**Lila**

(Preliminaries)

I am Lila Aale and my husband is Kamal Aale. We were at Sanoshree in Bardiya with my father- and mother-in-law, two younger brothers-in-law and their wives, and two younger sisters-in-law. They all live in Bardiya. We separated and moved to Nepalgunj about six years ago. Our marriage took place in Bardiya; it was an arranged marriage. His father and mother sometimes visit and stay with us. Right now I live with my daughter and father-in-law here. Mother-in-law usually lives in the village and sometimes visits us.

I was 19 years old when I was married to my husband. Most families in my village including my family were related with Gurkhas and so I knew what a Gurkha was before marriage. It is obvious that a girl is somewhat excited as well as anxious at the time of marriage; because she will be leaving the home she was born and grown up, and entering a totally new house. She was a bit confident because the person she was marrying was self-reliant, independent, and so he can provide for her.

It was a bit difficult in the beginning during the transition period; because it was a new surrounding with new people. I did not have to do much household chores at my father’s home but I had to perform all at my husband’s house. I had to perform different roles; like daughter-in-law, wife, homemaker, cook, washer woman, etc.

I was always afraid lest I would make a mistake, because I had not done those things earlier at my father’s home. I was careful not to make a mistake. My father- and mother-in-law coached and instructed me to do those things, but never yelled at me during the adjustment period. They did not bias me to their daughter, the younger sister-in-law, about the same age to me. She worked along with me and was friendly and helpful.

My husband had come on leave and married me. He stayed for one month at home with me before returning to his duty. I felt sad when he left for work the first time. I cried for two days and later calmed down as my mother- and sister-in-law consoled me. I was unhappy for a couple of days but gradually became normal in the company with the sister-in-law. Although there were other women, including Gurkha wives, in the village who treated me as a younger sister and advised me, but my sister- and mother-in-law were very supportive and guided me when I had difficulties, because at that time we three were only in the house.

He visited home after every six months for twenty days on leave. In the early two years we communicated through letters. Later we talked through STD calls, which was easier.

It was a bit difficult when he was away abroad, but later I got adjusted to it. The younger sister and brother-in-laws were like friends and it was comfortable for me to adjust in the family.

When he was away, the strategy to cope being worried remembering him was to keep myself busy and there were a lot of things to do at home in the village. He used to call me after reaching his duty station and my worries were vanished. Gradually, it became routine and I was used to.

We separated from the family because we wanted to move to the city for providing better education to our children, and he had younger brothers with whom it was not possible to live together always.

Earlier he sent money to his parents and they managed everything. He started to send money directly to me when we got separated with the family and I manage the household on my own. The expenditure to run the household including education of children, taxes, fees, food and so on per month is approximately Nepalese Rupees 60,000. I provide about NRs. 10,000 to father-in-law for medicine and also support mother-in law for medications per month. I spend NRs. 5,000 per month in addition to annual admission, exams and other fees for children’s education.

Yes, we have some loan borrowed for constructing this house from a bank. We pay NRs. 25,000/month as the interest and partial capital repayment. The interest rate is 13% per annum. So the total cost for running and managing the household is about NRs. 100,000/month. He sends US$ 1,000/month (NRs. 100,000) and there is his pension about NRs. 28,000/month to add too. I have been able to save a little bit with the saving/credit groups and a little bit in the bank. It is just two years and so we have not invested on land or other property yet, but started to build this house.

Yes, Gurkha wives are empowered than the common Nepali civilian wives, because they have to perform all the tasks of visiting school to pay fees, attend meetings and receive report cards, visit the public offices to pay taxes and participate in meetings, and so on. We have to do all those because our husbands are abroad.

The main difference between a Gurkha wife and a normal Nepali civil wife is that the latter is always together with her husband, who tackles the tasks outside the home but a Gurkha wife is alone taking care of everything. It’s hard to manage things alone.

Mostly father-in-law lives with us and he supports in taking care of children when I am out of house. People in neighborhood provide support if we both are not at home.

My daily routine consists of performing housekeeping and managing the household; e.g. to clean the house, cook food, prepare and send the children to school, wash dishes and clothes, and do grocery and shopping, including communicate with husband and children, and remind father-in-law to take medicine on time. My daily schedule is not hectic but relaxed. I have to rush only when preparing the children for school.

I have not ever thought of working outside the home. I am happy with my life, I’m content. Its not too complicated, but too much engaged in building the house and I have to make all the decisions since my husband is overseas, which is the most significant challenge I’m facing right now. That is stressful for me.

I decide financial matters after discussion and sharing with my husband. We never had any disagreement/argument on matters relating to where and how to spend money.

I had the baby after four years of our marriage. We had no problem on not having a baby till four years of marriage, but our parents-in-law were anxious to have a grandchild soon and were worried. That was only the pressure I had for the four years.

I think the attributes for good Gurkha wives are to take care of parents-in-laws, children, household, and maintain good relations with family members/relatives, which will make the Gurkha husband happy. We will be happy if our husbands are happy. A good mother has to take good care of the children, their food, health and education. She has to send a lot of time for and with children.

If a woman works outside home, she cannot accomplish all these responsibilities successfully; however she can manage both the roles and responsibilities inside and outside the house. I could not able to play all the roles and fulfill all the responsibilities if I were to go outside to work. There is some sacrifice.

