

**Causes and Effects of Transnational Migration in Nepali Society in reference to
Shinghak's *Remitland***

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Abstract

Transnational migration for the purpose of work and financial gain had a long history of Nepali society. Nepali youths had the dream of getting recruited in British army during the Second World War and the trend continued with Nepali youths' placement in Indian army in Gurkha regiment. After Maoist movement in Nepal, transnational migration became even more popular for many reasons. The study inquires why Nepali people choose transnational migration and what happens because of transnational migration. For this, the causes and results of transnational migration have been studied in Shyam Shinghak's *Remitland*. The major objectives of the study are to explore the causes and effects of transnational migration. Steven Vertovec and Jenine Dahinden's theory of transnationalism is used in the study. Some other theorists like John McLeod, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, Andrew M. Gardner, Roland Végső and Winfried Fluck's ideas of transnational literature are borrowed for the analysis of the novel. The study finds that financial insecurity, unemployment, frustration among Maoist militia after the ten years' war, family problems, longing for independency, single mothers' problem of rearing children and educating them, social and family pressure, personal desires etc. are some of the causes of transnational migration of Nepali people. They are attracted to transnational migration because of their compulsion to earn money for the family. The study shows that Nepali people choose gulf countries for migration because of the easy availability of man power agents and low investment. Nepali workers leave homeland and go to the gulf countries, host land, for the hard work in construction activities, animal farming in the desert, household work, factories and sanitation. Many man power companies cheat the workers as

they promise to provide them with good position in company and then compel them to work hard in another low-grade job as they reach the nation of immigration. These migrants in the gulf countries must return to their homeland as they can never be permanent resident there. Therefore, they are the major sources of remittance for the country. Transnational migration has many effects in the life of migrants, their family members and mainly the spouse. Psychological, social, and financial effects are visible in the society of migrants in origin country Nepal. The major conclusion of the study is that the major characters of the novel leave the homeland for earning money. However, the separation of migrant with the homeland has several effects on the lives of migrants and their family members.

Keywords: immigration, transnational migration, remittance, homeland, host-land

Introduction

Transnational migration of Nepali people has a long history. For education, Nepali people had the tradition of going to Indian cities mainly Varanasi. They go across the border and stay mainly in the neighboring country India and other Asian countries of gulf region for finding work and earning money. People from the hillside of western Nepal travel to Delhi, Mumbai and other cities of India for seeking job opportunities. They get engaged in low paid job like cleaner, porter, factory workers, farm worker and security guard (*Bahadur*). Getting recruitment in British and Gurkha army has been the major dream of Nepali youths. In the gulf countries, Nepali people get the job as construction workers, shepherd, security guard, cleaner, factory workers and housekeeping. Nepali people are searching opportunities in the foreign land at present.

Educated Nepali youths with academic excellence go to Europe and America and stay permanently. They become permanent resident there as they obtain citizenship. But the youths who go to Gulf countries return homeland after certain time. Therefore, Muksham, the major character of the novel *Remitland*, complains that intellectuals suggest others not to go

abroad by saying that gold can be grown in homeland if they work hard but they migrate with getting DV and PR and forsake nationality (p. 119). He says, “Rather we return, do not give up nationality” (p. 119). Muksham suggests educated Nepali people to inform youths that they have to learn skills before going to Gulf countries. They have to instruct them how they can search the reliable company and good job. Many Nepali youths suffer abroad as they lack good skill and work hard in low wages. Regarding the trend to go to Gulf countries for employment, Gardner (2011) points out that “The present (and ongoing) period in the migration history of the region commenced with the development of the region’s petroleum industry, exponentially expanded in the 1970s, and continues uninterrupted to the present day” (p. 6). Gulf countries develop themselves financially by petroleum products and they begin to develop infrastructure. They need many workers in the construction side. Nepali youths choose Gulf countries because they do not have to acquire high qualification for it.

The study concentrates on the causes and effects of transnational migration. There are many reasons of Nepali youths’ choice for the transnational migration. The major effects of transnational migration are psychological, social and financial.

Research Problem, Methodology and Objectives

The ideas of Steven Vertovec, Jenine Dahinden, John McLeod, Rebecca L. Walkowitz, Andrew M. Gardner, Roland Végső and Winfried Fluck on transnationalism are taken for the analysis of the novel. Vertovec (1999) opines that transnationalism has six characteristics (pp. 447-462). According to him, transnational communities are social formations and they grow new consciousness. They harvest new cultural identity and create new avenue of capital. They establish a new vision of political engagement and they rebuild a place or locality. Transnational communities have to be studied from new angle because they have developed with new features and made the world global. Dahinden demands the need of a transnational perspective that “stands for endorsing a particular, alternative, stance on

migration issues in order to bring to light processes which are still poorly understood in the frame of traditional migration research” (2017, p. 207). Both Vertovec and Dahinden have argued for the detailed study of transnationalism in new context.

