

Combat Usage of the Nepalese Khukuri: Methodologies and Techniques By “Kilogulf59”

After some research, a little of my own understanding, assessments, and preferences, I have compiled the following treatise on the Nepalese Khukuri uses as a combat weapon which is by no means complete. Please understand that I am certainly no authority and any corrections, questions, and commentary are highly welcomed. Furthermore, observe that knife fighting duels rarely if ever occur in the modern world consequently ones likelihood of a confrontation with a similarly armed opponent is extremely doubtful.

To start with, the acceptable pronunciation of the weapon is “koo-ker-ee” or “khu-khoo-ree” though many say “kook-ree” and the spellings are numerous to say the least. A few examples that I gleaned are Khookree, Kookerie, Khukri, Khukuri, Kukery, Kukoori, Koukoori, and Kukri with the most common being Kukri or Khukri. Apparently, this applies to the spelling of “Ghurka” as well. In my estimation, as long as the spelling resembles the correct pronunciation it is correct (you will note my “Kukri” and “Gurkha” spellings changing throughout this discourse).

Moreover, I am not going to delve into the history of the knife or its most famous users, the Nepalese Gorkha, as these are effortlessly researched on the WWW. As an aside, the Gurka, as the British presently dubbed them, were eventually recruited from Burma, China, India, Tibet, as well as Nepal.

Current Army of Nepal Issue Khukuri



As one can straightforwardly perceive from its shape, the Khukuri is primarily a slashing and chopping weapon with thrusting being a secondary application. Based upon this concept, one can employ many western short sword and/or Asian (Filipino) stick/sword methodologies. Conversely, from what I have garnered, my impression is that the legitimate users of this weapon, organizationally the Nepalese Gurka people, the Gurka troopers of the Nepal and Indian armies and, of course, the Brigade of Gurkhas of the British army, keep their techniques quite straightforward using merely a few. They do not turn the methods into a pseudo-science, as some would lead us to believe.

Where and how to carry the Khukuri: Primarily the Khukuri is worn on the left side, eight to nine o'clock area, with the edge forward, which appears the most expedient manner. On the other hand, I have observed some cases where it is positioned centralized over the buttocks. This latter method makes absolutely no sense to me and I see no advantage in its adoption. Should one be in

native mufti, the sheathe would be tucked into the patuka or sash just left of center, at roughly a thirty-degree angle, edge down. An additional option, one may consider an expedient cross-shoulder strap setup or, for concealed carry, a shoulder rig. The latter usually corresponding with the somewhat smaller Khukuri variations.

Note: It is advisable in my opinion that, if possible, one should always wear their sheathe knife attached to or suspended from their trouser belt, not on their pistol belt, web gear, or on/in their rucksack or Bergen. Should you have to jettison your gear hurriedly you are now without your last-ditch means of defense or survival.

Presentation or drawing of the Khukri: Just as all guns are loaded, all knives are sharp and accidents do happen. The bigger the tool the more severe the injuries so approach this with extreme caution, go slowly while training, and think safety. If possible, tape the edge for training or, if that interferes with the draw, dull the blade. Incidentally having a training partner and/or a full-length mirror to practice with is highly recommended.

Note: The following instructions assume the practitioner is right-handed, wearing the Khukuri on their belt, left side as stated above. This will be a two handed presentation as it is the surest method. Nonetheless, ultimately you ought to be able to draw the blade using only one hand.

