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Lahure as a Transnational Subject in Daulat Bikram Bista's *Chapaiyeka Anuhar*

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Abstract
This paper investigates *Lahure* as a transnational subject in Daulat Bikram Bista's *Chapaieka Anuhar* (*Chewed Faces*) that portrays a Gorkha soldier's mobility across national boundaries. The novel is about a Nepali youth's narrative of his experiences during the Second World War, portraying the psychology of a *lahure* through his mental conflict between the 'local' and 'global'. In particular, the novel revolves around the protagonist Ananta's perceptions unfolding the Nepalis' interactions with geographical, political, cultural, social, and economic realities abroad. The protagonist's unprecedented encounter with strangers unravels his perception, assessment, and analogy between Nepal and Germany in particular and Asia and Europe in general. This paper, therefore, concludes that *lahure* is a transnational subject who sticks to his local identities on the one hand and blurs the traditional notions of identity and belonging on the other.
Keywords: *Lahure,* transnational subject, transnational mobility, transnational identity

Introduction
Lahure, a term applied to an individual who goes to Lahore in particular and to the one who goes abroad for earning in general, has been a much discussed subject among the Nepalis for centuries. In Nepali society, relatively poor in terms of economy because of limited options for earning, a *Lahure* moves beyond the national borders and works as a military man in the ideal sense or gets engaged in some other works otherwise so as to make living and support the family back home. Primarily being a beacon of hope[1] for economically-deprived family, *Lahure*, as a transnational subject, bridges the 'national' and 'global' or 'home' and 'abroad'. Unlike diasporas who aim to integrate

[1] In most cases, *lahure*s' families are prosperous compared to others' as they make a handsome earning and do not only support the family but also earn possession such as land, building, ornaments and gadgets.

themselves into the countries of settlement, a *Lahure* mostly returns home on a regular basis. A transnational "does not leave his country with the aim of settling in another country, but tends to stay mobile in order to maintain or improve his quality of life" (Dehindan 56). In this sense, *Lahure* is a transnational subject who adopts mobility as a means of exploring income opportunities. Though, in recent years, *Lahure*s have opted to immigrate and settle permanently in the country they served for, they conventionally persist with the desire to return to the homeland. Dehindan also argues that "transnational formations result from a combination of *transnational mobility*, on the one hand, and *locality in the sending or/and receiving country*, on the other" (51). Therefore, Bista's *Chapaiyeka Anuhar* is a telling example of such combination in which Ananta, a *Lahure*, at least in his narration, moves to many other countries such as India, Britain, and Germany while frequently reminiscing the local territories in Nepal.

Lahure Culture and the Transnational Subject: A Theoretical Perspective

The term '*Lahure*' has its genesis in transnational identity. ~~as~~ Etymologically, the term is attached with Lahore, a transnational location such as the capital of the Sikh Empire in the nineteenth century[2]. In fact, Nepalis who visited Lahore in the early nineteenth century were then called *Lahure* in their home country. *Lahure*'s 'venerated' identity in Nepali society, however, emerges from being a Gorkha (usually misspelt as Gurkha) soldier, a part of the British Army. First sent by the Rana rulers to fight the two World Wars, the Gorkha soldiers earned name and fame for their military prowess: "Better to die than be a coward" being their motto. They are "Bravest of the brave, most generous of the generous, never had a country more faithful friends than you" wrote Sir Ralph Turner Mc who served with them at Gallipoli in an epitaph. Identified as 'martial race' by Brian Houghton Hodgson in "Origin and Classification of the Military Tribes of Nepal," the Gorkhas have scripted their history both as tough and 'honest' fighters. Interpreted as an Orientalist approach on the Gorkhas in recent scholarship, early researchers'[3] "main purpose was to classify the 'military tribes' of Nepal and to recommend them as the perfect soldiers for recruitment in the Company's Army" (Gaenszle 211). After such anthropological researches, the term '*Lahure*' has also been an ideological formation, not merely a simple identity of a Nepali migrant worker. "The cultural narratives of ethnic, gender, and national identities often cross borders," Anirudra Thapa argues, so "a transnational perspective to comprehend ideological formations" can be a handy approach to analyze the texts that have rich stories of migrant workers (5). Thus, a transnational approach in reading Bista's *Chapaiyeka Anuhar* can help aptly analyze *Lahure*'s identity and then his interaction, though imaginary, with foreign subjects, culture and history.

