

Nepali Youths' Transnational Migration in Akhanda Bhandari's *Malaya Express*

Achut Raj Kattel, Lecturer, Department of English,
Mahendra Morang Adarsha Multiple Campus Biratnagar, Tribhuvan University, Nepal
Email: achyut.kattel@mmamc.tu.edu.np

Abstract

Going abroad has become the dream of Nepali youths and it has spread rapidly in the country. This dream's root is the Gurkha soldiers' recruitment in the past as it has developed the thought of being *lahure* and going across the border for employment. Akhand Bhandari's *Malaya Express* raises the issue of youths' transnational migration for employment. This article inquires causes of Nepali youths' choice for foreign employment, its impact and the actions to be taken to change the trend of it. The theoretical tools of transnationalism developed by Vertovec, Levitt and Jaworsky, and Faist and Fauser are taken for the research purpose. The major objectives of the study are to point out the major reasons of transnational migration of Nepali youths, to identify the impacts and to analyze the ways to keep them in the country. The study finds out some positive and negative impacts of transnational migration. The study finds out that unemployment, peer pressure and the trend of migrating for employment are some causes of Nepali youths' choice for transnational migration. Though transnational migration benefits remittances, it invites many problems in migrants' lives and transnational families. It focuses on some solutions of transnational migration. The major conclusion of the study is that Nepali youths migrate to Gulf countries for employment and develop the web of relationship. They have emotional and social problems in host land, but they are bound to struggle for their future. They do not live there forever; they return to the homeland after visa time. Opportunities for employment and security of future will help Nepali youths to decide to stay in Nepal.

Keywords: home land, host land, remittance, transnationalism, transnational families, web of relationship

Articles information : Manuscript Receive : 22/01/2022, Review Date : 25/06/2022, Date of Acceptance : 15/11/2022, Publisher : Mahendra Morang Adarsh Multiple Campus, TUTA Unit, Biratnagar.

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.3126/tutaj.v10i1.74325>

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Introduction

Akhanda Bhandari's *Malaya Express* has a story of Nepali youths' search for employment in the Gulf countries. The history of Nepali youths' finding work in the foreign land and going across the border is very old. Wohl (2013) records "The two-hundred-year history of the British Gurkhas officially began in 1815 with the Anglo Nepalese War" (p. 8). Youths from hillside were attracted to be British soldier and tried to join British Gurkha. When Gulf countries began to search cheap workers from Asian countries after 1980s, many Nepali youths got easy access in Gulf countries.

Thiollet (2016) explains that “Explaining the shift from Arab to Asian labor migration in the 1980s requires both a reference to economics and the political context: the economic incentives favoring a shift to recruiting cheaper and supposedly more skilled (although this is contested) and generally more ‘expendable’ labor from Asia complemented the political change in the logics of regional integration and the emancipation of the Gulf States from regional Arab politics” (p. 12). The flow into the Gulf countries for employment even more increased in the twenty first century. For study, youths chose America, Australia, Europe and some countries of Asia where as for employment, Gulf countries has become the choice of lower middle class and lower-class youths from Nepal. In this way, transnational migration has become common among Nepali youths.

Malaya Express tells the story of Jit Bahadur. He decides to go to the Arab world for finding job. In the past, only Arab workers could migrate in the Arab world. Thiollet (2016) records that “Through the 1950s and up to the late 1980s, the Arab world was ‘practiced’ as a migration field, a space of transnational circulation, by Arab workers and their families from all social categories and all skill levels” (p. 11). But workers from Asia could also go to Arab countries after 1980s with a new law. Then many workers like Jit Bahadur headed towards Arab world seeking job. Developing country like Nepal depends much in remittance and supports the youths for transnational migration. Thiollet (2016) points out that “Migrants’ money transfer (remittances) to labor-sending countries has long been considered a crucial source of income to be harnessed” (p. 16). However, they study the situation of the host land and change the policy for the safety of their citizens. Thiollet (2016) presents the fact that “In the 1980s, Bangladesh banned female migration. The Nepalese government banned female workers under thirty years of age from migrating to the Gulf due to the risk of abuse. In the 2010s, the Indian government has repeatedly discussed banning the migration to the Gulf of female domestic workers under the age of forty” (p. 17). The changed policy is for the welfare of women and their families as they may be the victim of physical and mental torture.

