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Research Article

# Lahure Culture and Educational Achievement in the Gorkha Communities in Pokhara Metropolitan City, Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

*Nepalese societies have a long history of Gurkha Army culture for centuries. There is no question about the role of this culture in enhancing the socioeconomic status of these communities from the past. However, along with its positive aspects, this trend has brought some possible adverse effects on those communities who are directly or indirectly associated with the Gurkha Army recruitment process. This study has aimed to explain the possible impact on education attainment of youth from these communities due to participation in the Army preparation and selection process. For the study explanatory research methods were used, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data for insightful investigation of the phenomenon, where 184 aspiring youths from different army training centers operated in Pokhara Metropolitan City, Kaski were selected to gather quantitative insights from young individuals from the Gurkha community actively engaged in Army preparation training. Furthermore, qualitative data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with esteemed principals and administrative figures from educational institutions offering class 11 and 12 courses in Pokhara, Kaski. The recruitment process for the Army, particularly among youths from the Gurkha communities, presents a significant challenge to educational pursuits, resulting in a diversion of focus away from academic endeavors. This trend has led to a substantial number of individuals prioritizing military training over education. Consequently, this phenomenon has*

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*adversely affected educational attainment, limiting future opportunities for these communities. Additionally, the Gurkha community's historical involvement primarily in Gurkha recruitment has perpetuated their societal exclusion and marginalization. While self-realization within the Gurkha community is crucial, effective governmental policies promoting inclusive education and opportunities are equally imperative. Collaborative efforts between communities and policymakers are necessary to bridge these disparities, fostering an equitable environment and integration beyond traditional roles.*

**Keywords:** Educational attainment process, Gurkha army recruitment process, Gurkha communities, social remittance,

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## INTRODUCTION

The Gurkhas have a long and storied history of serving in the British and Indian Army, dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The recruitment of Gurkha soldiers began in 1815 when the British East India Company, which controlled much of India at the time, hired Gurkha soldiers from Nepal to serve in its army. Recruitment of Gurkhas started with the formation of four separate Gurkhas battalions namely, the first Nasiri, Second Nasiri, Sirmoor, and Kumaon battalions, where 4,650 Gurkha soldiers were enlisted in the British Indian Army (Rathaur, 2001). The first regiment, the Gurkha Rifles, was formed in 1817, and many more Gurkha regiments were created over the years.

At the beginning of the Gurkha recruitment, there were no specific policies for recruitment in the British Indian Army according to ethnicity. After 1857, with Sepoy Munity (widespread but unsuccessful rebellion against British rule in India in 1857-59), gradually, castes were controlled and emphasized on the hill tribes (Banskota, 1994; Shrestha, 2015). Until now, the caste groups with specific features such as martial race; greater power of enduring fatigue, low stature, short limbs, enormous muscle and vast strength, and broad and deep chest (Barua, 1995); there is the domination of the four ethnic groups, Magar, Gurung, Rai, and Limbu as true Gurkhas to this date (Banskota, 1994). At present, this trend and culture have brought the concept of the Gurkha community addressing specifically these ethnic groups, making the identities synonymously to each other.

In the regions where Gurkha communities are living, the majority had a higher level of human development indices, including life expectancy, literacy, and per-capita consumption (Nepal, 2020). Earning in the forms of salary and pension has contributed not only to these

communities, along with, but it has also contributed significantly to the national income. The average pension of Gurkhas was found to be greater than the average salary of Nepali officials, which signifies the contribution to the domestic consumption rate.

Along with the economic remittance and its positive impact on the quality of life of these communities, an important aspect is the social remittance this community received. As per Nepal (2020), a significant issue in accessing incentives like promotions and allowances during service in the Army was the absence of education upon enrollment. Recognizing the importance of education in the Army, individuals subsequently engaged in the education sector back in society for the new generation. Moreover, they actively participated in the modernization of rural regions by enhancing both social and physical aspects, such as prioritizing health, hygiene, and sanitation, and introducing novel ideas and products to their communities. These efforts can be termed as social remittance, collectively playing a pivotal role in fostering the development of rural areas in Nepal.

According to Shrestha (2015), the new criteria for the selection process that emphasizes on educational aspects of recruits has a significant impact on the educational attainment of Gurkha communities. Suppose the British Gurkha Army recruitment is the only skilled emigration opportunity available. In that case, the proportion of educated Gurkha men remaining in Nepal is predicted to be 25.43%, which is an increase of 9.26% non-migrant portion of educated Gurkha non-migrants before the change.