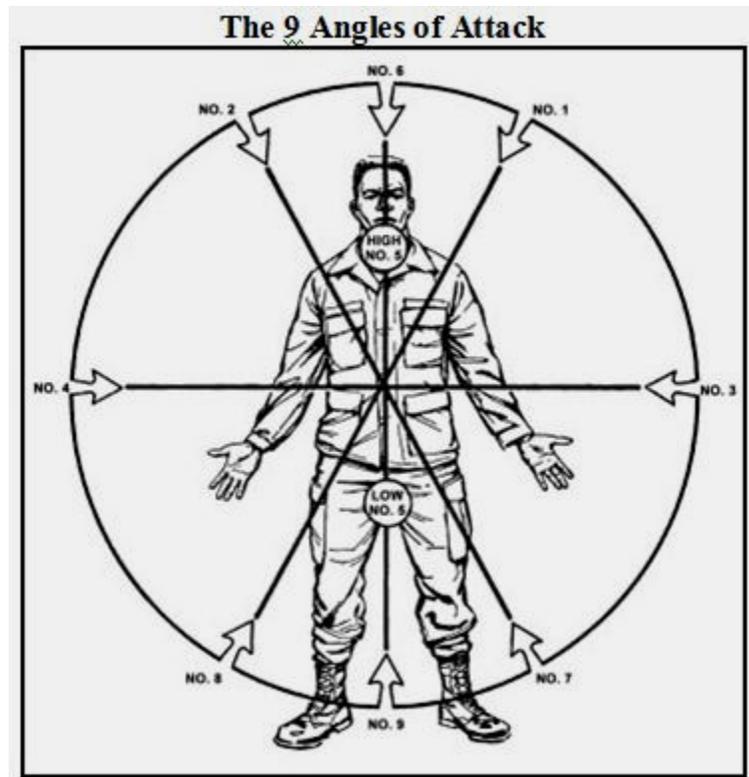
- a) Grasp the handle with your right hand, the grip used is the basic hammer style.
- b) Rotate the scabbard about the frog to an almost horizontal position and turn the edge side slightly away from your body.
- c) With the left hand, grasp the scabbard from the spine side nearer the bottom. ***Do not wrap the hand around the scabbard***, sandwich it between the thumb and palm in the hands web. This is extremely important as a sharp blade, when drawn rapidly, can cut through the scabbard, and take your fingers with it. Moreover, this applies to any sheathed edged weapon.
- d) Smoothly slide the weapon from the scabbard. The spine of the Khukuri must ride the sheathes back effortlessly all the way out. The stroke will be a somewhat arcing motion with minor upward pressure applied throughout. Owing to its curved, banana like shape one cannot merely pull a Khukuri straight out, this is a significant admonition.
- e) Re-sheathe in reverse order.

In effect, that is the unsheathing formula. Please heed the following caveats; accomplish these procedures while looking towards the threat, do not look at the knife/scabbard. Use extreme caution; work slowly and methodically with the correct procedures. Keep your fingers away from the edge at all times. The method can be easily adapted to the buttocks or patuka carry positions using a little common sense. Once perfected, steps a), b), and c) will merge into one simultaneous operation. Refer to the first photograph on the left below. Note too in the other pictures the ambidextrous training, something for consideration. Remember only perfect practice makes perfect.



Combat employment of the Khukri: As stated previously, keep the techniques used quite simple, chiefly several cutting or slashing motions and possibly a thrust. Given that we have just covered the Khukri drawing procedure, it behooves us to exemplify the cut from the draw initially.

Note: To simplify the explanations all cut-n-thrust angle numbers are taken directly from the “9 angles of attack” chart shown below. This I chose to use, as it is undoubtedly familiar to most, coming directly from U. S. Army Field Manual 3-25.150 Combatives. For those of you not familiar with the angle chart they are not to be taken literally. Simply they are a reference of cut or thrust direction nothing more.



Cut from the draw: This cut or slash would be necessary only if a surprise attack upon your person were evident. The cut itself is purely a number 8 upward angular laceration. Considering the distance at which your adversary is, the draw cut can come from either a right or left leg lead stance. The difference being that, at a slightly greater adversarial distance, using the right lead will allow one to step into the slice with the left leg as it comes up and across thus adding a bit more power. At a lesser distance use the left lead and slash immediately.

Thrust from the draw: The thrust, which is either a high or a low number 5, is implemented as follows. From a left lead and as the Khukri clears the sheathe, it is brought to right side point turned straight outward, edge down parallel to the ground or horizontal. The handle will be next to the body, with the knuckles at the waist, arm cocked back. Straight away, propel the blade forward concurrent with a right forward step thus adding weight and force to the stab. Should the attacker be too close for the right step, simply thrust from the left lead, using shoulder, and body torque for additional power. In the guard position, the left arm is ready to block, parry, or for a follow up strike of its own.

The cut and thrust from the draw are the two immediate action techniques. Under other, less pressing circumstances and if your awareness level is high, as it should be, it is incessantly preferred to have the blade out and ready in the on guard posture.

The on guard stance: Once more, in the left lead, once the Khukri clears the scabbard it will be brought up and over to the right side next to the ear. Maintain the edge towards the threat or in other words out, and the point to the vertical during this maneuver. The left arm will be in the guard position. Visualize a boxers stance except in your right hand is the Khukuri and that is the guard stance in quintessence.