For the analysis of transnational communities in the present context and mainly Nepali transnational migrants to Gulf country, the present study is done. The major questions raised in the study are as follows:

- What are the causes of characters’ choice for transnational migration?
- How do characters and their family members’ life change after transnational migration?
- Why do characters behave as they behave after transnational migration?

The major objectives of this study are to point out the causes of characters’ choice for transnational migration, effects of it and reasons of behavioral transformation in them after transnational migration.

Results and Discussion

Shinghak’s *Remitland* discloses the financial problem of Nepali youths in Nepal due to unemployment. Rukmani, one of the major characters in the novel, expresses her grief that she would like to tell her husband not to live in the foreign land anymore. But she cannot say so when she remembers her children’s education and their future (p. 24). She needs money for food and daily expenses which her husband fulfills from foreign employment. However, she has several problems due to separation from her husband. She feels loneliness because no one has time to help her in her needs.

Causes of Transnational Migration in Nepal

Lack of opportunities and the economic crisis is the major cause of the transnational migration of Nepali youths. Remittance attracts the youths for transnational migration.

Vertovec highlighted one of the major causes of transnational migration as remittance. He

(2009) remarked, “Economically, however, by far the most transformative processes and phenomena of migrant transnationalism have concerned remittances – the money migrants send to their families and communities of origin” (p. 103). Many youths got involved in Maoists’ revolution and left schools and colleges. Youths like Muksham had to fulfill the wishes and demands of family members. Muksham gets married with Fungsha and goes to foreign employment because of her ambition (p. 78). Muksham confesses that he is not a man of over-ambition.

Muksham decides to go to foreign land for finding job and earn money better than in the homeland. He gets married with Fungsha and migrates from the hillside to the Terai for finding better opportunities. However, their life in Terai becomes difficult because of financial crisis. He works hard by teaching in an English medium school but realizes that he cannot have better future in minimum salary. He cannot fulfill all the desires and demand of the family. He finds his future insecure although he has been successful to build the house in Terai. In spite of his immense love and affection to his wife, he has to leave her and go to the foreign land for earning money. Schuerkens (2005) pointed out that “One of the simplest economic explanations of migration is that people move with the aim of improving their situation. On an international level, this would mean that large groups of migrants move from poor to rich regions” (p. 536). In fact, Muksham decides to go abroad because of his wife’s overambition also (p. 78). She wants to be rich and have a better future. Most Nepali people like to change their status by going to the rich country and earning money. That is the destiny of many Nepali youths at present. The question comes who could leave the young wife and the family members at home and go to the foreign land if there was immense opportunity in homeland.

In many South-Asian countries like Nepal, it is easy to find the mediators to send the youths to Gulf countries. Gardner (2011) claims that “Employers and manpower agencies in

the Gulf States work directly with labor brokers located in the sending countries. These labor brokers—in Kathmandu, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Bombay, Columbo, and other large cities in South Asia—work with a constellation of satellite offices in smaller cities and towns” (p. 9). Nayaraj and Rukmini go to Gulf country very easily because of easy access to the man power companies. Nayaraj goes to Malasiya whereas Rukmini goes to Qatar. Their staff roam into the villages and search the youths who are eager to go to the foreign land for employment.

Psychological Effects of Transnational Migration

Transnational migrants miss their homeland and remember the hills, farm land, home, rivers and climate mainly getting tired of working in the same climate and high temperature in Gulf countries. New events and activities affect the migrants in new environment. Their family members at home are also affected as they miss their loving family member.

Castaneda and Buck (2011) write, “Migrants are not only affected by political and social realities but also by psychological ones” (p. 88). That psychological effect may remain even after returning home. Therefore, Muksham confesses that he has become dry after living in Saudi for nine years (p. 117). Vertovec (2009) clarifies that “Research demonstrates how even those who have never themselves moved from the home context are powerfully affected by events, values and practices among their transnationally connected relatives and co-villagers abroad” (p. 15). Muksham realizes that his feeling of colorless barrenness is the result of his attachment with Gulf country’s warmth and dryness.