Besides this, based on study conducted by Subba et al. (2014), it was found that literacy rates within Nepal's Gurkha community and its subordinates differ significantly. The hill Brahmins exhibit the highest literacy rate at 79%, with the females having the highest literacy rate, maintaining their historical educational dominance. Conversely, the Gurkha communities—Gurung, Magar, Rai, and Limbu—show lower rates ranging from 56% to 68%, even vulnerable especially in terms of female literacy. Furthermore, a research investigation carried out by Bhul (2021), found that the inclusion of ethnic communities, excluding the Newar community, in civil service positions within the special and gazette classes is notably deficient. These ethnic communities collectively represent 30.83% of the total population but hold only 1.64% of civil service positions. In contrast, the Brahmin, Chhetri, and Newar communities, accounting for 12.74%, 15.80%, and 5.48% of the population respectively, possess representation rates of 72%, 15.89%, and 7.14% in civil service roles.

Youths from these ethnic communities are ready to give up everything including their study to recruit in the army (Gurung, 2012), as there is a craze among the youth to recruit

in the British Army. Historical affiliation with this culture, social prestige, secure life, and opportunity to settle abroad are the reasons that are still luring new youth into this even after 200 years of its initiation. This might have resulted in very insignificant participation of these communities in the mainstream of the nation such as politics, education, public services, and others.

Thousands of youths start involved in physical training even before they reach the eligible age for registration for recruitment, and it is contentious till they cross the age limit. The success rate of getting recruited into the army is shallow, the probability of joining the British Gurkha Army is less than 0.44 (Shrestha, 2015), and there is concern about the academic future of the aspirant youths who will be unsuccessful in the selection, who have given up their education for the recruitment process.

The Lahure culture and strong focus on military recruitment in these communities, command significant attention and dedication from young boys and their families. This emphasis on joining in Army and involvement in preparation sessions for Army recruitment detracts from educational pursuits, hindering overall educational progress in these communities. Despite the positive socio-economic impact of the Gurkha recruitment, concerns arise about its effect on the educational status of these communities, particularly on the youth. The intensive training and recruitment process may negatively impact educational attainment, potentially leading to increased school dropout rates. The societal emphasis on military aspirations over other career paths might limit future opportunities and have long-term adverse effects on inclusion in the mainstream of the nation from these communities. Additionally, the low success rate in army recruitment raises questions about the future of those who sacrifice other career development, especially education for military training.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

This study has adopted an explanatory research design that synthesizes quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques tailored to the research's specific objectives. This study has used primary as well as secondary data for a comprehensive study. The primary instruments utilized to gather primary information were structured questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The structured questionnaire was specifically crafted to gather quantitative insights from young individuals from the Gurkha community actively engaged in Army preparation training. The Pokhara Metropolitan City of Kaski had been selected as the study area. 6 Army training centers operating in Pokhara, from which 184 aspirant trainees

were selected using a random sampling method to systematically gather data related to attitudes of young aspirant trainees toward education, behavioral tendencies, parental involvement, and their academic performance.

Furthermore, qualitative data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with esteemed principals and administrative figures from educational institutions offering class 11 and 12 courses in Pokhara, Kaski. These interviews were meticulously designed to explore in-depth the behavioral nuances, educational attitudes, parental roles, students' attendance patterns, drop-out rates, and academic achievements of young aspirants, particularly those belonging to the Gurkha community. This qualitative approach aimed to uncover and understand the complex factors that impact how students from this Gurkha community experience education and their paths through it, specifically those aspiring for army careers within the Gurkha community.

This study has also involved consolidating and evaluating secondary information sourced from scholarly articles, government reports, and data sets to investigate the socioeconomic status of the Gurkha community and explore the trends and factors shaping the Lahure culture within these communities. Emphasizing critical evaluation, the study has prioritized ensuring the reliability, validity, and relevance of the findings to contribute meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge related to these specific research areas.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The number of youths participate in the Gurkha recruitment training process each year. According to the British Gurkha Camp, Pokhara, Kaski, in intake 2022/23 AD, 8548 aspirant trainees had cleared the preliminary stage of registration, and 218 and 140 youths completed the final selection process in the British Army and Singapore Police respectively, showing a 4.188 percent success rate. According to the field survey, youths from 53 districts were found to participate in the Gurkha Army recruitment preparation process. 8.2 percent of youths were found to participate in preparation even before reaching the required age for registration in the army recruitment process. There are several cases of being unable to pass the preliminary selection stage i.e. receiving a gate pass for further stages of selection even after years of preparation. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that the number of aspirants who are directly or indirectly trying to evolve in the selection process is significantly high. This signifies that the actual success rate of being recruited into the Gurkha Army is much lower than the data shows.

