**Ritu**

(Preliminaries)

Amanda: Will you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Ritu: My name is Ritu Aale. I lived at Sainik and my husband’s family also lived there earlier. Later, they moved here and I also was wedded here. We had an arranged marriage. My husband went overseas in consultation with me and the family. He is doing well and sends money regularly. Nobody forced him to go abroad. We are four members in the family – mother and brother in-laws, me and my husband; father-in-law has passed away.

Interpreter: You said you lived at Sainik, which means soldiers. Was anyone from your paternal home worked as a Gurkha?

Ritu: No, we had no Gurkha in our family. The name Sainik was given because that settlement was started by soldiers long time ago.

Amanda: Do you have any child?

Ritu: No.

Amanda: How long have you been married to your husband?

Ritu: Three years.

Amanda: How long has he been away in Doha?

Ritu: It is one year now.

Amanda: What was the motivation for him to seek work in Qatar or overseas? What was the main reason?

Ritu: He is the responsible to sustain the family, because he is the eldest son and responsible of the household and to earn. So, the primary motivation is to earn.

Amanda: Is he the only one working in the family? You also work, yes?

Ritu: Yes, I also work. I work in the television cable network.

Amanda: How much do you earn doing that?

Ritu: NRs. 8,000/month.

Amanda: How much does your husband earns in Doha? And how much does he send?

Ritu: He earns around NRs. 50,000/month and sends around NRs. 80,000 after two months time.

Amanda: Are these the only sources of income to support the family? Or these are the main sources and there are other sources too? Do others also work?

Ritu: These are the main sources and another source is rent of the house.

Amanda: How much does it cost to run the house every month, including food, utilities, travel, any sort of tax, medicines, education fees, repayment of debt if taken to go abroad, etc.?

Ritu: I do not know, have to ask mother-in-law.

Mother: The cash expenditure was negligible earlier when we were living in the village because food stuffs came from the farm. Now, as we moved to the city, all the costs including the younger sons’ education included comes about NRs. 15-20 thousand per month. The younger son had problem relating to his nose and was treated and operated at Kathmandu a couple of times. We have to take him again for treatment to Kathmandu when he will be 16 years old.

Amanda: Does the money you make and your husband makes go to your account or your mother-in-law’s? Who manages the finances in the house?

Ritu: The mother-in-law manages the finances.

Amanda: Who owns this house? Is it mother-in-law or Roshan or who else?

Mother: The younger is still young and Roshan, the eldest son, has gone overseas just a year ago. This house was built by my husband working abroad and I own it.

Amanda: Is her husband still alive?

Interpreter: No, he has passed away.

Amanda: Is the house completely paid for or does there exists some debt?

Mother: It is completely paid. I built the ground floor with his earning, while my husband was at Saudi operating heavy vehicle. As the children were small it did not cost much to run the house. Then I built the first storey. We did not have debt then. My husband had kidney failure, which was incurable disease and we had to take him to Lukhnow, Bareli and Delhi in India and Kathmandu for treatment. We spent a lot of money for his treatment but he died within six months of identification of the disease. We have a little debt, around NRs. 1.5 million. However there is no danger to sell the house to repay and I hope I will be able to pay it sooner or later.

Amanda: What is the interest in that debt?

Mother: It is 20% per annum.

Amanda: Is the interest included in the household expenditure you mentioned?

Mother: No, it is not included.’

Amanda: Have you been able to save from the money earned by your husband or your son including your daughter-in-law? Or it is even to run the house and other expenses.

Mother: Roshan, a jolly good fellow aged 21 years, spends much he earns in cell phone for his enjoyment and making calls. The monthly income from the rent amounting to 10-20 thousand and around 3-4 thousand from Rita’s salary is enough merely to run this house. Not much saving.

Amanda: Did your husband consulted with you or mother-in-law for going overseas or he decided on his own after finding the manpower company? Who was involved in that decision?

Mother: Yes, he consulted with us all; we discussed it together. It was necessary for him and it was his responsibility to earn after his father’s demise.

Amanda: The main reasons were financial. How did you decide that he should work in security at that particular company, the Star? How was that decision made? How did you identify that company?

