

The Pride of Gorkhas: Khukri

Aditi Gurung¹, Genius Chakma², Dr. Prabha Lama³

¹Student, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Visual Arts, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun, India

³Department of Humanities & Social Sciences Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun

ABSTRACT

Kukri is not just a melee slightly curved weapon for the Nepali people. It has been used by different civilizations as a weapon, but in the Nepali culture, its essence has been deeply rooted within the Nepali culture. This study has been divided into several parts, where the origin and birth of the “kukri” have been tried to be revealed, from its emergence to its use, including the focus on the blacksmiths who forged the blade with their own hands. Further, the handles and their types have been discussed with a focus on why they were forged in such a peculiar way including various types of handles known in history. Thereafter the study focuses on Karda and Chakmak. Further, the study seems to unveil the use and purpose of notches and discovers how they mostly served the purpose in the kukris that were used in war by soldiers or as a weapon during animal sacrifice for religious purposes. The study also seems to reveal and discuss the kind of bond which exists between a Gorkha and a kukri, and why a kukri has been indefinitely always associated with the Gorkhas and vice-versa. Thereafter the study seems to discover the religious faith and traditions of the Nepali people concerning their kukri while unveiling myths scattered around the globe regarding it, and at the same time giving an overview of the present scenario concerning kukri around the globe.

Keywords: Kukri, Gorkha, Tradition, Ivory, Mountain, Curvature, Ethnic

INTRODUCTION

Kukri is a short weapon with a broad blade and is almost similar to a machete. Its origin remains in the shadows thus no one is actually certain about its genesis, however, one amongst the many popular speculations is that the shaping of the blade might have descended from the classic Greek weapon known as “Kopis”, famously used in the 7th century BC. The Kopis was used by the cavalry of the Macedonians and was also carried by the troops of Alexander the great while invading northwest India, being impressed by the use of such blade as a melee weapon the native blacksmiths known as “Kamis” copied the design. Though there are conjointly few similarities within the production of a number of Kukri to the crafting technique of antique Japanese weapon system it was different from it hence, creating the Kukri the oldest knife known to humankind. The oldest kukri recognized to exist is put on a show on the broad deposit in the capital of Nepal that belonged to Dravya Shah, crowned head, the King of Gorkha in the year 1627. However, the origins of the kukri seem to date back to around 2500 years ago as well. Some claim that the kukri was 1st utilized by

“Kiratis” who dominated the kingdom of Nepal before the Licchavi age, in the seventh Century BC.

For years and centuries, no one around the globe truly knew about the existence of the kukri which was only recognized in the Country of India and the kingdom of Nepal, where the native Gorkhas seemed to carry the tradition of forging and keeping the Kukri with them as a part of their culture. With this legendary multi-utility weapon the great Gorkha King Prithivi Narayan crowned head carried the unification campaign and annexed 22-24 smaller states into the sturdy unified “Nepal”. Even before him the Malla kings conjointly used kukri as their weapon. The kukri could be used domestically as day-to-day tool for common Nepalis from dawn to twilight, aiding in their daily family chores like cutting meat, whittling twigs, creating ways by clearing bushes, etc while also serving as a security companion. The leading edge of the kukri was first described by a group of people in India, who had to face it within the well-documented battles since 1814, combating the ‘Gorkhali Sainik in the western kingdom of Nepal. Within the hold of the Gurkha soldier's grip, this apparently little piece of steel known as khukri or Kukri generally, becomes a real sinister weapon, with which a Gorkha attains incontestable rare feats of bravery while facing the enemy in many other tracts. Throughout world war, world war I and II kukri were used as a fatal weapon by almost all of the Gorkhas. During such a period, it came to light that Italy had kept some of the troopers captive. The Gurkhas with their kukri managed to rescue the troopers from their territory behind the enemy lines. Though' additional trendy weapons like tanks, atom bombs, and machine guns were the major weapons during those wars, the kukri still emerged to be as a very important weapon throughout the devastating war. This can be seen as even the British Gurkha, Singapore Army, and Bahrain Army still carry kukri as a matter of pride to date. The successful war campaigns and swift finish of the Gorkhali Sainik against its enemies should be attributable to some extent to this weapon. It's believed that the universal custom of the Gurkha Army carrying the kukri began from the historical ‘Gorkhali Saniks’ carrying the blade with them all the time, even when they were not gone on a war. This practice traditionally still exists throughout the globe by the Gorkhas, as part of their culture.