### Caste-wise Participation in Gurkha Army Training

Based on some earlier studies, there has been the domination of the Janajati communities, especially, Gurung, Magar, Rai, and Limbu in the Gurkha Army for centuries. Despite the non-discriminatory policy adopted by the British Government based on caste in the British Army and Singapore Police, domination of Janajati communities is experienced. In the study, the tendency of participation in the Gurkha Army recruitment was found to differ according to caste and ethnicity. Specific castes and ethnicities have found the pre-dominant in Lahure culture and the Gurkha Army recruitment process.

**Table 1**

*Caste-wise Participation in the Gurkha Army Recruitment Process*

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Brahmin	22	12.0
Chhetri	33	17.9
Janajati	116	63.0
Dalit	13	7.1
Total	184	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Table 1 shows the caste-wise participation in the Gurkha Army recruitment process. As can be seen in Table 1, all caste groups are participating in the Gurkha Army recruitment process, however, the Janajati community has a higher tendency to participate in the recruitment process, out of the total, 63 percent of youths from the Janajati community especially Gurung, Magar, Rai, and Limbu community have participated in Gurkha Army recruitment training process. Followed by the Chhetri community, Brahmin community, and Dalit by 17.9, 12, and 7.1 percent respectively.

### Occupation of Parents of Aspirant Trainees

The occupational and financial background of the family is one of the determining factors motivating participation in the Gurkha Army recruitment process. Families with occupations related to education and a higher level of income were found to be less responsive to motivating their sons to participate in army recruitment training procedures.

**Table 2**

*Occupational Distribution of Parents of Aspirant Trainees*

Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Army	40	21.7

Foreign Employment	36	19.6
Business	26	14.1
Government Job	13	7.1
Private Job	10	5.4
Agriculture	49	26.6
Others	10	5.4
Total	184	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

**Table 3**

*Average Monthly Income of the Family*

Monthly Income of Family	Frequency	Percent
Less than 50,000	115	62.5
Less than 1 lakh	57	31.0
More than 1 lakh	12	6.5
Total	184	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Table 2 shows the occupational background of the families of aspirant youths who are participating in the recruitment process. As can be seen, in Table 2 majority of the youths are from an agricultural family background at 26.6 percent, followed by Army or Army pensioner at 21.7 percent, foreign employment at 19.6 percent, and business at 14.1 percent. In contrast, as can be seen in Table 2, there is very little participation of youths from families who are associated with Governmental and private jobs. This may be the reason that youths from academic and civil jobs family backgrounds have very little tendency to participate in the Gurkha recruitment process. Table 3 shows the average income level of families of aspirant youths. For the analysis, income less than 50 thousand rupees has been considered as low-income, more than 50 thousand and less than one lakh rupees as medium-level income, and more than one lakh rupees as higher income level families. Most of the youths come from low-income level families, as can be seen in Table 3, 62.5 percent of youths are from low-income level families with incomes less than 50 thousand rupees. 31 percent of youths are from medium-level income families. There is low participation of youths from higher-income families. It is worthwhile to note that, it is possible that, there is a higher rate of participation of youths in the Gurkha Army recruitment process from low-income and non-academic family backgrounds.



### Spending in Education and Army Training

According to the field survey, families of youth who have been participating in army training sessions are found to be spending a significantly larger amount of money on recruitment training compared to the spending that has been made on their education. The average monthly spending on education is Rs. 4989.59, on the other hand, the average monthly spending on army training is Rs. 12545.59, more than twofold the average spending on the education of their sons. Probably, the lifestyle and financial security that can be achieved from being recruited into the Army might have motivated parents to invest a comparatively large amount of money in Army training and preparation procedures for their sons rather than their education.

### Factor Encouraging Youth to Participate in Recruitment Session

It is important to understand who motivates new youths to get involved in Army preparation. The result of the study shows that family and parents are the major motivating factor for participation in Army recruitment preparation sessions.