Mother: We did not look for that particular job. The manpower is here at Nepalgunj and he went there to look for job overseas as they had announced for vacancies. He was a little young not matured for security but his body structure, height and physical fitness made an impact on them and he was selected for security.

Interpreter: Had he done any sort of security work, earlier?

Mother: No, he had not done anything. He was studying. The interviewing foreigners were impressed and selected him for the job.

Amanda: What was the manpower company called?

Mother: Lucky Manpower Company, which is near the District Administration Office.

Amanda: Were you worried about the security work? Like what kind of the job or work he should be doing? Do you think security work means to be working in a dangerous place? What was the actual description of the security job? Did you think if it was police or military job before going abroad?

Mother: No, we did not know and the manpower company just said it was ‘security guard’. We thought it was better to watch the people and premises as a security guard than the manual or construction labor because he would do 9-10 hours duty and then rest. We imagined it was simple and easy. Therefore we agreed him to go for the job.

Amanda: Did you have any fear when your husband first going overseas? You were newly married, young woman, and then your husband going overseas leaving you behind with his family. Were you nervous or worried?

Ritu: Yes, during the first few months I was anxious and sad, because of his absence, but I have become accustomed and do neither fear nor worry that much.

Amanda: Did you get support from your mother-in-law having experience of her own husband working overseas? Or, did you have friends who supported you when you were sad?

Ritu: Mostly her mother-in-law comforted and shared her experiences and besides that she was supported and consoled by her friends too.

Amanda: Having your daughter-in-law move in here for the first time was there any sort of transition issue? We heard from other interviews that sometimes there are a bit pressure the daughter-in-law feels that she has to work extra hard in the household and on the other hand she was new in the house and misses love and care of her parents, while the mother-in-law had to spend some time mentoring her how to cook properly. Was the transition okay with you? Or there was some hiccups on the way?

Mother: She knows if it was difficult when she moved into the house, but I did not feel challenging when she moved in.

Ritu: Yes, in the beginning, I felt a little bit sad and discomfited, but gradually was used to it.

Mother: The allegiance was reached for marriage when her father-in-law would return from abroad, but he returned with sickness and we were too busy taking care of him. They knew and liked each other as both lived in the same village at that time and their marriage was arranged.

Amanda: How old were you at the time of marriage?

Ritu: I was 18 years old.

Amanda: When is your husband due to come back?

Ritu: He will be back after one year on vacation and the plan is to go back again.

Amanda: Do you have planned for a child? Are you going to discuss about that when he will be here?

Ritu: We will discuss and decide after he comes.

Amanda: What were the associated fees with your son and husband going overseas, like manpower fees, medical, passport, etc.?

Mother: It was around NRs. 250,000 including everything like travel to and from Kathmandu a couple of times, bags/baggages and clothes.

Amanda: Did you have to pay the local and Kathmandu-based manpower companies or just the local manpower?

Mother: We just paid NRs. 135,000 to the local manpower company.

Amanda: Did they explain why the fee was so high?

Mother: No, they didn’t, just asked as the fees.

Amanda: Were you aware of the national campaign that legally the manpower could charge only NRs. 10,000 at that point?

Mother: We have heard about it, but it is not implemented. Without taking extra money nobody will move his/her hands or feet – do nothing or procrastinate or delay. It was easier for them to tackle an inexperienced youngster.

Amanda: Although the campaign for at most NRs. 10,000 for the overheads of the manpower and/or recruitment companies is there and the employing agencies providing free visa and tickets, these are not implemented in practice. So, at this point it’s not about raising awareness, but actual implementation, the government is accountable in holding manpower companies responsible.

Amanda: What is the most difficult thing about having your husband work overseas? What is the biggest challenge for mother to have your son work overseas?

Mother: Because of the financial crises he had to go overseas for long term to work leaving us behind. I miss him a lot. We do not have a choice. We would have lived together if there were opportunities and access to the opportunities within the country.

Ritu: It’s the same. We like to live together in the family, but there is no option.