Fig.1 Kopsis

• Image collected from:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kopsis#/media/File:Iron_machaira_\(sword\)_MET_SF2001346.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kopsis#/media/File:Iron_machaira_(sword)_MET_SF2001346.jpg)

Creation/Forging of Kukri

The people behind the roaring story of the kukri are known as the "Bishwakarma" an ethnic group who are referred to as the "Born Kukri Makers" shaping the knives for several generations and still doing so in the present era, with abundant pride and pleasure. The forging of kukri is unexpectedly primitive, however, its vogue and class, are something to be reckoned with. In the early Kingdom of Nepal, most villages would have a blacksmith who was known as “Kami” for their magnificent forging of the kukris to their fullest potential. In today’s era, there's an excellent deal of mass-production of these deadly knives, a systematic traditional method during which the Kamis from different locations assemble together, and work under a contractor who is responsible for all the management, and administration including financial activities. The kukri blades have always varied in the terms of quality ranging from some inferior to prime quality steels, from apprentices to



masters' works, from low-cost to stylish curved blades however the owner desires it to be which could be noticed by any associate who has an eye for talent to differentiate one from the other. Usually, the vehicle's spring (suspension) steel has been used for the forging of a kukri blade, but recently special steels were self-created by the manufacturers by extracting iron-ore from natural resources known as the "Himalaya Steel". Earlier the Kukris were much longer than the trendy ones and considerably varied depending on the type of steel used and their handles. Army kukris issued to the Gurkhas throughout the World War era had inscriptions inscribed in them like the name of the manufacturer, the holder (owner), or the issue date and the name of the platoon unit. Today both the ancient and the famous village kukris, including the military knives have intensely modified over the years adapting to the trendy times and their developments. Kukri grips are commonly made up of native walnut wood known as "Sattisaal" in Nepalese, domestic Asiatic buffalo horn, and a few components acquired from brass, aluminum, ivory, and even odd-toed ungulate horn are used for a few special ones. These days' the faux cervid horn and yak horn are in fashion in the market. Shapes and sizes of kukris from ancient (classic) to trendy ones have varied intensely from place to place, person to person, all the while depending on different smiths as well. Kukri created within the village Bhojpur, noted for kukri, create fat thick blade whereas Sirupate, the foremost noted kukri in the kingdom of Nepal is incredibly slim and skinny. At the same time, kukris from Salyan are long and slender with deeper belly, and Dhankuta, a village within the east created an easy normal handy kind of blade even used by the army, however, it comes with a drawback, as there is stress observed in the handling of the sheath since it is highly decorative. It should be noted that Kukris created throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were far much longer and additionally sickle-shaped than its trendy counterparts.



Fig.2 Kami Holding a Khukri

Image collected from:

<https://www.fodors.com/world/asia/nepal/experiences/news/meet-the-blacksmith-who-crafts-a-nations-icon>

Handles

The shapes of the handles were usually observed to be very broad belly with a steady curved blade and light in weight. The kukri's manufactured and used by the army are produced in mass and are very hard to distinguish from each other, as they symbolize uniformity in the unit of the army, with the exception that one might engrave their name on the top or the bottom of the blade or the handle so as to mark their respective kukri but the kukri's forged by the native Nepalese people i.e, Kamis can be distinguished from one to another, as they are made by different people and are additionally designed as per the request of the individuals who request for their own kukri. Moreover, to the eyes of the people around the globe, various kukris might seem to be almost identical to each other, hard to be distinguished, but if closely noticed one may observe differences in each kukri. Since the kukri forged by the native people are wholly handmade, they differ even if such changes ought to be minute in nature, differences such as the style, edge, or the inscriptions engraved in the blade or the handle can be seen to exist in all of the kukris. There are three types of tang that can be observed in a kukri; full, half, and fully flat. The full tang means the blade goes through the handle, while the half tang is said to be when the blade goes only halfway through the handle and the full flat is ought to be said when the blade is shaped in such a way that the handle is in between the wood of the handle. Tang are often visible on the edges of and steel rivets of the tang and a pommel plate or butt cap is likewise prepared at the tip to beautify the total fixture; this kind is thought as "Panawal handle".