**Table 4**

*Factors Encouraging Youths to Participate in the Army Training Session*

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Parents	116	63.0
Relatives	7	3.8
Friends	7	3.8
Trend	2	1.1
Others	52	28.3
Total	184	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Table 4 shows the factors that influenced and encouraged the youths to participate in the recruitment preparation process. As can be seen in the table, almost two-thirds of the youths were motivated by their families to participate in a training session. Parents from the Gurkha communities themselves likely want to see their sons participate in the Gurkha Army recruitment training and get recruited in it.

### Educational Status of Aspirant Trainees

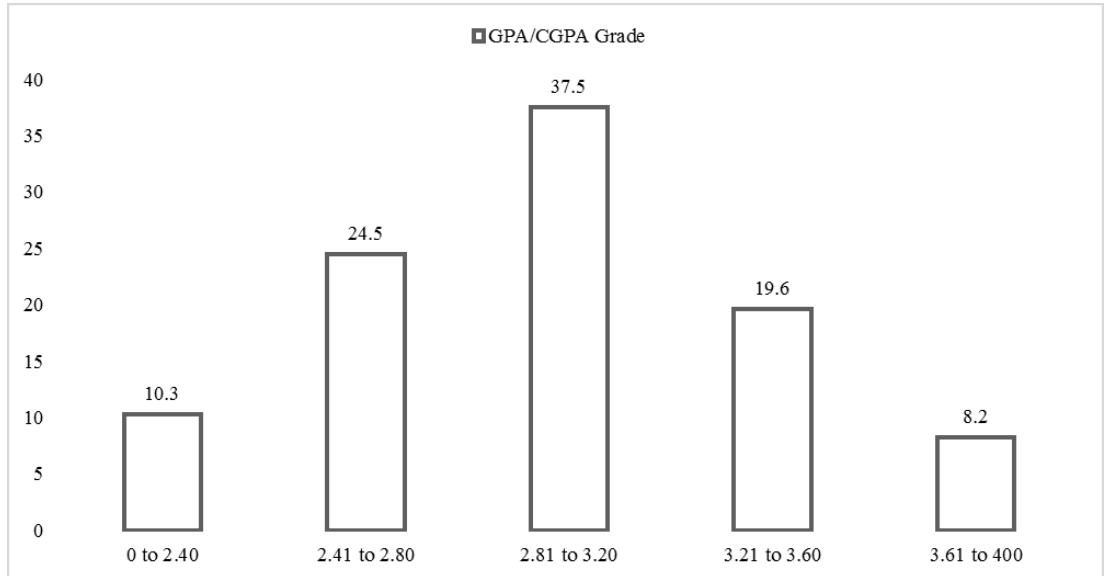
Series of dedicated training schedules and participation of school-going youth in it; priority selection on army training over the continuation of the study have noticeably released adverse effects on the regular study process of students, grades to be obtained, and prospects



towards the educational career.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution of GPA/CGPA*



Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

Figure 1 shows the Grade Point Average/Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA/CGPA) distribution of trainee youths who have participated in the recruitment preparation process. As can be seen in the figure, the majority of the youths have a GPA/CGPA less than 3.20 (B+ or below) in their latest academic achievements i.e. Secondary Education Examination (SEE) or School Leaving Certificate (SLC). Around 30 percent of youths who have been involved in the recruitment procedure have good grades of education with higher GPA/CGPA in SEE or SLC.

### Mode of Training and Continuation of Study

**Table 5**

*Mode of Training*

Mode of Training	Frequency	Percent
Prepare Training from Home	64	34.8
Stay in the Hostel of the Training Centre	120	65.2
Total	184	100.0

Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

**Table 6***Continuation of Study During Preparation Session*

	Frequency	Percent
Continue the Study	42	22.8
Admitted in School/College and Irregular in Classes	25	13.6
Completely Focused on Preparation	117	63.6
Total	184	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Table 5 reveals that more than 65 percent of aspirant youths prepare for recruitment by staying in the hostel of the training center, and consequently, there is a definite possibility of adverse effects on the education of youth who have been involved in the Gurkha Army training process. Table 6 shows the current status of the academic continuity or obstacle to educational attainment or regularity of education by the youths who have been in the preparation training session. Only 22.8 percent of youth who have been in the recruitment training process have continued their education and attained their classes regularly along with the army preparation and 63.6 percent of aspirant trainees have quit their education and have focused completely on their training where 13.6 percent of aspirant trainees have admitted in school and college, not attaining regular classes and plan for attain the final board exam directly. As demonstrated in the table, more than three-fourths of the aspirant trainees have partially or fully sacrificed their academic careers.