This study presents the causes, impacts and solutions of transnational migration of Nepali youths in reference to Akhand Bhandari’s *Malaya Express*. The main causes of transnational migration are unemployment problem, family pressure and the peer pressure. Transnational migration has economic, social and psychological impact in the transnational families. Some factors like employment opportunities can stop Nepali youths from transnational migration. In *Malaya Express*, characters make a dream, go to the host land, suffer there and return homeland with dissatisfaction and frustration.

Problem, Objectives and Methodology

Malaya Express tells the story of Nepali youths who have suffered from Maoist movement, unemployment problems and irresponsible leaders. This study raises the following questions and answers them:

What is the impact of transnational migration on transnational families?

Why do Nepali youths go to Gulf countries?

How can they be stopped in the country?

The major objectives of the study are to observe the impact of Nepali youths' transnational migrations in their families, to locate the causes of transnational migration and to trace the ways of stopping them in the country.

Nepali youths choose transnational migration because of unemployment problem in the country. Jit Bahadur involves in Maoist movement and expects that the situation of the country changes. But he gets frustrated when his own leader does not recognize him after becoming the minister. Then he is bound to go to the foreign land for earning money. Many youths like Jit Bahadur earn money in the foreign land and send it at home. That is the source of income for the country. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) claim that "For one thing, many non-industrialized countries have become economically dependent on the remittances migrants send and have put into play a range of policies and incentives to ensure they continue" (p. 133). Nepal has become dependent in remittance for earning foreign currency.

However, youths like Jit Bahadur can not stay in Gulf countries forever. Osella and Osella (2000) claim "Unlike other types, Gulf migration offers to some the chance of rapid and vast accumulation of wealth by village standards". They further explain that "Gulf migrants cannot settle away but must, sooner or later, return home, where their newfound wealth and access to consumption may dramatically alter their status and their relationships with others, and offer them the chance to forge new identities" (p. 119). Youths like Jit Bahadur are sure to stay in the country if they are provided the employment facilities and source of income. But they find it hard to sustain there.

Transnational migration develops the ties between two countries and societies. Basch et al. (1994) initially defined transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p. 6). Transnational migration bridges two different cultural groups and different communities of different geographical locations. Faist and Fauser (2011) define a transnational perspective as "one which captures both the cross-border ties and engagements these actors sustain and the role played by institutions on the local, national and global level, including international organizations such as the World Bank, national states and organizations in development cooperation" (p. 1). Vertovec (2009) defines transnationalism as "a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity" (p. 3). It has both positive and negative impact in the transnational families. This study analyzes the impact of transnationalism in transnational families. Jit Bahadur suffers in abroad whereas his wife Priya develops extramarital relationship with Danish.

Results and Discussion

Nepali youths' sorrowful narratives fill the novel of Bhandari. In this study, the causes, impacts and solutions of transnational migration are discussed and incidents from the novel *Malaya Express* are presented.

Causes of transnational migration in Nepal

Many youths decide to have transnational migration due to peer pressure. They see their colleagues who have been grabbing opportunities by foreign employment. Jit Bahadur acknowledges that many friends have gone to gulf countries and become strong financially. He remembers Sarbe, Hikmate, Belbote Rudre and other friends who earned in Gulf countries and built house in cities of Nepal. Youths see their friends going abroad and earning money and sending gadgets at home. This attracts them to seek opportunities in the foreign land.