After Prithvi Narayan Shah, the then King of Gorkha and his successors began to "raid into the territories of Britain's Honourable East India Company," Mike Chappell writes, "Johan Company declared war against the Gorkhas in 1814" (3). For instance, "the territorial disputes between the East India Company and Gorkha," Bernardo A. Michael argues, "reveal a number of important historical themes and historiographic

[2] Lahore was one of the largest cities in Mughal era and served as the capital city. It was annexed to the British Raj in 1849 and served as the capital of British Punjab. It is now the second largest city of Pakistan.

[3]Brian Houghton Hodgson, for example, was a British resident in Nepal in the early-mid nineteenth century.

concerns that are not bound by the confines of nationalist history writing" (19). After proving their dauntless character during the Anglo-Nepal war, the Nepalis supposedly surprised and harassed, if not defeated, the British East India Company, forcing the latter to sign a peace deal in 1815. It is described in the peace deal: "Lieut.-Col. Bradshatv, acting as political agent in the Terrai, had concluded a treaty of peace with the Nepal government, which was confirmed, with public formalities, by the Governor-General in Council, on the 2nd of December" (36). This incident already setting the tone for Nepalis' recruitment to the British Army, the partition of India in 1947 further fueled the concept of transferring four Gorkha regiments (eight battalions) from the Indian Army to the British Army, while *six* Gurkha regiments (twelve battalions) were transferred to the post-independence Indian Army. The Gorkhas serving for more than two centuries as a part of Great Britain's tradition of engaging foreigners to fight in her wars, which explains that "the British Army's and public's respect, admiration and affection for the Gurkha soldier have grown to such a level that few would challenge the right of the Gurkha regiments to be considered an elite–and a popular elite at that" (Chappell 4). Since 1815 through the world wars, they have served in as many places as Hong Kong, Singapore, Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia, Cyprus, the Falklands, Kosovo, and recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this sense, *Lahures,* the Gorkha soldiers are the transnational subject.

Bista's *Chapaieka Anuhar*: Critical Analysis

Lahure as a Transnational Subject

Nepali literature, at least *sawai* (a poetic folk tale in Nepali literature) and fiction, has captured *Lahure*'s involvement in the world wars as one of its central themes. Bista's *Chapaieka Anuhar,* one of such examples, entirely revolves round a British Gorkha soldier who has been thrown in the African forest during his battle against the Germans. Ananta is the protagonist of the novel has no company but his rival, a German lieutenant Kim Rich, who, like his British (Nepali) counterpart, has been deserted by his troops. Ananta, also the first person narrator of this novel, introduces himself with the German soldier, his feelings and emotions, and his likes and dislikes. Ananta's imaginary interaction with Europe, particularly Germany, traverses the transnational experiences, while, in the meantime, reminiscing the local ones. In a transnational text, Peter Morgan believes, "two or more geo-cultural imaginaries intersect, connect, engage with, disrupt or conflict with each other" (12). This is evident in Bista's novel as the narrator talks about beer, sandwich, beetroot, and meat soup that Kim Rich is fond of; he describes about Kim Rich's infatuation with a German girl[4] Vergeet and his memory of Ira, Sophia, Sarah, Monica, and Maria. The narrator reads his former self as a Nepali village boy through Kim Rich and reveals his sharply contrasted bearings. Unlike the German, who has been suffering from despondency, Ananta had been high-spirited even in tough situations such as carrying heavy sacks on his back, being beaten by his father or quarrelling with friends on the way to school and while shepherding. He, unlike Kim Rich, was a tough guy who was not like "a species of undergrowth that collapses in a touch" (Bista 3).

As a war narrative, Bista's novel elaborates on Ananta's experience during the Second World War. He describes his gallantry in a grotesque manner. He boasts, "Had I been a wax gourd that dies instantly after being pointed by the little finger, I would have been translated into corpse like many of my friends" (3). He further states, "My intellectual consciousness had not deceived me even after my enemy's bullet had gone

[4] She is a German by nationality, but she works as a doctor for the British.

past my ears and neither had my underwear been soaked with stool and urine" (3). He describes the war scene in the following lines:

> My mind could still think of destroying the enemies while crawling on the floor, escaping the bullets and bayonet attacks. And it was the healthy brainpower in me that I once gained victory over a German troop in support of only twenty young soldiers. It was that very post for the demotion of which the platoon OC had sacrificed thousands of non-Nepali soldiers. (3)

He implicitly brags Nepalis' superiority over non-Nepalis in terms of intelligently handling the war situation and defeating the opponents. He indicates that the German troops very formidable otherwise were easily defeated by the British Gorkha soldiers.

