung 72). The tense in Java, known as the 'Java Nightmare,' was brought into control by the Gorkhas' "martial masculinity" (Updety 9). However, Britain had to face

rebellions in Malaya and Borneo. Tony Gould argues, “In both conflicts Gurkhas provided the backbone of the military operations” (324). The Gurkhas were to fight with the rebels in the hot, rainy and thick jungle of Malaya. However, the Gurkhas defeated them as Tim I. Gurung states, “As far as the Gurkhas were concerned, the Malaya Emergency ended in 1960 when the communist leader Chin Peng fled to Thailand” (88). The situation became normal after that, but the Gurkhas did not have a rest as Indonesia had a deep interest to capture Borneo Island, located on the northern border. The Gurkhas “imbued with warlike qualities” (Northey 98) defeated the pro-Indonesian rebels and captured the commander Affendi. The Gorkha Naina Bahadur Rai is mentioned in the book as saying, “the brave Rifleman single-handedly killed two rebels and captured the remaining two, including Affendi, and he was awarded a military medals for his bravery” (Gurung 107). However, the Indonesian president Sukarno revived terrorism and the Gurkhas had to continue fighting with them. In November 1965, Lance Corporal Ram Bahadur Limbu and his team counter-attacked and killed many rebels to end terrorism forever. Ram Bahadur Limbu was awarded the Victoria Cross for his excellent battling.

Bravery in Rescue Tasks

Though *Ayo Gorkhali: A History of the Gurkhas* consists of the Gurkhas’ rescue of their officers, co-warriors and civilians only after they started fighting for Britain, there should certainly be such actions even in the Anglo-Nepal War. In every warfare, the wounded co-warriors get rescued as much as possible. After the Gurkhas’ recruitment in the British East India army, they initially succeeded to suppress robbers and bandits, which was a rescue of the civilians from the robbers and bandits. With the Gurkhas’ strong role only, the mutinies in India were settled well. In the book, *The Gurkhas*, Farwell writes, “Reid embarked his battalion in forty-five canal boats, put skirmishers along the banks, and went on his way. Near the village of Bhola he was attacked by mutineers, but the Gurkhas drove them off...” (42). The officer Reid was luckily rescued. During the First World War, at the second battle of Ypres in Belgium, a wounded Rifleman Motilal Thapa was supporting another seriously injured officer Capt. Hartwell: “When Capt. Hartwell regained consciousness after a long period, he found Motilal at his side with his good hand arm holding a cap over the officer’s face to keep the sun out of his eye” (Gurung 40). Though one of his hands was injured, he was giving security to his officer. Similarly, the first Gorkha Victoria Cross winner Kulbir Thapa with his “conspicuous bravery” (Biggs 43) also rescued his co-warriors in the battle of Loos in France, in September 1915. Tim I. Gurung states that the wounded Kulbir Thapa of the 2/3rd Gurkha evacuated a severely injured soldier of the 2nd Leicestershire Regiment and other two badly wounded men from his regiment to a safe place (40-41). Amidst the war horror, Kulbir Thapa rescued his wounded co-warriors courageously with patience.

During the Second World War in Europe, the battle against the German soldiers at the San Marino Road in Italy, was very devastating. There was a heavy cross attacking between the Gurkhas and the German soldiers. According to Tim I. Gurung, “Rifleman Sher Bahadur Thapa, the 1/9th Gorkha, marched through a continuous hail of bullets and saved the lives of his section commander and two wounded soldiers before being fatally shot by a machine gun” (58). He received the Victoria Cross for his great deed. He was a brave and devoted soldier. The similar situations occurred even in the war of Eastern front against the Japanese force. Buddha Singh Rana of 1/3rd GR was in the clash with the Japanese soldiers at Kohima. He remembers, “When my colonel died, I was hit on my chin by a machine gun, got dizzy and fell down. The next time I woke up, I found

myself in a hospital bed fully covered in bandages” (Gurung 64). He was taken to the hospital by some of his co-warriors. At Taungdaw, on the West bank of the Irrawaddy River of Burma, a badly injured Gorkha Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung kept counter-attacking the enemies to protect his two severely wounded compatriots lying helplessly at the bottom of the trench (Gurung 68). His right hand was shattered, and there were injuries on his body, face and leg. Maurice Biggs asserts, “Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung was evacuated to a hospital, but he lost his right hand and the use of his right eye” (74). He was also awarded the Victoria Cross for his outstanding heroism.