Slashes or cuts from the guard stance: When cutting with a Khukri one is to train in a circular or arc-like pattern of swing. Attempting to “push” the blade through will greatly decrease the effectiveness of the weapon. After all, it is a cutting weapon as opposed to the battleaxe, which is in reality, a sharpened impact tool. A cursory glance at a Kukri’s edge geometry will clarify this point.

The actual attack patterns themselves are quite simple. Aside from the draw cut, angle 8 will not be used much and angles 7 and 9 undoubtedly never. As well, there are no backhand cuts for the Khukuri either, being that it is a single-edged weapon. One may however use the blade spine for a strike to disarm or subdue an opponent. Be advised though that the blades spine is capable of breaking the radius or ulna and certainly of splitting the cranium. As a weapon, the Khukuri is not to be taken lightly.

The primary cuts one will study are angles 1, 2, and 6. Once more, please remember that a number 6 cut does not necessarily target the cranium top specifically. A simple, direct downward strike to the shoulder, arm, or say a kicking leg, are also “6” angles. Angles 1 and 2 can target the neck, upper or lower trunk, as do angles 3 and 4, or any other targets of opportunity. As my Arnis instructor would say, “If they leave it hanging out there for you...take it off”. The Gurkhas fight with their national weapon in this simple manner. In your own instruction, do not attempt to complicate the matter, think simplicity.

Thrusts from the on guard stance: Fundamentally, from the on guard or the draw stance, the actual thrust procedure is the same. In the guard stance, the weapon is vertical and therefore the arm needs cocking. Accomplish this by simply rotating the elbow back until the knuckles are next to the waist as described earlier. There is however a variation on this. That is to thrust as in western fencing's lunge and possibly using the inqartata in combination.

Prior to continuing, I should state that the use of the lunge and inqartata is not complicating the methodology. On the contrary, I have seen the Lunge demonstrated as the way to stab with the Kukri. This demonstration was by a former Gurkha as well, so I presume it is suitable to discuss the procedure. "Lunge" and "Inqartata" are nothing more than western fencing designations for techniques that are common throughout the worlds various martial arts styles and, as the saying goes, a rose by any other name is still a rose.

The lunge thrust from the on guard stance: Once the Khukuri is in the cocked position, several occurrences are simultaneously going to ensue. A large aggressive step forward is taken with the right leg, the Kukri, in the right hand, is propelled forward rapidly into the assailant, and guard or left arm is snapped to the rear thus propelling the body forward, and the body posture will be lower and focused on the right leg which is bent at the knee. The completed feat will resemble, to a slightly less exaggerated degree, the fencing lunge shown below. Normally in fencing, I believe the techniques are executed from a weapon arm forward or right lead. Moreover, the same can be said of some other martial arts and western hand-to-hand styles; reference A. J. D. Biddle's "Do or Die" or John Styers' "Cold Steel". The description I provided is, as customary for me, from the guard or left lead. It has been my proclivity not to leave my weapon hanging in the breeze, however far be it from me to argue the point further as either has both its pros and cons.



There are a few key points to consider when implementing the lunge. It is more of a lower body movement than an upper. In fencing terminology, the lunge is defined as simply “an attack made by extending the rear leg and landing on the bent front leg”. Note as well that the torso is kept more in the vertical than the horizontal; one should not lean too far into the movement or balance and control will be sacrificed. The forward step though aggressive should not be excessive nor should it be greatly exaggerated either. It is rather a sliding motion than a stomp, though terrain awareness does come into play, you are not traipsing through a swamp. As the rear leg straightens, do not forget to throw the left arm backward forcefully as this contributes greatly to the power of the thrust. Speed is of the essence, one moment you are simply facing the advancing attacker and in a flash your weapon buried into him. Speed will come in and of itself and is directly proportionate to proper practice, in the beginning if you attempt to go fast, you won't.

For myself, I would not do the thrust that way, primarily, as I feel it is too committed, leaves no guard, and the weapon arm is a bit too exposed. Nonetheless, should the opportunity present itself, one does cover a lot of ground that way and I do not discount it altogether. It is an extremely valid technique, one that should be learned well, nevertheless one of specific opportunity in my estimation.

Inquartata (inquarto or inquarta) is a term from the Italian School of Fencing meaning an offensive displacement of the body from the line of attack such as an attack made with a quarter turn to the inside, concealing the front, but exposing the back. Alternatively, an evasive maneuver executed by pivoting on the front foot and making a demi-volte (a half turn done with one foot; 90 degrees of a full 180 degree turn) with the rear foot to the outside line, displacing the chest, but exposing the back. An Inquartata action is often accompanied by a stop thrust (in fencing).