Amanda: There are emerging issues raised by NGOs in Nepal that suggest a higher rate of unfortunately suicide and violence in migrant family home. They suggest an underpinning reason is the ‘culture of gossip’, particularly community gossip around the migrant home with the male being overseas targeting the wife at home. Do you have such experience people saying not nice things about you or other migrant families? Things like, for example, oh she eating momo in a restaurant when her husband is working hard overseas, or I saw her out of town. Have you heard that sort of gossip? Is that happening in this community or to you?

Mother: We listen about such incidents through television. But we do not have felt it occur with us. The most important thing is the mutual trust of the husband and wife; I damn care about what others’ say. We have not faced such problems because there is a good understanding amongst us.

Amanda: Do you feel the same? Or do you feel differently as a young woman?

Ritu: I do not feel the difference, but the same.

Amanda: Along with that it is reported that there are street harassments; like following, whistling, teasing, or touching or rubbing in public transports, etc. abuses are increasing in Nepal. If you have such problems especially when your husband or son being abroad. Are you concerned when you or daughter-in-law is walking on the streets? In Nepalgunj are you worried about that sort of male attention or not nice advancements or do you think Nepalgunj is relatively safe?

Mother: Yes, we hear about such happenings but I do not worry about my sons and daughter-in-law. I tell them to go out and come in on time. They follow routine and avoid/prevent such harassments.

Amanda: What do you think about it, because particularly such violence is directed against young women? Do you feel any sort of insecurities when you walk to work and return? Or such insecurities preventing you to go out alone?

Ritu: I do not worry when I walk in the daytime, but sometimes I feel a bit insecure when I have to walk in the evening or if I am a little bit late.

Amanda: How did you raised NRs. 250,000? Did you have in your savings or have to take loan for that?

Mother: We had savings to send him abroad, so we didn’t take loans.

Amanda: How long do you want him to work overseas? Is it 10-15 years as the job is okay, because he is a young man? What is your long term plan?

Mother: All mothers love their children wish them to perform better and pray for their progress. It depends upon him. He might be thinking how long he wants to work overseas, how much he wants to earn, how he is going to live with his family and his family.

Amanda: Have you guys talked about it? How long you want him overseas? As your wife, have you had that discussion?

Rita: Yes, we talk and discuss about it. We plan to first clear the debt, and then save quite a good sum to start something after returning to Nepal. So he will work overseas the long as it is required to do these two tasks.

Amanda: You two want to have your own house? Is that you want in future?

Rita: No, not like that. They want to live together in a joint family.

Amanda: I am curious when it comes to family planning, having children. Are you anxious at all when he comes home he stays for only about a month or so and gone for another year? Are you anxious to get pregnant when he comes home?

Ritu: We had not thought of that earlier, but we plan to have a child this time when he comes for vacation.

Amanda: How often do you communicate with your husband and you with your son? Do you communicate every day? Or a in a couple of days? Do you have video conferencing or texting?

Mother: I talk with him once in a month or so.

Ritu: Yes, I talk with him every day.

Amanda: Does he talk about his work? How does he spend his day there? Do you know much about his work over there?

Ritu: Yes. He says he does night duty and sleeps or rests during the day.

Amanda: Does he describe his work as difficult or frustrating? Or is he generally happy with what he does?

Ritu: In the beginning, he said, it was a little bit difficult and hard for him to adjust but he is used to now and happy.

Amanda: Does he work seven days a week and eight or ten hours a day? What is his work days like?

Ritu: Yes, he does night duty for seven days a week and the work hours is 8 or 9 a day.

Amanda: When you talk to each other what kind of communication do you have? Do you act as a support for him or he complains of his hard work? Do you play the role to console him by saying this is for short time and we will be together again? Do you tell him about your day? Do you ask about each other’s physical or mental health? What do you guys talk about?

Ritu: In the beginning he used to say the work was difficult and I tried to support, console and encourage him. But these days he does not and is happy, and so we talk about everyday things and our feelings. We talk about his upcoming leave and look forward to his homecoming.

Amanda: Have you ever thought of working overseas? Is that something you have wanted to?

Ritu: I am interested to work abroad if I get a chance; if possible together with my husband.

Amanda: You could be a security guard with him.

What is your biggest hope for him working abroad? Given the sacrifice of being physically absent? What is your greatest hope you can get from all of this?