Ananta, a Nepali serving the British Army, has "intense connections to national or local territories" (Faist 14). His situation in the African forest reminds him of his childhood. While breaking a branch over his neck he recalls the moments he used to play a typical game-breaking stick with the neck. His Tommy gun (a submachine gun) on his shoulder and a *khukuri* (a Nepali knife) at his waist is not only the regimental identity of a British Gorkha but the crisscross of the global and local identity. Being a British Gorkha soldier, a matter of pride in his home country, has ironically been burdensome for him. His sense of pride emanating from being a valiant warrior is dented by his historical situatedness. He murmurs, "Had I not seen the young sons of the mothers of my nation, my industriousness and hands being dead and decaying in farms and roads of foreign countries, I would have probably boasted. But these eyes have seen the actual identity of the Nepalis. Our pride may have died right on the day we set foot on the earth" (Bista 6). He may have proven his valor but only at the cost of losing his 'national' self and already becoming a transnational, a Nepali by nationality, fighting for Britain against Germany.

Bista projects Kim Rich as a patriot who takes pride on being a German. He claims that he does not possess a dual self as a British. For the Germans, the British are not what they are. He avers, "Germans are combatant and laborious indeed, and more the latter," adding, "Had they not been laborious, the Germans would have not held their head high" (8). Bista projects the Germans as narcissists: "Aren't there eyes to see others in Germany?" (9). Bista ponders,

> . . . Why does he not look towards me? Like him, I'm also a human and live with my memories. Unlike in his cities and villages there are no clubs in mine. No theatres. There are no guitar tunes arousing desire in blue light, naked thighs of intoxicated girls, intoxicating hugs and kisses like that of serpents. Nor is no frolic of knife and fork. I may have my own stanzas in me. Stanzas of grazing calves in the pastures, stanzas of singing *jhyaure* (folk) songs, beating *madal* [a Nepali musical instrument], stanzas of forest bird spreading my 'Bayberry ripened' tones across the leaves in spring. Don't my stanzas bear any significance compared to Kim rich's? Is Kim Rich's existence only existence, and mine not? Is Kim Rich's life only life, and mine not? Phew! Why does Kim Rich not understand the fact that I love eating *gundruk* [fermented leafy green vegetable in Nepali] and cornmeal porridge while he loves eating sandwich and beetroot soup? The fact that water of my country is tastier than his? But he is not willing to look into me. . . . I know he will see his own reflection in my stories too. . . (9)

The novelist preserves Ananta's particular interest and shows no clear inclination towards universalism. A transnational subject emphasizes "co-presence of universalizing and particularizing processes" (Faist 16). So does Ananta in the novel. He believes that if

beetroot soup is a German's favorite, *gundruk*[5] is not less so for a Nepali in any sense. Food, drink, art, and music are universal, but they exist in their own particular forms.

Mostly an intersection between a Nepali and a German, Bista's *Chapaieka Anuhar* also engages with the British. Kim Rich's vengeance on the British has noticeable weight in the novel. He is confident that the British are responsible for the Second World War. He believes that the Warsaw Pact pushed Germany to the brink and never let it rise. It was just like resurrecting from the ashes that Germany regained its power. He further states that Ananta has been blinded by the British and groomed as a British soldier who has much contempt for the Germans. His mind has been corrupted by the British who "see the Germans as war and mammoth" and thus he "looks sweet but is indeed bitter in reality like the British" (Bista 14). He argues, "Despite your master's effort to identify the Germans as war, the true historians will never accept it" (14). Here, he expresses his contempt for the British, the French, and the Russians. A transnational fiction, according to Morgan, captures "a level of cognitive dissonance as the recipient interprets and processes the differences and similarities of 'nation' and 'other', or of 'us' and 'them'" (12). Ananta in the novel compares and contrasts Nepalis with others such as the British and the Germans.

Ananta, not that well-versed in world history, gets perplexed by Kim Rich's explanation. "Who is responsible for this war?" he muses, "I only know thousands of miles away from my nation, war like that of Kaurava-Pandav is waking up among the whites" and as a consequence "the mothers of my nation are bereaved and wives widowed" (Bista 15). He contends that despite Nepalis having nothing to do with the war, they will have to stand this heart-rending experience for ages. "Nepali blood in African land, Nepali blood in European land, Nepali blood in Asian land," he fumes, "the entire earth has been soaked with the Nepali blood" (15). He thinks that there is hardly any complaint against it because "Nepalis have already been killed at birth; even in womb; so, why should one burst into tears or get hurt for those already killed?" (15). He indicates that Nepalis since their birth are prepared for others and start serving accordingly. Having heard "Have to go to the German's foray" since his childhood, Ananta has learnt from his British officers that the faces like Kim Rich's as a war and a malady since he started his military life (15). He implicitly agrees on Kim Rich's perception that Ananta looks at Germans through British lens. Thus, Ananta's perception of the Germans is itself transnational as what a German for Ananta is what one is for the British.