Maoist revolution in Nepal had very devastating effect in Nepali society. During the period, Nepali society was in chaos and tumult. Murder, rape, physical assault and violence terrified people. That caused transnational migration of Nepali youths. Jit Bahadur could not tolerate the pain of his sister's rape and murder during the Maoist revolution. After the daughter's murder, Jit Bahadur's father faced trauma and died of the pain. After the revolution, the leaders got position and power but militia like Jit Bahadur had to leave the village. His beautiful world was eroded after father and sister's death. Therefore, he left the country and headed to Malaysia. However, he regrets why he has wasted his precious time in Maoist revolution. He questions what he has got by adding awards, fighting in war and taking lives of so many people. He realizes that he has achieved nothing rather he has lost everything. He has not been saleable and stable in the country. As a result, he thinks he has to leave the nation and roll down sweats in foreign land (P.127). Maoists obtain position in the government after the revolution but do not support the cadres who have fought in the war. A minister, Maoist insurgent in the past, suggests Jit Bahadur to apply in public service commission and get a job. Jit Bahadur has learnt great lesson and decided to choose foreign employment (p. 151).

Though Jit Bahadur of *Malaya Express* had the wish to live in the country and home, he could not manage because of the lack of opportunities. Jit Bahadur did not have much option as he lacked qualification. Getting job opportunity was impossible in the village or town. Once he has got the chance of working in an English medium school but the remuneration has been insufficient to stay in town. Maoist had convinced him that it was useless to take bourgeois education for taking him to the movement. Maoists brainwashed him before he joined them. Living in the village was difficult as things were expensive because of inflation. In frustration, Jit Bahadur decided to fly to Malaysia.

After marriage, Jit Bahadur of *Malaya Express* was not able to provide the mobile phone to his wife. He had an agony that how he could fulfill the demands of children after some years. Jit Bahadur thought that his friend Sarbe went to Qatar and made house, Hikmate bought half acre of land in Belbari with the earning of Saudi Arabiya, Majhagothe Mailo made house in Dharan after working in Malaysia and Belbote Rudre's children were studying in Kathmandu as he sent money from abroad (p. 47). First time Jit Bahadur disagreed with his mother who tried him to convince that he could earn money working in Nepal. She said Nepal would be like heaven if he worked for twenty years (p. 47). His mother gave many examples of some people who had either died or had terrible life in abroad. She mentioned Fyaurebaari Upendre who had passed away in Malaysia, and Tallaaghare Shyame whose dead body was in Saudi Arabia. Jit Bahadur's decision to go Gulf country was for earning money and running the family smoothly.

Easily available manpower companies and their agents at village is another cause of youths' going for work in Gulf countries. Jit Bahadur's friend Nirajan has informed him how agents of manpower company can do everything for interested youth. He makes some candidates like Ram, Narendra, Jagat and Jiwan ready for foreign employment and the owner of manpower company visited his home town for their interview. Jit Bahadur faces interview and finds it very easy. The youths do not have to pay heavy amount in the beginning. Agents convince the youths saying that they do not have to work hard in abroad. They lure them by showing dreams and attracting them for transnational migration. Jit Bahadur has been informed that he has to just pack the computer parts by sitting in a room and he is paid eight hundred ringette per month for it. They said he would even get that much additional amount for working overtime. But when he reached Malaysia, the company man informs him that he gets only six hundred ringette per month and there is no guarantee of over time. The work has also been different. Jit Bahadur has to carry the load in the building construction site. Manpower company in Nepal has cheated Jit Bahadur and his friends. They know it after they reach in the foreign land and the company take their passport. They have been trapped and pushed into the darkness. They have to stay in a room no better than goat shed in homeland. All of them including Jit Bahadur regret arriving Malaysia (p. 69).

To secure the future by earning money in abroad is also a cause to choose transnational migration. Jit Bahadur tells his wife Priya that living in the country there is no difficulty to manage for food only but earning is not at all (p. 38). He convinces his wife saying that they will have their children and they have to provide food and education for them. They have difficulty in earning from agriculture because the land is not fertile and barren. Working hard in the agricultural field is useless because it does not grow well in the field (p. 38).