I do not have much expectation. I expect to live together in a family. He comes on vacation for one month and it slips faster meeting the relatives and friends. It is a very short time. I wish if the vacations were longer or more often. As per my expectations he calls me every morning and after his duty is over in the afternoon. I worry if there is no contact at those specified time.

The child was born when we were together when I went to live with him in the army camp at Rajasthan in India for two years; so she grew up with him. She easily recognized him when he came on leave and cuddled with him. He stayed at home for two years after retirement from the Indian army. Therefore it was not difficult for me teach her who her father was and love him.

The child says she is sad when her father is not at the school gates as her friends’ fathers go to pick up them from school. She misses him and asks why he has gone abroad. I tell and explain her that he has gone to earn for better lives for us. It’s hard to explain because he has to work overseas to materially provide for the family. He misses his family and we also miss him. This is the reality.

We are excited on his home coming and we prepare his favorite food. We raise chicken and goats to made dishes for entertaining him. It is something like a festival. My daughter quickly goes to her father, she does not hesitate. Usually she is at school when he arrives and she tells me to fetch her from school when her dad reaches home.

(Daughter) My dad is in Afghanistan and he works, he performs duty there. I talk with him every day. I ask him how he is and bring me lots of chocolate and nice clothes. He says to obey mom, be a nice girl and study hard. I abide by his advice and I am a good girl. I love my dad because he loves me.

He has no bad habits; however the main thing I like about him is his honesty.

I believe we have a strong family and I do not worry of the news of increasing family breakdowns within migrant workers. Everything needs to be shared between the spouses, and both have to be truthful and honest for a strong marriage. I hear of some family breakdowns in Gurkha families too, but it depends upon the persons. I think the lack of mutual understanding; trust and reliability are the underpinning factors for such family breakdown. Likewise, violence, usually domestic violence and alcoholism are also contributing factors to family breakdown. These are not of concern to me.

My husband served for 17 years in the Indian army. He stayed for two years at home after retirement and then went to Afghanistan for FSI. This was the first company he worked.

His time of two years at home before joining FSI was hectic. Around 6/7 months were spent to visit the relatives and then building this house took most time. He left for Afghanistan when the house was finished, which took almost one and a half years.

Money is critical for living, as all know it. We have borrowed loan to build this house and required to payback. The child was studying and needed more for further studies. And he was free and wanted to engage in something benefitting rather than remain idle because his age was not much. We got that opportunity at FSI and so he went abroad again. The main motivation for going overseas as a private security contractor was money.

We discussed and decided together for him to go to Afghanistan to work as a private security contractor. I become worried, when there are bad news. I was stressed during those times because of the dangers involved. He would not have gone there if we had ample resources. We have to compromise with these dangers and difficulties as well as worries and tensions. We did not think about other safer countries like Gulf and safer jobs like unarmed security, because the offer of FSI was at hand and we did not want to miss it.

He says the FSI is a good company and I also feel it is nice.

On listening to the recent news about bombings in Kabul that injured some Nepalese security contractors I was very much worried. We could not contact with each other during that time that made me more anxious. He called me some time later and told me although the incident was nearby but everything was fine; then I was calm and comfortable. I also have the contact number of the company and some brothers working nearby in case of emergencies. FSI did not contact me at that time, but he made the contact. We also discuss about the risks of injuries or even death during the course of duty in Afghanistan. The company has insured him against such incidences. I believe the working and living condition and environment in Afghanistan is safe and secure as he tells us. He captures the images of his living space, and eating and working places. The living space is okay but he has to don the security uniform and carry a gun, which I feel is difficult and dangerous in such an environment.

Support for children, especially education, could be developed by the FSI/company. Vacation of one month per year is very pitiable; so the leave period could be longer or shorter leaves for certain duty hours like twice monthly leaves per year, or more leaves in a short time.

I do not feel much difference between the Gurkha and the private security personnel; except that we could go and live together when he was in the Indian army as a Gurkha but now that is not possible. Both are dangerous but the army is safer compared to Afghanistan.

Although the baby is small, she says she will become a doctor when her father asks what she wants to be. What she can be depends on her education and qualification. We hope for something but the child may decide for another thing when she grows up. Therefore, at present our goal is to give her good and quality education. We discuss a lot about the education of the child.

He does not discuss much about his work but merely says its okay. I understand he does not tell everything about his work, but keeps some reserve, thinking we might worry.

He talks with daughter like an empathetic father, a friend while communicating electronically; such as how were your days, what did you had for lunch, how are your studies, were you happy, etc. Sometimes, usually during the festivals, he expresses his frustrations through electronic communication becoming sentimental by saying I miss you and our daughter very much.

He says he will do the private security work till he is fit and fine, but I emphasize on working for three or four years only. We have not yet discussed and decided on a specific plan for retirement. He says he will work till he can work but I request him to return and start a business/enterprise of our own. He does not agree because he says we do not have business knowledge and skills. He does not have any bad habits and upon retirement he can adjust to the situation.

I do not worry on hearing the news on increasing of violence against women and street harassment. Such incidences occur in Nepalgunj too, though it has reduced in recent years.

I have heard people gossip about a Gurkha wives or wives of migrant workers that they are squandering the hard earned money of the husbands. Some might be true and some could be entirely based on jealousy. One should be truthful and honest; such gossips would not harm her. I damn care of such pointless rumors and empty gossips. The strategy I adopt is to ignore such gossips because my husband and I trust each other and share our feelings and situations. I have never heard people talking about my back.

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