Fig.3 Types of Handles

Image collected from:

<http://sirkukri.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-kukri-knife-of-gurkhas-historical.html>

Types of kukri handle

Most of the classic kukris are accustomed to have a wood handle with a rat tail tang but, astonishingly, the tail failed to come back in trend of handles. The handles were bowed in contrast to the trendy ones and had steel or iron fixtures in most cases. The precise origin of who initiated the “Panawal” handle isn't known, however, in all probability, it began in the early 1900s once the Kamis was influenced by the British knives and they undertook the new higher version of the blade. It's additionally assumed that the handle demanded associate upgrade as rat tail handles weren't robust enough to carry the long blades once placed in an arduous job. In the present days, different materials are utilized in the forging of the kukris, since it is observed that several changes made and different components used in the making of the kukri help in delivering a quick, easy-to-use knife, which lasts longer and is certainly quite handy than compared to those of the ancient times. Still, exceptions can be seen as there are still people who prefer the old ways of forging the kukris, and depending upon their wish, such kukris forged could be fashioned in a different way as they desire.

The Kukri is carried in a sheath, “Dap or Dab” in Nepalese, an unremarkable pair of wood frames lined with traditional buffalo hide or different domesticated animal's bones, and might or might not have brass or steel protection depending on the kukri. Kukri sheath just like the blade and handle has been known to be used since ancient times and just like the knife itself, the sheath has also been modified and changed as per the requirements needed. Scabbards from the time period failed to have belts and other people used untreated unblemished raw animal skin hide only for the mere sake of carrying the kukri blade. Kukri was therefore stuck within the owner's sash or “Patuka” as any styles for its hold were missing. When the formation of the Gorkha Army by the British was done, they were instructed to hold the kukri from the waist belt in army uniforms, and later steel and brass fixtures were worn to look smart furthermore, shielding the naked tip of the sheath. Few kukris have ornamental sheaths with decorative wood, horn, silver, and paintings on brass and ivory. Kukri whose sole motive is meant for just the show is given time and energy in the making of its sheath by using horns, timber, and different expensive ornamental substances to craft gorgeous styles and carvings with typical and religious symbols within the sheath. It is a standard in the Gurkha army to supply a retiring officer with a Kothimoda kukri (silver case) to honour his high-quality carrier service to the regiment.



Fig.4 Decorative Handle

Image collected from:

<https://www.khukurihouseonline.com/nepal-dhankute-horn-khukuri-ornate>

Karda and Chakmak

Kukri scabbard conjointly has two pockets at the rear that carry blunt steel known as “Chakmak” for sharpening the kukri blade and conjointly for putting sparks from flint and a bit sharp kukri known as “Karda” used as a little utility kukri. Very recent scabbards beside Karda and Chakmak together have an additional animal skin pouch (Khalti) connected to them used for carrying tiny survival kits or most of the time, tiny pieces of flint to form a spark with the Chakmak. However, army kukris in war days including most of the kukris in the 19th and early 20th centuries had neither the Karda Chakmak nor the additional pouch. It was only during the middle of the 20th century that Karda and Chakmak were once more placed back within the Gurkha knives to keep up the kukri tradition.

The Kukri Notch

The most appealing and distinctive part of the kukri is that the notch or "Cho" (a numeric figure like "3" in most cases) is cut into the blade directly in front of the grip. The Cho or “Kaudi” in Nepalese that separates the kukri from the world of knives instigates a lot of interest as a result of its distinctive form and utility objectives. The notch works as a blood dipper serving to save the blood or fluid from going near the handle so as to properly maintain the grip of the holder during the execution of its use and at the same time serves as a stopper to prevent numerous kinds of kukri notches. Chakmak (sharpeners) is to metal sharpener for khukuri blade. But the notch specifically serves as a spiritual significance because it indicates the legendary Hindu fertility image (OM) and represents the sacred cow’s hoof (as a cow is idolized in Nepal). It is also believed to be developed as a tool for catching and neutralizing an enemy blade in a close-range fight. However, myths like notch being a useful tool to seize an enemy’s sight within it and hurl the blade sort of a boomerang to strike the head of the enemy is not real and only fictional as a kukri isn't used by throwing, but rather by skillfully handling and striking in a close-combat.