Impact of transnational migration

Transnational migration has mainly social, psychological and economic impact in transnational families. Many changes are observed in the life of migrants and their family members. Jit Bahadur returns from Malaysia and promises not to leave the homeland anymore. He says that he has experienced the pain of living far from home (p. 289). Migrants' society also changes because of economic activities and new knowledge.

Social impact

Nepali youths' decision to pursue foreign employment breaks the heart of family members. They fall into tears and live in very pathetic condition. In Malaya express, Jit Bahadur's decision of going on foreign employment hurt his old mother and wife so much that they could not hide their tears. Mother tries to persuade him that 'Work here so hard as in foreign land, planting garlic yields gold here' (p. 46). However, Jit Bahadur knows the value of foreign currency. He replies that 'one turns into twenty. One lakh earned in the foreign land turns into twenty lakhs' (p. 46). From the day Jit Bahadur decides to go foreign land no tear stops in the eyes of his wife Priya. Her eyes swell and becomes red. Her bond of love cannot be the barrier in the path of Jit Bahadur's firm decision.

Foreign employment has become the matter of prestige and honor in the village. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) argue that “Transnational migration scholarship has also identified striking changes in social life, documenting transformations in kinship and family structure and how these inform constructions of class, gender, and race” (p. 137). 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 (P. 50). Osella and Osella (2000) admit that “The process of transformation of the migrant into a patron runs concomitant with and shares similar predicaments with the growth-cycle into manhood” (p. 129). The youths carry the smart mobile phones and go to the inn for drinking beer. They show the foreign notes 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 was difficult to find in the village (p. 50). It is true what Osella and Osella (2000) explain, “In the mainstream among men of all communities with an eye for local status and power games, the accumulation of wealth and its display and mobilization in (often expensive) prestige enhancing spending activities go hand in hand” (p. 121). Harke has prestige in the village because he has got a mobile phone. His daughter has been in abroad and she has gifted her father a mobile phone. Pipalbote Appa has mobile phone that his son has sent from Saudi. Almost everyone’s son or daughter has been in Qatar, Saudi or Malaysia and they have sent mobile phones to their parents (p. 17).

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 (p. 50). Gardner points out that “In some regions of South Asia, large portions of the young male population are absent. This was particularly apparent in one of my village visits in the Terai of southern Nepal” (2011, p. 15). 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. The 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.

Transnational migration kindles the love for the nation also. Jit Bahadur does not find any difference between working as Maoist Guerilla during the movement and struggling in Gulf country for earning. Jit Bahadur and his friends had to live in small room the whole day because of the fear of police. They could not have proper food and rest. So has been Jit Bahadur’s condition in Gulf country. He remembers the words of Atom, a Maoist instructor, that the certificates of bourgeois education have no value and they will be burnt down. He inspires all of the cadres to involve in Maoist movement and make it successful that makes their life better. Jit Bahadur and many other youths get attracted to it and forsake education to be Maoist and obtain permanent certificate from people (p. 91). Maoists cheated youths like Jit Bahadur in own village. In Malaysia, some other Nepali cheat them and make their life even more difficult. By the struggle in foreign land, these youths miss their own village and family. Their love to the nation increases even more than they have been in the homeland.

Psychological effects of transnational migration

Transnational migration invites psychological and sexual problems in the members of transnational families. They even seek extramarital relationships and involve in physical relationships. Jit Bahadur's wife Priya enjoys physical nearness with her roommate Kamala in the beginning as she goes to Biratnagar for studying bachelor level. She cannot suppress the physical need and enjoys being naked and embracing her friend Kamala. Later on, she has not only the sexual relationship with Denish, a computer teacher, but also decides to flee with him. Jit Bahadur suffers in the construction site at first and then a pig shed looking after the pigs. But his life changes when he reaches Camroon Highland for working in the farm land. The owner of the farm land has been a Chinese and provided the sound wage. More than that, he has physical relationship with Peni, an Indonesian girl who has been working in the same farmland. Both Priya and Jit Bahadur have had extramarital relationship. However, Jit Bahadur's prompt action saves Priya from being sold by Denish in India. Jit Bahadur forgives Priya and decides not to go to the foreign land thereafter but to serve the nation and mother.