Spouse suffers from loneliness when husband or wife goes to the transnational migration. Rukmini expresses her pain that she would request her husband to return home if she has no tension of children’s future (p. 24). She realizes that it is not easy to live single in the village after the spouse goes abroad. Muksham feels that he has missed the natural beauty of his country for nine years. He compares Nepal and Saudi and find Nepal much richer in

natural beauty (p. 117). The suffering in the transnational migration invites the mental stress to the migrants. Castaneda and Buck (2011) worried that “Remittance-led migration brings about traumatic separations of husbands and wives, children and parents, creating transnational households” (p. 85). Castaneda and Buck (2011) point out that “Frequent physical contact, the expression of love, caring and providing for are key elements to fulfill one’s role as a parent or spouse. Thus, distance becomes an issue in close social relations, especially in asymmetric and dependent ones, such as between parents and children” (p. 85). As Castaneda and Buck expresses their fear, Muksham faces the same issue after he returns from Gulf country. His wife Fungsha flees with another man. He can not meet his wife at home but finds her letter. She has been in relation with another man in his absence. This is the story of many households at present. Husband goes to foreign land for earning and his wife spends his earning unnecessarily. They even flee with other man taking away the husband’s earning of life.

Social Effects of Transnational Migration

Foreign employment has become the matter of prestige and honor in the village. Returning from abroad after getting employed in the foreign land, the youths feel proud and honored. The youths return from the foreign land wearing bright clothes and wear colorful cap. They carry the smart mobile phones and go to the inn for drinking beer. They show the foreign currency to their village friends and convert the value in Nepali currency. They generally have Riyal and Ringgit in pocket to show the friends and talk about. Youths who do not salivate in Riyal and Ringgit is difficult to find in the village. Transnational migration emptied the youths in the villages and only old people and women and children seem to stay there. Men are also not found to go on funeral in the villages. Hill side of Nepal is full of abandoned home and barren land. The agricultural land area has turned into forest.

Markova (2007) remarked, “The social effects of migration amongst others consist of change in family composition, family separations and the abandonment of old people, child outcomes in terms of labour, health and education” (p. 7). People have problem how to go to the hospital and how to arrange the transportation. One after another, the youths go to the foreign land like Qatar, Saudi, Oman, Dubai, Kubet, Korea, Japan and Bahrain to roll down the sweats. Gardner claims that “Compared to those migratory conduits with one end-point in North America or Europe, for example, very little is known about these migrants, their experiences in the Gulf States, the processes that lie behind their decisions to migrate, or the way this migration reshapes family and community life in the places from which they come” (2011, p.3). Youths migrated into Gulf countries suffer in warm weather condition and they even face health problems. Some youths pass away as they do not cope up with the inhospitable weather condition. Around fifteen hundred Nepali workers’ dead bodies come to international airport annually (p. 93).

In spite of that, Nepali youths migrate because they do not have opportunities in the country. Castaneda and Buck (2011) clarify that “Motivated to take desperate measures in an attempt to raise themselves and their families out of poverty, they realize they have an impossible choice – to remain in poverty or to leave their families in order to demonstrate how much they love and care for them” (p. 89). Strong determination to change the financial status, the youths choose transnational migration. Schuerkens (2005) also views that “The economic, political and social transformations that have emerged directly influence migrations. The existing huge imbalance between the developed world and the world that has yet ‘to be developed’ has led to mass migrations” (p. 550). Men found in the villages are either teachers or officials of health post and rural municipality. Those who are unable to go to foreign country are supposed to be weak and backward. Some youths have difficulties how to apply for foreign employment and how to face the interview. They have humiliation and

feeling of backwardness. Muksham finds in his maternal home only women, children and old people as all youth are in Saudi Arabiya and Malaysia (p. 99). He admits that even the daughters and daughters-in-law have begun to choose transnational migration. It is because of easiness to go to Gulf countries. Gardner writes, “Employers and manpower agencies in the Gulf States work directly with labor brokers located in the sending countries. These labor brokers—in Kathmandu, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Bombay, Columbo, and other large cities in South Asia—work with a constellation of satellite offices in smaller cities and towns” (2011, p. 9). These brokers even lure the men and women by making narratives about the income and luxury.

Transnational migration has also affected the traditional occupation of Nepali people, agriculture. Because of the shortage of human resources, agricultural land is remaining barren and people have to depend on foreign income. The number of domestic animals has decreased and gasoline has replaced the wood as fuel (p. 99). Youths do not concentrate on study rather they pass the time roaming in the chowk. People do not like home-made food, they have fast food for breakfast and snacks. Products of multi-national companies have captured the local market of distant villages also. Youths are attracted to fashionable clothes and electronic gadgets (p. 99).