Various types of Notches (Kaudi/Kauri)



Fig.5 Notch

Image collected from: <https://www.khukurihouseonline.com/kukri>

The notch being a can opener or rest curvature for the forefinger of the using hand for slicing are all fictitious. The primary kukri blade ever notable to modern humans had the Cho and a few drawings, it was found in an Indian temple around 600 A.D. Most kukri that originated in the past had the legendary notch and even the modern ones still carry this distinctive tradition. The notch is additionally a special section to exhibit the maker's ability and talent.

The Bond between Gurkha and kukri



Fig.6 Gurkha ~~santik~~ with ~~kukri~~

Image collected from: <https://special-ops.org/11-interesting-things-about-gurkhas/>

Gorkhas were in all probability the best mercenary force the world has ever seen earning them fame around the globe. Gurkhas and kukris both are synonymous. Kukri without Gurkhas and Gurkhas without kukri almost seem out of the question, since kukri and the Gorkhas have been associated since ancient times. The Kukri isn't solely the national weapon of Nepal but also serves as a symbol of the Gurkha soldier, a prized possession with which he has indelibly carved an identity for himself. It is a vital part of the Nepalese culture – it represents their history, traditions, and religious ideals. It is also a logo of wealth, status, and status in the Nepalese way – it even encompasses a sincerely represented social position as an article of dress. Gurkha soldier carries a kukri with him as a part of his uniform in the battle. It is said that in the hands of a Gorkha, a kukri is nothing less than a devastating, silent yet dangerous blow to the enemy's life. In fact, it's even considered as an extension of his arm itself. The bullet could be misfired, or the mag could run empty, but when a Gurkha unsheathes his Kukri, he makes his final "do or die" run on the enemy in a fury to complete the mission. This scene created the romance and therefore the legends. With an extreme will, a fast and fierce blow could be severely devastating and could be a first-rate-smooth slaughter, wherever the blow may be made, the enemy would tumble down and the flesh wound would be separated from the enemy's body just as quickly in a swift. The Gurkha and his Kukri are incomplete without one another. Conjointly they need to earn their repute, so as to never be forgotten. Nepal, the Gurkhas and therefore the Kukri square measure invincible. Be it any war where a Gorkha would have gone, there couldn't be anywhere even a single one of them would have left without their kukri, with fierce and strong will to use it whenever the need may arise. The Kukri is likewise the emblem of the Gurkhas, whether or not they are serving among the Nepal navy, the British navy, or the Indian military. Badges, insignia, flags, signage and colorations employed by varied armies with Gurkha squads all have a kukri on them. Gurkha fighters have a dreaded reputation, and the kukri is one of the main reasons. No Gurkha has ever been heard to go into battle without a kukri.

Faith, Traditions, and Myths



Fig.7 Uniform with Khukri

Image collected from:

<https://www.thekhukurihouse.com/service-no1-sarkhari-khukuri>

Kukri plays a crucial spiritual role in the ancient rituals of the many distinctive ethnic businesses of Nepal. As a religious good luck charm, it's worshiped and admired and given loyalty to, besides alternative helpful iron and metallic equipment, for the period of Dashain (the longest and most crucial competition within the Nepalese calendar), and at completely different instances every time any sacrifice is to be made, kukri is used. The traditional, ancient belief is that a kukri in the house is expressed to bring fortune and chase away evil spirits. The historical custom – even so determined in traditional households – is that once a Nepali tends to retire in the dead of night time it's even placed below the pillows to keep scary dreams at bay, and dispel evil influences and thoughts. Its position in typical Nepalese subculture is very respected, and its cultural symbolism and importance are certainly extremely deep.

For a Nepalese, the kukri in addition symbolizes further intangible traits for both men and women such as honour, justice, human dignity, and freedom. There couldn't possibly be anything more powerful, showing an image of the energy and spirit of the Nepali nation and of the Nepalese folks greater than that.