Working in foreign land is not an easy task. Jit Bahadur arrives in Kuala Lumpur to build a 'new Malaysia'. The narrator asks, "How many such Jit Bahadurs are making 'new Qatar', 'new Saudi or new Dubai'" (p. 59). They build skyscrapers in the sea and grow vegetables in the sand of the desert. Some grazing sheep in the hot sun. But their fate does not change much. Transnational migrants reach at foreign land but they miss their homeland. Thiollet (2016) reports that "In the Gulf, migrants have been strongly alienated by institutions and practices designed and generated by states and transnational companies, notably oil firms creating an illiberal transnational management of migrations and migrants' lives" (p. 20). They recall the past and regret for doing or not doing different activities. When Jit Bahadur reaches abroad, his "heart returned to his own country. What did he do in his life? What did you experience? After reading, he entered the forest to fight the war. He carried a gun with the aim of making 'New Nepal'" (p. 59). Jit Bahadur and his friends have to leave the country after fighting against the system and trying to change the situation in vain.

The transnational migrant suffers from mental stress in abroad because of work pressure and memory of family. Jit Bahadur has a girlfriend called Peni in Malaysia and has sexual relation. But he realizes that loving a foreigner in the foreign land is just a sunshine and shadow of life (p. 251). He feels that he has to share his life with his wife Priya. His girlfriend Peni is just for quenching the thirst of sex. He regrets that why he has scolded Priya by saying to search someone to fulfill sexual need. He calls his wife instantly but it has been switched off. He feels pain in heart like a flame. Then he can not bear and decide to return home. He finds his wife in relation to Denish. He saves her and lives at home after deciding not to go abroad anymore.

Jit Bahadur sees bad dream at night that he has got only three hundred ringette of a month. He fights with the company man and tries to beat him in the dream. But he beats his own friend who has been helping him to wake up. In fact, he has been in psychological stress and cannot feel peace at night also. He begins to sleep on the lowest bed from the next night. Jit Bahadur and his friends including Narendra weep the whole night once as they are beaten at company. They ask for their regular salary and work whereas the company owner wants to halt their work for some days. This is

the destiny of Nepali migrants in Gulf countries. Many Nepali youths even pass away while they are asleep. Many youths return in the wooden coffins from Gulf countries every month. The dream of earning money and providing very luxurious life to the family members just vanish away.

Not only the migrants suffer in the foreign land mentally, but also the members of the family suffer in the homeland. Priya, wife of Jit Bahadur, and his mother pass the days in tears at home. Priya becomes weak and loses weight because of husband's absence and memory. She has to work harder than before as she has to look after the farm and animals, household works and her mother-in-law. She misses her husband so much that she used to see Jit Bahadur in the goats, trees, stones, mud, land and the cow shed as she threw away the cow dung (p. 72). Her pain increases and reaches in peak as her friend Bipana informs her that foreign women follow the males in Malaysia, even mislead them and even keep them there forever. Priya's feels as if she is a pig being hurt with arrow. The mother has also terrible condition at home day by day. She remembers her son Jit Bahadur every moment and becomes weak and lean and thin with the anxiety.

Economic Impact

Youths from Nepal travel to abroad mainly for seeking employment. Narendra has completed bachelor and begun to search job. He requested his relatives and other people. He even spends money but does not get anything in return. He has got a job in boarding school but that has been low paid job. He cannot survive with it and loses the faith of finding a good job. Then he decides to go to Malaysia (p. 57). Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) point out that "Because 40% of the world's labor migrants move from one developing country to another (particularly in Asia), it is important to look at subregional contexts" (p. 135). Nepal is a developing country and youths lack the employment opportunities. They choose transnational migration because of their compulsion. Youths find agents in each village who help them to go to Gulf countries. They take the passports and call after they get visa (p. 51). Gardner points out 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" (2011, p. 9). Youths feel easy because of these agents and they do not have to spend much also.