### **Continuation of Education by Trainees**

It is important to analyze the impact of the training session on the educational attainment of the youth who are involved in the recruitment process. The mode of the training session and the time the youth engaged in the recruitment process may determine the tendency to continuation of their education if they are unable to be recruited into the Army.

**Table 7***Future Plan of Youths (They are Unable to be Recruited into the Army)*

	Frequency	Percent
Continue of study	30	16.3
Apply for abroad study	94	51.1
Others	60	32.6
Total	184	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

Table 7 shows the possible future actions of youths if they are unable to recruit into the army. According to the table, only 16.3 percent of trainees aspire to a continuation of their studies and seek for better career in the future if they are unable to be selected in the final selection procedure of the army. As can be seen, 51.1 percent of young may apply for abroad study, and 32.6 percent of trainees have no plan for being related to and continuing of studies after this process. This result shows that there is a higher tendency of discontinuity of study of youths who have been participating in army training sessions. This high percentage of discontinuity in the education of youth resulting from involvement in army recruitment preparation tends to harm the educational status of these communities in the present and future.

Following extensive discussions with principals and academic personnel directly engaged in school-level education, particularly overseeing the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) and School Leaving Certificate (SLC), noteworthy findings have surfaced. This collaborative engagement involved in-depth interactions with key educational figures responsible for overseeing and guiding students through crucial academic milestones. Through these discussions, substantial insights and observations regarding students' educational path, particularly concerning SEE, SLC examinations, and upper level have been acquired.

The majority of young boys from Gurkha communities tend to develop an interest in joining the army from an early age and express a desire to participate in army recruitment processes after completing the necessary academic qualifications. Until they finish their Secondary Education Examination (SEE), there's usually no record of them missing classes. Their involvement in activities linked to Army recruitment begins upon entering classes 11 and 12, consequently, those who have been involved in recruitment training sessions tend to lead to higher rates of absenteeism from regular classes compared to normal students. Consequently, dedicated students often seek school schedules that accommodate their army recruitment preparations, resulting in increased absences from regular classes. This dedication to recruitment preparation sometimes affects their performance in terminal and final exams. Surprisingly, some parents found to prioritize their sons' Army preparation over their academic performance.

A significant situation arises when students, despite achieving good grades in the SEE, opt for simpler subjects in grades 11 and 12, not fully utilizing their academic potential and instead focusing on Army training sessions. This diversion from academic pursuits to military training is notable, especially considering that very few students from these communities choose careers in the academic sector. This trend might be attributed to the deeply ingrained

Lahure culture and a lack of evidence or examples of successful careers in academics among their relatives and families.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the government's implementation of policies to ensure proportional representation and inclusion of subordinate castes and communities in the nation's mainstream, the persistently low literacy rates within these groups underscore their marginalized status. The representation from these communities in civil service positions stands at a mere percentage despite constituting a significant percentage of the population share. This stark underrepresentation extends across crucial sectors like politics, education, and public services. Indifference to academic activities and careers related to education and the prevalence of the Lahure culture in these communities can be considered one of the major contributing factors for significantly lower academic status and their representation in the mainstream of the nation of these communities.

The recruitment process involves a rigorous selection procedure that starts with the potential recruits being screened for eligibility. Those who meet the eligibility criteria then have to undergo a series of physical and mental tests, which can take several months to complete. During this time, many young people aspiring to join the Army may put their education on hold or drop out of school altogether to focus on preparing for the selection process. This can result in a loss of valuable learning opportunities and can limit their future career prospects if they do not make it through the selection process or decide to leave the Army later on. A notable percentage of youths from Janajati communities participate in Army recruitment training, while those from academic and civil job backgrounds show minimal interest. This discrepancy in participation might be attributed to the substantial investment in the army's training over education due to the perceived lifestyle and financial security offered by military service. Family and relatives play a pivotal role in motivating these aspiring recruits, with many abandoning their education in favor of the rigorous Army training process. Only a small percentage of aspirants intend to pursue education if unable to secure a position in the Army, highlighting the primary focus on military recruitment within these communities. This persistent phenomenon within these communities further contributes to the lower educational status of these communities.

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