Kukri is the glory of national pride, gallantry in battle, and insignia of success with wonderful history upheld by the brave Gurkhas. The name and repute of the kukri are very high-quality as a result of its far one very inexperienced and outstanding kukri however the myths it incorporates within and its religious values have virtually literally this kukri a true legend. The myths that have unfolded over the centuries notably in the western global have made kukri an additional subject as a hobby and for knowledge, especially for people who are obsessed with collecting knives. A kukri once drawn is instantly thought to taste blood before it is even re-sheathed, the symbolic "Kaudi" notch was seen as a device to capture enemy's view within it and hurl the kukri within the direction of him, snick off his head and grasp the kukri out of the air because it returns; and therefore the

notch obtaining wont to disarm the enemy through catching his blade in it and snatching from his hand by using twisting the kukri are all myths (but initial one may be actual in historical instances) but has as a substitute created an anxious, respectful and one in all a kind image to the current exceptional kukri in minds and thoughts of tens of millions. The Kukri is produced in mass in Nepal because of the religious values it incorporates and the beliefs it's created among the Nepalese lifestyle. The shape of the blade itself represents the trinity symbols of "Brahma", "Vishnu" and "Shiva", the 3 most celebrated and prestigious Hindu Gods in Nepal and India. The notch within the blade indicates the powerful image of fertility (OM) of Hinduism and conjointly indicates the cow's hoof which is often believed as holy in Nepal. Kukri is additionally adored on special occasions and festivals and is perceived as a dynamic icon of Hindu mythology. Notably in "Dashain", Nepalese predominant tradition, the kukri is worshipped ritually and placed to the movement of beheading home animals as services to the "Durga" goddess (Goddess who slaughtered devils and evils). Further in "Biswakarma Puja" which particularly falls in autumn, devotees worship kukri along with completely different iron and metal tools to pay their appreciation and loyalty. Only those kukris are worshipped before any sacrificial ceremonies which have been used to sacrifice to the god as there is a belief in Nepalese society that "a kukri have to taste blood to be a kukri". This sacrificial approach to life additionally follows within the Gurkha army during which each year animals are sacrificed to foresee glorious fortune and blessings to the regiments and their soldiers.

The faith and perception that the kukri has produced are tremendous and attention-grabbing. A kukri is believed to bring fortune and prosperity, and kill evil spirits, these beliefs have been maintained to survive and sustain even in today's generations. The Kukri is assumed to own spiritual power to intimidate demons, evils, and nightmares and thus even today, lots of Nepali people agree to carry it and place it underneath their pillow before sleeping at night. Even when an infant is observed to be showing symptoms of illness the parents of such a child tend to keep a kukri under the infant's bed or pillow. Further, in Nepali ethnic groups like Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar and Tamang and so on a kukri is likewise cremated in conjunction with the useless man in a perception that the khukuri would defeat the Devil in order that the departed soul might want to travel to heaven and relaxation in peace. Additionally, there's a saying that "a person with a kukri represents a person of honor, dignity, braveness, and loyalty who might kill for the rightful cause whenever required". There's, also a saying heard through Padma Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana, former top Minister of Nepal that "... the kukri is national addition to the religious weapon of the Gurkha to hold it even as awake and to space it underneath the pillow while retired. As a spiritual weapon it's far worshipped different the Dashawn and at completely different times anytime any sacrifice is to be made". Besides these, the kukri is the symbol of wealth, status, and prestige in Nepal. It's additionally widely used as the national symbol and a mark in the level of ranking in security forces.

The famed legendary story goes- anytime a Gurkha draws his weapon out, if he was unable to find his enemy's blood then he had to put his own, alternative story additionally goes- kept below pillow to forestall dangerous dreams and nightmares. In the villages and rural areas carrying kukri symbolizes manhood for boys, it helps to keep satin at bay, including ghosts and black magic. As well, a really well-liked voice communication in Nepalese as "Kukri Bhandha Karda Lagne", that means "To be over sensible than his/hers elders". Besides these, kukri is worshipped before any sacrificial ceremonies as there's a belief in Nepalese society that a new khukuri should taste blood to

become a real khukuri. This sacrificial tradition additionally follows within the Gurkha Army where every year animals are sacrificed for good fortune and blessings to the regiments and its soldiers.