After being deserted in the African forest, however, Aanta transcends his earlier belief about the Germans and starts treating Kim Rich as a fellow human, not as a foe. He philosophizes, "The light we absorb while giving life to someone can never be compared to the one we absorb while taking millions of lives" (16). Ananta, a war survivor who narrowly escaped the explosion of the plane he was flying in, is baffled by his own situation. He mulls, "I never knew the micro wire of a Nepali's inner story was being connected to a German's" (17). He unravels the history of Kim Rich, a committed German nationalist, who believes his cowardice is the consequence of his father, an anti-Warsaw Treaty, who had fled to the Netherlands instead of resisting the circumstances. Ananta describes about Kim Rich's desire to live for Germany as he still "feels swastika," an emblem of the Nazi Party in the then Germany and a sign of racial hatred in the aftermath of the holocaust (18).

It is his *Lahure* status that makes Ananta a transnational subject. His long journey from the Seti bank of western Nepal to the British Gorkha regiment and then to

[5] a fermented leafy green vegetable

the battlefield during the Second World War brings him to a German's proximity. Constantly being reminded of his nationality though, he time and again transcends his national self and gains a transnational stature. Ananta says that he had introduced to Kim Rich as a Nepali (Ich bin Nepali) and Kim Rich had introduced himself as a German (Ich bin Deutsche) (20). But gradually their national selves crumble and start looking at each other as humans: "I had forgotten that he was a German and he had forgotten that I was a Nepali" (20). Ananta's disbelief in the division of the world into nations is a typical character of a transnational subject. Transnational narratives "enable reflection upon the nature of a world in which national boundaries are no longer assumed as natural" (Frassinelli et al. 7). Quintessentially transnational, Ananta tries to justify that humans have no fundamental differences despite having been divided by language, culture, and geography. He believes that language can never draw a dividing line between humans; so is the case with him and Kim Rich.

Cultural Objects and Transnational Mobility

"Cultural objects," as argued by Frassinelli et al., "not only offer accounts of transnational mobility and connections, but also are themselves mobile and enter into relationship with cultural texts from other parts of globe" (10). In Bista's *Chapaieka Anuhar*, German culture enters into Nepali fiction through a *Lahure*. Besides Ananta's conversation with Kim Rich, a lady's arrival at their forest domicile provides yet another intersection of Nepali and German cultures. In blue coat, blue frock and knee-high leather boots, Vergeet, a war doctor, tantalizes Ananta's imagination, which is described in the novel: "On her beauty, a romantic poem in European style can be imagined" (Bista 31). Unlike Nepali girls who feel shy to show claves while crossing over the river, Vergeet, heavily scented with puff and powder, does not hesitate to walk in undershirt and tight underwear. Yet, despite being brought up in a sharply different society, she, like a Nepali woman, looks after the hut. She says to Ananta, "It's not only in your country," adding that "cooking, feeding and cleaning is all done by mothers and sisters in ours as well" (93). He starts smell a Nepali girl in her whose "smile has been blurring the boundary between blacks and whites, and demolishing the one between Asia and Europe" (102).

Though Ananta identifies Vergeet as a Nepali girl in some respect, he discovers a number of differences in dealing with the issues related with love, marriage, life, and career. When asked about his girlfriend, he responds, "I've not seen any beloved ever in my life, Miss. Neither anyone has written me a love letter, nor have I" (104). He reacts to her frown of disapproval like this:

> Her culture has no belief that I have not any girlfriend. A soldier is after all a soldier like a trapped bull, be it German or British, Nepali or Indian. Lust is firmly stuck to his talk. He possibly tries to energize his heart shaken by the fear of death, using woman's aroma as a shield. Discussing lust, he probably feels like wearing iron armor. I have many faces of the 43rd Gorkha Lorried Infantry Brigade in my mind. I know many faces of other companies. I recall Nepali soldiers' faces and eyes, and those of Tommy soldiers as well as many non-Nepalis'. Each soldier's wallet would have a young girl's photo. I have seen some soldiers who had tattooed nude girls on their arms and chest. I have also seen some soldiers who, instead of firing guns at war, would be sketching women's thighs on the floor. In addition to that, I have also seen some non-Nepali soldiers who would chop off the dead soldiers' genitals and give them female ones. (Bista 104)