The Gorkhas carried out rescue tasks even in the post-Second World War confrontations and wars. Vijaya Kumar Tiwary describes it in this way, “They stood like a pillar almost wherever there was a theatre of fighting” (811). They fought to rescue the French hostages who were under Viet Minh. Nevertheless, only in the second attempt in March 1946, the Viet Minh was defeated and they “left the French in full control of Indo-China as they departed” (Gurung 72). Then, the Gorkhas were to face the pro-Indonesian rebellions in Borneo Island. Sheik Azahari, the leader of pro-Indonesian activists and Yassin Affendi, the commander of the rebels, were defeated only in some days’ confrontations as it is described in the book, “The privilege of rescuing the Sultan from the rebels fell into the hands of the ½ nd Gurkha, and the relieved Sultan remained grateful to the Gurkhas for life” (Gurung 106). However, Indonesian President Sukarno did not give up his interest in Borneo Island, but initiated terrorism. The Gorkhas with full “martiality and loyalty” (Caplan 580) had to go in search through hot, thick and rainy jungles of Borneo. In November 1965, Lance Corporal Ram Bahadur Limbu of C Company of the 2/10th Gorkha team had a cross-firing with the guerrillas. Unfortunately, two of his gunmen got severely wounded. Swearing “that the enemy would pay for this with their blood” (Farwell 274), he carried them to a safe place amidst the heavy firing. The Gorkhas defeated the enemies at the end. The sad point is that both of the rescued died. Ram Bahadur became the 13th Victoria Cross winner from the Gorkhas. Besides, on 9 June 1982, in the Falklands war, there was a heavy mortar firing from the enemies and “one Gurkha officer and three soldiers were hit and had to be evacuated” (Gurung 125). They were taken away for medical treatment.

Conclusion

The Gorkhas are heroic not only in battling but also in rescuing people such as officers, co-warriors and civilians. We can observe their bravery in ‘battling’ and ‘rescuing’ in many wars, including the Anglo-Nepal War, the First World War and the Second World War. In the Anglo-Nepal War, the well-trained and well-equipped British soldiers had a very difficult time to defeat the Gorkhas as they had to cut off the water supply into the Khalanga fort. They took such a cruel action just due to their defeated mentality to the war heroism of the Gorkha soldiers. After the Gorkhas’ recruitment in the British East India army, the British officers were kept secure from the mutineers and the civilians were freed from the usual troubles of robberies, banditries and mutinies. In the First and Second World Wars, the Gorkhas fought for Britain ferociously. Defeating the enemies, they kept the image of the Union Jack high in the world. They were honoured with the Victoria Crosses and other medals for their heroic battling as well as their courageous rescue works. Even after the Second World War, the Gorkhas had to fight against the rebels in Malaya and Borneo Island. They exploited the rebellions and gave relief to the civilians and rulers in the particular countries. In the Falklands War, the Gorkhas did not fight with the Argentinian soldiers for a long period because the Argentine soldiers soon surrendered as they had already heard about the bravery of the Gorkhas. The Gorkhas became the main power for Britain’s victory in many wars that

they fought around the world either during the imperial or post-imperial period. Thus, in summary, the book *Ayo Gorkhali: A History of the Gurkhas* by Gurung draws the vivid picture of the Gurkhas' 'double heroism' in wars: 'battling' and 'rescuing.'

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