Transnational migrants utilize their earning in educating children and household activities. From villages of hillsides, these youths climb down to the Tarai. Some buy land and others make house. Some change the roof of the house (p. 50). Gardner points out 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). But life is not easy in Gulf countries. In spite of that, the youths struggle hard in Gulf countries to change their fate. Transnational migrants in Nepal teach their children in English medium school in the city and they talk in English with their grandparents to tease them (p. 50). According to Gardner, "Although many migrants encounter significant problems in the Gulf States, remittances from the Gulf are undeniably central to the

economic activities of countless communities in the Indian Ocean world” (2011, p. 14). Transnational migration has increased the economic activities in the distant villages of Nepal.

Money in twenty first century compels youths to look at several directions and grab the opportunities. Osella and Osella (2000) argue that “Cash is then a signifier of masculine status, notes reckoning the worth of a man. This relation between men and money can be traced in several directions” (p. 122). Nepali youths look at Gulf countries because it is easy to get visa. Jit Bahadur does not find interview hard. He has been talking with man power company’s agents and they say interview has ended. However, going Gulf countries, they cannot live there forever. Thiollet (2016) claims that “The Gulf States have set up and implemented a regime based on denying citizenship and political and socio-economic rights” (p. 17). Nepali youths live in Gulf countries, work there but return sooner or later. They do not get the permission for permanent residence in Gulf countries.

Solution for transnational migration

Nepali youths go to Gulf countries for seeking resources to earn money and secure the future. If the government makes the policy to provide employment for youths, they do not prefer to go to abroad. Youths have to learn how they can utilize their agricultural land and earn for living. Jit Bahadur’s mother gives seeds on his palm and suggests “to grow money in own land by sowing that in the field. Build own nation by picking up that fruit” (p. 290). Her suggestion is one of the solutions of stopping youths in the country. Jit Bahadur agrees with his mother as he has had much painful experiences in Malaysia. He has also suffered at the Maoist movement by losing his family members. Jit Bahadur starts ‘Priya Farm’ in Jarayotar and involves in financial activities.

Jit Bahadur realizes that he has to use what he has experienced in life. He has also got educated wife and inspiring mother. Jit Bahadur understands that he has to “Gain the experience of becoming a true citizen that the country is looking for. Get inspiration to live with self-respect by making own soil muddy” (p. 287). He has obtained knowledge that “First wipe the mother's tears. Laugh at home. In the same way, inspire others to laugh. When smiles spread from house to house, the whole village will be happy” (p. 287). He concludes that “If all the villages laugh, the district will laugh. If the district laughs, the zone will laugh. If all fourteen zones laugh, whole Nepal will laugh. When Nepal laughs, all Nepalis who have traveled around the world will come back here” (p. 287). He finds it the trick to make a country and keep youths at homeland. He learns that Nepal never gets developed when Nepali youths make the foreign land fertile with their blood and sweats.

Conclusion

Transnational migration of youths in developing country like Nepal has several causes. Some of the major causes are the lack of opportunities in homeland, Maoist movement in the past, peer pressure, easily availability of manpower companies and their agents in villages, and the thought of securing the future. The major impacts of transnational migration are social, psychological and economic. Transnational migration breaks up the families for short or long time and creates psychological stress. To stop youths in the country, they have to be provided opportunities of

employment and developed the sense of security financially. Agricultural development is another way to minimize transnational migration. Youths' involvement in the agricultural activities can kindle their love for the nation and the feeling of nationality. Jit Bahadur's mother gives him some seeds and suggests him to sow in the field. Symbolically she is instructing the youths to work in the country and roll down sweats in the mud. That is a solution of transnational migration.

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