Ritu: We hope is to support the family; to make sure everyone gets what he wants. This sacrifice accounts to a happy life for family, so that we do not have to worry about any difficulties and live comfortably.

Amanda: So, material or economic scaling. If you had any wish in the world, money as not an issue, what would you wish for yourself? What would you wish for you and your husband, like going for university degree or a skill training or study nursing or travelling, or what would you want for most in the world for yourself?

Ritu: I do not have such desires but work at some place with nice pay.

Amanda: Can you tell me what do you love most of your husband? What is the best attribute of your husband?

Ritu: He is not jealous.

Amanda: And what is the thing that frustrates you most?

Ritu: Sometimes, he is a bit lazy.

Amanda: Being a migrant family what do you feel what expectations of you are as a wife of your husband working overseas? You are living with your in-laws her. What makes you a good wife? What sort of things you need to meet the expectations of you?

Ritu: To adjust with all the family members, obey instructions, follow family norms and discipline, have cordial relation with all, etc.

Amanda: What expectations do you have of your husband, besides sending money home?

Ritu: He is a nice man. Supports family. He is understanding and trustworthy. He is never angry. He is not jealous. He loves me and his family. These are his good attributes and I expect him to retain and continue these forever.

Amanda: My husband and I have an agreement that we text each other first thing every morning and last thing at night to keep in contact. Is such expectations do you have of your husband too? In terms of communication, how often do you expect him to be contacting you?

Ritu: We usually talk daily over the phone, except a couple of days when he or I exhaust our salary at the end of the month and there is no balance in our phones. She wants to continue that process of communication.

Amanda: Is there anything else you think Star security, your husband’s employer, or the manpower agency can be doing different that supports your husband’s work and your needs and the family’s’?

Ritu: I anticipate they launch program, help to support the migrant families.

Amanda: What sort of help?

Ritu: Besides providing proper facilities and care for the migrant workers, they could initiate program directly supporting families like providing information about the workers to families and improving communication facilities between workers and their families.

Amanda: Besides communication, what else direct support to the family? Special program to support to or do something for the family by the company?

Ritu: Support to start an enterprise or business for income generation. A small amount as gratitude to operate a small trade. Could be grant or low interest loan.

Amanda: Is there anything special you have planned for his homecoming? When he comes home is it a normal kind of day for you or do you plan a special meal or a ceremony?

Ritu: We do not plan ahead. But we welcome him by cooking the food he likes most and enjoy in his company. We will make visits to special places and relatives.

Amanda: The departures are quite painful. You really get sad. For you, what is the departure like? Do you wave him off as he departs or leave him down the road and see him go or just hug? What do at the departure when he goes overseas?

Ritu: I did not go to see him off for the first time. We bade farewell. However I felt sad when he left. This time may be more difficult or harder.

Amanda: In those moments how do you cope? When you are really sad and your tears flow and you hug your mother-in-law or what do you do to deal with that sadness?

Ritu: Yes, all of us become sad to depart. There is weeping and crying and at the same time we convince and console each other reminding about our future. That way we cope with the sadness. We become normal as time passes.

Amanda: Is this something a marriage where your husband is physically separated and you guys are discussing about having a family. Is this something that worries you or you think what that’s going to be like raising your children with your husband being physically absent? Did you consider what hardships might be there?

Ritu: Of course it is hard to discuss but we will talk over the phone too.

Amanda: So, you do not think it is going to be hard then being a single mom with your husband overseas?

Ritu: Yes, I think I can take care of the baby. I do not think it will be hard because I’ll have my mother-in-law with me and family members will be helping me.

Amanda: How does your day go? What do you do daily?

Ritu: I do the sweeping and cleaning of the house after I get up in the morning and prepare lunch. I go to office before 10 am. During the day time, I work and deal with the customers, and chat and enjoy with colleagues at the workplace. I return in the evening and prepare and have dinner together with family. I go to bed after washing the dishes.

Amanda: So, keeping quite busy. When you have a baby, do you want to continue your job or do you want to be full time housewife and mother.

Ritu: I want to continue working outside after the baby is weaned.

Amanda: That’s all I wanted to know from you on how your everyday life is constructed around your husband working overseas. Thank you for sharing your experiences.

End of transcript