Classic inquartata



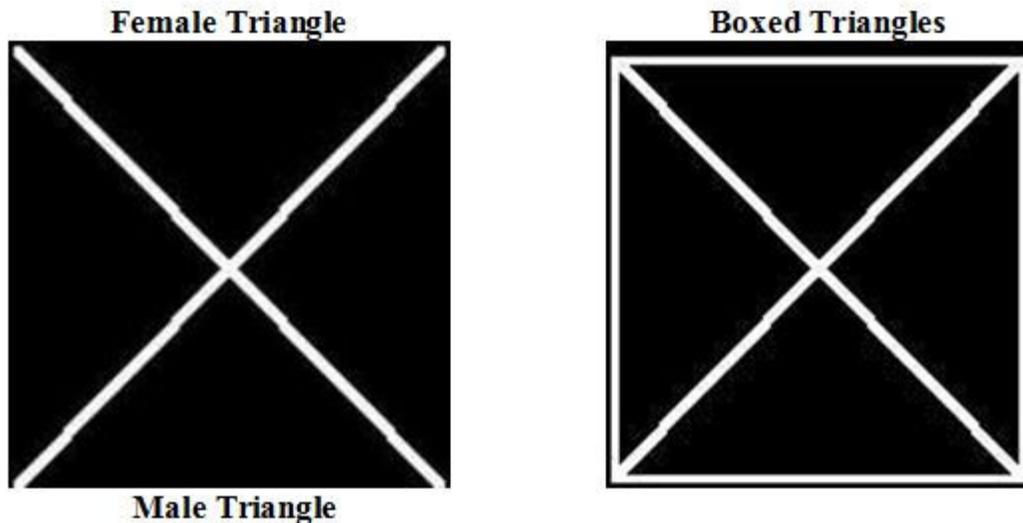
In non-technical language, one simply veers the body out of line, pivoting on the forward foot, with the incoming weapon. Seeing as I earlier cautioned against thinking “knife vs. knife” duels I will explain my reasoning for the inclusion of this movement. Let us assume that you are either a soldier on the battlefield or a patron in a saloon. Your adversary charges you with a longer weapon like a rifle with bayonet affixed or a barstool. He has the reach advantage so what will you do? Cut or thrust while performing inquartata ... a stop-hit if you will. Remember to go for the assailant and not his weapon. He is the problem, and a stout cut with a Khukri will no doubt end the confrontation.

For a practical explanation of the inquartata and for that matter the lunge as well, please refer to John Styers’ exceptional treatise “Cold Steel”.

Footwork, combining techniques, and multiple adversaries: Volumes have been written on these subjects so I will not delve too deeply into them. I will nonetheless touch upon what I consider as key points.

Footwork: As in all areas, keep the footwork simple as well. The footwork style that works for you should be applicable to all your needs. Firearm, stick, edged weapons, and empty hand; the patterns and movements are the same, this includes your “normal” movements and how you carry yourself daily. Remember if you move like a plow horse, you will fight like one, don’t be a clodhopper. This is why many professional athletes, including Football players and Boxers, have studied dance (ballet) as well as the martial arts.

My suggestion is to use the basic western boxer’s or linear pattern and the triangle patterns associated with Indonesian and Filipino martial practices. This material is readily available on-line however I will include a very basic tutorial.



On the floor of your training area, make an “X” with tape; box it in as seen in the photo on the right if you wish. You will be working from both the center and corners of the triangles. Stand at attention on the X intersection point facing the female triangle. Move your right foot back to the

lower right corner; you are now in a left lead stance. Subsequently come to attention once more and immediately transfer the left leg to the lower left corner; you are now in a right lead stance.

Yet again, come to attention at the intersection. You will repeat the movements however, this time you will shift the respective legs forward to the upper corners. Practice these steps varying the sequence periodically. Incidentally if you have not already figured it out this is the footwork of the On Guard stance, the Cut or Thrust from the Draw and the Slash or Stab from the On Guard movements. It is additionally how you move to the inside or outside of the opponent.

The moment you are somewhat comfortable with the triangular or X pattern drills, step to a corner, bring the legs together, and shift along the box. Practice right to left and forwards to rearwards changing direction frequently and using either foot. Do not become locked into one way of moving, flow from one to another. Practice the triangular and shift footwork separately and gradually until the actions are most natural and sinuous. Speed will develop automatically as your footwork skills increase.