Transnational migration of a man or woman provides freedom to the spouse and that may break the marital relationship also. Extramarital relationship is one of the major problems resulting from transnational migration. The physical need of husband and wife may lead the person to have extra marital relationship in the society. People like Narayan scrutinize whose husband has gone to foreign land for employment. They trap the women slowly and make physical relationship. Narayan admits that he has six women to serve (p. 100). He explains that these women have the pain of separation and he has to please them physically. Narayan knows that the transnational migrants send money time to time before

they return the homeland. That makes women economic independent and diverts their mind. In the past, Nepali people used to go to the foreign land but they had to collect money and bring it back with them as they returned. So, women stayed home and lived in the family. But they have money now in hand and television and mobile to guide what to do. Narayan blames remittance for the freedom of women and their involvement in extramarital relationship (p. 101). However, he calls himself a social worker or a service provider.

Rukmini openly tells Muksham that they are friends and he realizes that time has changed (p. 34). Narayan questions how they can be friends because they do everything closely (p. 36). He believes that they are like spouse. Rukmini confirms that a man and a woman can have friendship and they can support each other in need. However, she feels that Muksham's wife Fungsha is very lucky to get such a good husband (p. 40). She regrets of not meeting Muksham before the marriage. Rukmini drinks wine on Muksham's forty ninth birthday and gets intoxicated. She kisses Muksham and falls asleep in his bed room. It shows how frank Nepali women have become. Muksham has the desire to revive his youth that has almost dried away after living in Saudi Arabiya for nine years. He knows that Rukmini has been that medium to quench his thirst of nine years (p. 49). However, he does not know what may happen if her husband returns home from foreign employment. He believes that it is his love to Rukmini that has tied them. But it is dishonesty because her husband is alive (p. 51). He surrenders himself in front of female power and sacrifices his moral, religious, social and ethical values for the sake of her love.

Women whose husbands have been in transnational migration openly discuss about the physical needs. Muksham overhears the conversation of some women who have clearly acclaimed the importance of their physical needs. They think that they can not suppress the physical desire for long time and they can not believe that their men do not make any physical relationship with others abroad. One woman even explains that sexuality is a natural

thing just like trees being green in rainy season and plants growing in the land. She believes that life follows the time and season (p. 50). Their discussion prove that Nepali women have been becoming advanced and open minded. They have learnt to adapt to the change. One of the women boldly says that they can also go to the foreign land and earn money. They have the strength to earn for the family going to a foreign country. She complains that their husbands do not send them abroad because of their suspicion of physicality to others (p. 52).

Muksham's wife Fungsha has also left him when he was in Saudi Arabiya. Some women make extra marital relationship until their husbands return from the foreign employment. However, some flee away breaking the marital relationship and family life. Rukmini wants to enjoy the extra marital relationship with Muksham until her husband comes from abroad. Rukmini's sister suggests her to have relationship with him until her husband comes back and she also accepts that there is no harm in making relation in husband's absence (p. 82). Rukmini's sister explains that extramarital relationship is not a crime and dishonesty but a result of the necessities of the wives of men going to foreign employment (p. 82). She pleads that all principles, tradition and laws have been originated by the theory of necessities. She exemplifies that abortion was illegal in the past but it is legal now. One day, she hopes, extramarital relationship will also be legal. Anu also tries to persuade Muksham to have enjoyment with her until her husband returns from abroad. She thinks that there is no harm of enjoying physicality in the absence of husband for certain time (p. 202). It proves the transformation in the thought of Nepali women.

However, all women are not as lucky as Rukmini. Some women like Laxmi have to suffer in the traditional Nepali society. Laxmi's husband Bire has been abroad for employment for ten years and she cannot suppress her physical desires. She has had an extramarital relationship with Nima. In the police station Laxmi and Nima and other villagers come together. Bire does not pardon Laxmi for her illicit relationship and Nima does not

accept her making wife because he has already been married. Then Laxmi has to leave her children, home, mother-in-law and husband and go to the mother's home. In this way, sometimes women suffer and do not get justice in the traditional Nepali society. Nima does not have to lose family, village and society but Laxmi has to give up everything (p. 89).

Deaths of transnational migration in foreign land is one of the major causes of pain in the Nepali society. Every day four dead bodies arrive in the international airport of Nepal (p. 93). More than fifteen hundred Nepali Youths lose their life in foreign land. This is alarming data and its effect in the family is even more terrible. In the high temperature, Nepali youths work hard in the Gulf countries and they sleep at night in air conditioner room. Muksham narrates how the two-year-old daughter of Rudraman weeps and his wife faints looking at his mouth in coffin. His five-year-old son and his old mother's wail has been unbearable for the villagers (p. 93). Markova explains that "The social effects of migration amongst others consist of change in family composition, family separations and the abandonment of old people, child outcomes in terms of labour, health and education" (2007, p. 7). This is the reality of Nepali society as youths are away in foreign land.