Ananta, constrained by military disciplinary codes on the one hand and featuring from a society relatively illiberal towards sex on the other, tries to suppress his instinct while talking to the German lady. He mutters, "Being thrust onto fire by birth, how can we have romance and its taste?" (106). Here, Ananta learns about German history through Kim Rich and Vergeet's narratives. Kim Rich who blames the Warsaw Pact for being the main cause behind the Second World War also believes that Woodrow *Wilson*, the President of America and Georges *Clemenceau*, the Prime Minister of France. While he still sounds a devotee of Hitler, Vergeet holds grudges against him. Hitler is not god for her any longer. He is war and death (74). She has no hope from a tyrant who exterminated his own army. It is reasonable because she has a handful of appalling stories about Nazi's barbarism to share with. Her fiancé, Frantz, a medical student, was shot dead by the Nazis after blaming him for being a communist. Similarly, her next lover, Muller, an army officer, was blamed for being involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler and shot dead. Her father and brother, who had nothing to do with politics, were both executed. Critiquing Nazi atrocities and Germany's involvement in war, she displays a character different from that of Kim Rich. She contends that Hitler does not necessarily represent the Germans because farmers, workers, and even soldiers hate war. "Had Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg's plan to assassinate Hitler been successful," she hypothesizes, "there would have been no war" (113).

As a transnational identity is "not bound by the binary of the local and the global occurs in national, local or global spaces" (*Minor Transnationalism* 6), Bist's protagonist has the same quality. Thus, transcending his status as a brave Gorkha soldier fighting the world war, Ananta critiques war and advocates humanity. He believes war does nothing more than yielding new artillery and deranging human race. Recalling the Pandav-Kaurav and Ram-Ravan wars, he had heard from a local priest, Ananta compares and contrasts the mythical wars and the world war he is fighting. Despite being different in nature, wars, for him, are similar as those who lose life are the rulers and the ruled. He acknowledges that he has understood neither the Ram-Ravan nor the Sparta-Troy wars. Despite being a descendent of warriors, Ananta hardly cherishes his military career. He admits, "Had I understood war, I would have never idolized the military officers of my clan" (Bista 111). He further speculates that he would have loved working in the farm and enjoyed his rural life. He realizes that if intoxicated by war, humans become resentful; they are war, wolves, mammoth, and annihilation; they are no more humans (124). Expressing his desire to give up arms, he invokes the Buddha and Christ, messengers of peace. In the novel, he consoles dispirited Kim Rich: "This child will recognize the Buddha of my nation and Christ of your nation; he will identify all the messengers of peace of the world; and would grow as such a human who would teach all the humans of the world to look at fellow human not through the lens war but that of humanity" (133). He wonders if human progress is possible without war. After Vergeet, an anti-war advocate, and her newly born baby are killed in bombardment by unidentified fighter planes, Ananta along with Kim Rich is shattered. He knows the invaders are neither Russians nor Chinese nor British nor Germans and the invading planes neither belonged to Russia nor China nor Britain nor France nor America nor Japan; they all belonged to mammoth. "May all humans of the world unite and terminate the ever strengthening war," he wishes, "and may its cachinnation get buried by its own arms!" (145). War, for Ananta, is against humanity, so it has to come to an end at any cost. He disapproves of any alignment with any power centre as it never resolves the tension, but aggravates it. War, mostly waged to safeguard national interests, leads to annihilation of all human societies as devastation has no boundaries.

After navigating German culture and history through Kim Rich and Vergeet, Ananta questions cosmopolitanism in the guise of neutrality. He now starts realizing how much fascinated he is towards his own nation and culture. A transnational subject's country (of origin) "still remains an important player that continues to impact" the transnational self (Quayson and Daswani 15). Ananta's memories from Nepal since his childhood entangle him time and again and do not let him get immersed in the new hybrid cultural atmosphere. A new location becomes a "space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center" (*Minor Transnationalism* 5). Importantly, the characters in the novel, defying their professional and ideological inclinations, turn towards each other and form a hybrid zone.

Conclusion

To conclude, Bista's *Chapaieka Anuhar*, sketching *Lahure* as the protagonist, unravels a process of cultural exchanges with people featuring from completely different backgrounds. The setting, the African forest where Ananta encounters the Germans, serves as the location where he exchanges his experiences with the foreigners who represent his rival forces. Ananta, transcending his national identity and British ideology, establishes social and cultural ties with Kim Rich and Vergeet. His experience exemplifies how a transnational subject can foster a relationship with citizens across borders despite the collision of interest of the nation-states, and, in this case, even when nation-states are at war against each other. The main characters, after gaining familiarity with one another, dissipate fear and turn towards each other to cope with a new and unprecedented situation. Thus, *Lahure* is not merely an economic agent who primarily leaves home country with a view to earning money, but a transnational subject who functions as the agent of cultural exchanges between and among the people across borders.

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