Conclusion

These days kukri is still used for the reasons it was used in the ancient period, be it in a war, or for domestic purposes, including as a medium to showcase power, prestige, and wealth in the Nepali families. Nowadays khukuri is used for decoration and in India and UK. The kukri is also famous in the army as numerous regiments and units within the Indian Army, including the Assam Rifles, the Kumaon Regiment, the Garhwal Rifles, and the various Gorkha regiments are famous for using kukris as a weapon and for paying respect as well. Out of its native location of South Asia, the kukri additionally sees carrier with the Royal Gurkha Rifles of the British army—a completely unique regiment this is one-of-a-kind from the rest of the British military as it's far the most effective regiment that recruits its infantrymen strictly from Nepal; a relationship that has its roots inside the times of British colonial rule in India. The kukri is the staple weapon of all Gurkha army regiments in the course of the arena, a lot in order that some English speaking groups mention khukri as a "Gurkha blade" or "Gurkha khukri". The kukri seems to be Nepalese and Indian Gorkha emblem and is used in lots of conventional, Hindu-centric rites and inclusive wedding ceremony ceremonies. Even though instances may also have changed but one could inevitably discover a Kukri at any Gorkha house. Even though people sacrifice animals in the name of rites, it should be put to halt as it is inhuman and old tradition, as lots of controversies have surrounded the same as well. People should continue the traditions without harming living being or animals.

References

1. Martina Sprague (2013). Kukris and Gurkha. Amazon Asia-Pacific Holdings Private Limited
2. Fernan Vargas, James Loriega (2019). Kukri Combat Knife of Nepal. Lulu.com
3. TIM I. GURUNG (2020). Ayo Gorkhali: A History of the Gurkhas. Westland
4. <https://www.wearthemighty.com/mighty-tactical/gurkha-kukri-absolute-devastation/>
5. https://www.khukuriblades.com/kukri_history/
6. <https://deadliestwarrior.fandom.com/wiki/Kukri>
7. <https://www.thekhukurihouse.com/origin-of-the-kukri>
8. <https://glosbe.com/en/mk/kukri>
9. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-10782099>
10. <https://asiatimes.com/2018/04/brief-history-gurkhas-knife-kukri/>
11. <https://www.khukurihouseonline.com/gurkhas-khukuri#:~:text=A%20Gurkha%20is%20incomplete%20without,forever%20with%20pride%20and%20glory.>
12. <https://www.craiglawrence.co/about-the-kukri.html>
13. <https://www.greatgurkhakhukuri.com/history-of-nepalese-kukri/>
14. <https://kilatools.com/kukrihistory/john-powell/GurkhaKukri./2traditionalkukri.html>
15. <https://www.gurkhabde.com/the-kukri/>
16. <https://www.atlantacutlery.com/bhojpure-traditional-kukri>
17. https://www.academia.edu/4349526/Col_Kirkpatrick_and_the_Kukri_knife_a_exploration_of_the_Kukri_in_the_late_18th_and_early_19th_century
18. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/06/world/asia/nepal-animal-sacrifice-gadhimai.html>

19. <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/29/world/asia/nepal-gadhimai-ritual-slaughter/index.html>
20. <https://chinesemartialstudies.com/2013/04/29/mythology-of-the-kukri-sign-and-symbol/>
21. <https://www.theweek.co.uk/the-week-unwrapped/104702/what-is-the-gadhimai-festival-and-why-is-it-so-controversialhttps://www.khukuriblades.com/>
22. <https://www.thekhukurihouse.com/origin-of-the-kukri>
23. <https://asiatimes.com/2018/04/brief-history-gurkhas-knife-kukri/>
24. <https://www.greatgurkhakhukuri.com/history-of-nepalese-kukri/>
25. <https://www.khukurihouseonline.com/kukri>
26. <https://www.craiglawrence.co/about-the-kukri.html>
27. <https://ravencresttactical.com/history-of-the-kukri/>