Up to this point you have been facing forward and essentially been performing individual movements. Try pivoting to change directions during the drills and mix up the sequence i.e. from a right lead shift to the left pivot, then go to a forward step, pivot again, do a left lead and so on and so forth. These skills you will need especially for multiple determined enemies.

Footwork considerations: Be comfortable, balanced, and graceful keeping the knees bent, weight distributed proportionately, stand on the balls of your feet, and always bring the legs together between movements, think fluid mobility. You can practice footwork throughout your normal day nonchalantly. While we are on the subject, Inquartata and the Lunge are essentially footwork techniques too, consequently if you choose to, incorporate them into your drills. They are combat applicable techniques and should hold at least a small place in your repertoire.

Combining techniques and multiple adversaries: Theoretically, you know how to handle, draw, slash, thrust, and move with the Kukri; using extreme caution (caution cannot be overemphasized while working with a Kukri or other large bladed weapon) put it all together. Mentally plan what you are going to do and visualize an adversary or two armed with various weapons. Go slow; actually try to do a slow motion workout at first. Keep your guard hand where it belongs and watch your leg position especially when doing numbers 1 and 2 cuts at full power. There is much momentum achieved with a heavy weapon like the Khukuri and you will not stop it easily. Of course, that is also one of the great features of this excellent weapon as well. Note too that you may want to work your program left-handed. In my opinion, you need not be completely ambidextrous nonetheless in case of a strong side injury you will not be completely helpless either.

Sparring and scenario based practice: Should you have a training partner or group, sparring is a great way to blend and flow your individual lessons together. Remember two important points: one, **NEVER EVER SPAR WITH A REAL KHUKURI** and two, you are not practicing for a contest or so-called knife fight. I cannot emphasize these considerations enough especially the former. Need I mention to take all possible safety precautions, wear safety goggles and perhaps a helmet.

Personally, I feel the sparring should be looked upon as flow practice and perhaps I should have used the term flow drills instead. You and your partner should start in very slow motion and tell each other what you are about to do. This is in truth more difficult than it sounds. Conversely, this will program your subconscious mind (muscles do not have memory or thought capacity) to respond automatically and correctly to the adversary's telegraphed movements. Gradually speed up the flow drill, dropping the conversation entirely, until you are at full speed and actually sparring. Change partners often if possible though always start the same way, very slowly. Remember, stay focused, as you are not training to best your partner or win points. You are training to use a very old and deadly weapon in defense of your life, the Khukri.

Scenario training is relatively self-explanatory and well remember to keep the situations realistic. You will be armed with your "Kuk" out of doors generally. As a Soldier, you may very well face a bayonet affixer rifle or an E-tool wielding foe. As a civilian, the adversary may well have an ax or stick etcetera. Have padded training weapons made up for this purpose. PVC pipe, pipe insulation, and duct tape make for some creative mock weapons. You can also weight them by filling the pipe with shot or sand. For any partner work, make up a mock Khukri and weight it down – safety first, last, and always.

Incorporate your H2H/Combatives skills into the picture as well. Let us imagine that you are sitting by your campfire relaxing after a day in the woods and are foolish enough to allow yourself to be jumped from behind. Obviously, you need to get the assailant off you prior to putting the Kukri into play, correct. The possibilities are endless for scenarios, if you do it in "real life" you could possibly be attacked while so engaged and yes that includes latrine call as well.

Conclusion: What I have written is nothing new or earth shattering as it has undoubtedly been developed previously and by someone else. I have attempted however to keep the instructions as uncomplicated and pragmatic as possible. As I touched upon earlier, the Gurkha, do not have a formalized system per se. Nonetheless it must be remembered that these chaps have been using the Kukri for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years as a culture and individually all their lives. They do not need to be instructed in the use of, what is essentially, their third arm. From what I have perceived, the program outlined in this treatise approximates their approach. Before I forget, this program will work exceedingly well, with little adaptation, with any large bladed weapon, bolo, machete, barong, golok, Smatchet, et al. It is also good for stick and cane and, to some extent, knife, and empty handed.

Acknowledgments: Specifically I would like to recognize and thank my old instructor and lifelong friend MDK a.k.a. RoninB4. Being exceedingly skilled and ranked in several Asian and Indonesian martial arts; his knowledge and instruction, both historically and practically, were invaluable to me throughout my adult life. As for the rest, it is a compilation of my years of personal research, painful experience, and a bit of experimentation.