Economic Effects of Transnational Migration

Transnational migration has brought changes in the family of migrant in the homeland financially. Remittance has changed the family life and living standard of Nepali people. Vertovec (2009) writes, "Remittances are sent by all types of migrant workers: male and female, legal and undocumented, long-term and temporary, manual and highly skilled" (p. 103). People go Gulf country primarily for earning money from Nepal. Gardner clarifies that, "Remittances generated by this migration are used to buoy families' basic consumption, as the seed money for entrepreneurial activities, to fund the education of migrants' siblings or children, and in South Asian society, for the dowries of migrants' sisters or daughters" (2011, p. 14). The migrants' wife is shifted to the cities from the villages and their children are

admitted in the English medium private schools. From hillside villages, they migrate to the city of Terai like Dharan and Biratnagar in the eastern region. Some change the hey roof of their house into tinned roof. Others buy the land for making home in the city area.

Muksham has also had better economic standard after the foreign employment. He has bought one acre land with the suggestion of Fungsha in cheap rate from the earning of Saudi Arabiya. Later its price increases so much after the land area gets developed. Vertovec explains the effects of remittance and points out that “Remittances tend to: displace local jobs and incomes; induce consumption spending (often on foreign imports); inflate local prices of land, housing, and food; create disparity and envy between recipients and non-recipients; and create a culture of economic dependency” (2009, p.104). Generally, the transnational migrants invest their money in land if they have farsightedness. Gradually the price of land rises as the foreign employee begin to invest in the land. Muksham buys land but his wife has been no more with him to enjoy the earning from land.

However, transnational migration has increased the dependency on remittance. Puspa says that farming is not beneficial enough to run the house and the family (p. 190). The culture of going for foreign employment results in the greenery of the country. Trees grow in the uncultivated land of hills and people plant trees in Terai instead of crops. Jivan claims that not only his house but also the country is run by remittance (p. 190). Nayaraj proposes that they should name the country ‘remitland’ (p. 190). The novel is named after this concept. Vertovec (2009) claims, “Money is transferred through banks, agencies of various kinds, directly on-line, through professional couriers or through social networks” (p. 103). Some migrants send money into their friends’ hands.

All household do not have the safe financial situation even after the transnational migration. Some spouses misuse money and ruin the family. Many events are heard in society that a man send money from abroad and his girlfriend or wife spend it on secret lovers.

Muksham's friend tells them that a man has sent his girlfriend three lakhs but she flees with another after he returns Nepal. Anu, a married woman, also proposes Muksham to have enjoyment physically but he refuses. Afterward he has heard that she has spent the earning of her husband's three years with someone else. Nayaraj says that she has fled away with another when her husband is about to come home from foreign employment. It is a terrible problem invited by transnational migration.

Changing Family Roles and Behavioral Transformation

Transnational migration changes the roles of husband or wife in the absence of one of them. If husband goes to the foreign employment, his wife has to do some of his work also. She involves in agricultural work, economic activities and decision-making task. If wife goes abroad for employment, husband has to rear children, feed them and do all household activities. Castañeda and Buck (2011) claim that "Migration shakes up the family social structure. Paternal absence implies changes in gender roles since those left behind make up for the unpaid housework and decision-making that the missing parent(s) would have done otherwise" (p. 102). In the foreign land, people learn to do everything. They develop their self confidence and sharpen their skills. When husband goes for employment in the foreign land, wife does his duties also. Rukmini does all household work and runs a shop. She becomes a business woman. Muksham learns cooking and washing dishes, cleaning house and handling other household activities after returning from abroad.

Conclusion

Shinghak's *Remitland* highlights the causes and effects of transnational migration in Nepali context. The major causes of transnational migration from the country like Nepal are financial problem, peer pressure, unemployment problem, trend of going abroad and the desire to make safe future. Rukmini, Muksham, Prakash and Nayaraj go to the Gulf countries for earning money. They want to change their poor financial situation and become financially

sound. However, there are several effects of transnational migration in the lives of migrants and their family members. Some of the effects are psychological, social, financial and behavioral. Migrants feel loneliness and dry in abroad and their family members including the spouse face uncertainty and distress. Although their financial situation changes and they feel secured, every family may not have that fortune. Spouse can misuse remittance and the hard work goes in vain. The social and behavioral effect is even more visible.

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