**Purnima 7 Jun**

(Preliminaries)

I am Purnima Thapa. I am Hari Maya. We moved to Kohalpur in Banke district from Surkhet almost 13 years ago. My father’s home and husband’s home were nearby in Surkhet. I have five brothers and one brother-in-law and two sisters-in-law. My elder brother-in-law and I have three children each.

We were from the same village, went to school together, and knew each other very well. Ours was not arranged but a ‘run-away’ or love marriage. We lived together with my husband’s family after eloped with him. I was eighteen and a half years old when I married him.

He was already a Gurkha before we got married. I did not have much information about what Gurkha was; I merely knew Gurkhas were in the Indian army. We lived together for almost one and a half month before he returned to his job in India. I only visited him for a couple of months and basically was living in Nepal.

It was a bit uncomfortable only to live at his home with his parents and siblings after leaving my father’s house. However, it was not difficult since our families were well acquainted, living close by, and were related in a way. There were not yelling or fighting in my in-laws house with me. I experienced the difference on being a daughter and a daughter-in-law, but there were no problems. The mother-in-law instructed me to do household chores and we lived at ease and comfortably. All family members were well known so it was not difficult to cope with and adjust.

I felt lonely and sad when he left abroad in the early years. However, it became routine later on and my mind was diverted when I had children. When he went abroad after leave I drew for support from parents-in-law and my parents.

My husband sent money to his parents and me separately when he was serving the Indian army. When we were together in the joint family, my responsibility was to look after the children, and the money was for their rearing and caring including their medical expenses. All the household management was carried out by the parents-in-law. All the money he sent was spent and we could not save when he was in the Indian army because his salary was low.

On being a Gurkha wife my status in the community was a bit improved; I was trusted by people. However my life was not easy but a bit difficult because I had to take care not only of children but also his family. Neighbors and relatives used to ask and pressure for loan thinking me having much money on being a Gurkha wife; it was difficult to tackle with them. People think that Gurkha wives have plenty of money but I knew how much I had and how I was faring; so sometimes they were angry and commented negatively when I could not provide them money. I gave birth to the first baby after two years of marriage. There was no pressure to become pregnant and have a baby from any corner when he was at home during vacations. I also thought that it is natural, it will happen one day and so I had no hurry.

I have not felt anything extraordinary or astonishing on being a Gurkha wife, because I already knew many things about a Gurkha from my then would-be husband. There is not much difference between a Gurkha wife and a common civil Nepali wife because both work in their farm and take care of domestic chores, except that the Gurkha wife is managing the finance and household on her own and she is less dependent on others.

I spent most of time in Surkhet and I heard nothing sort of community gossip about a Gurkha wife or me. Likewise, I have not felt anything like that since we moved here. So there was no pressure from the community.

The attributes of a good Gurkha wife, I think, are to take good care of children and manage the household well.

Although my husband is working in difficult circumstances, I expected advice and guidance from him to manage the finance and household while he was physically absent and I also used to propose or suggest about what could be done. I do not expect any other thing from him.

I do not think that he will betray me and build illicit relationships with other women; likewise I do not have any idea of adulteration with other men because we trust each other and we are believers in Christianity. He does not gamble, and is not used to alcoholism and any other bad habits.

I believe the key to successful marriage or family when the husband and father works away for long time is mutual trust.

The children did not easily mix with but were scared of their father when they were quite young. I used to tell them about him working overseas for us because he loved us. They became close to him after they understood and realized their father’s role as they grew up. The age of the eldest daughter is 20 years, the younger daughter is 17 years and the youngest son is 15 years.

In the earlier times, when he was in the Indian army, we communicated through letters, which were not much and they were not connected with him that much unless he was at home on leave. But nowadays, the internet has provided opportunities to see and hear each other whenever one wishes. Therefore, they do not feel missing or they are worried of his physical absence. He plays more disciplinary role in the sense that he tells them to study hard, do homework and help mother manage the house and sometimes he also plays the role of emotional father like how was your day, what did you eat, take care of your health, etc when he talked with the children over the phone/internet.

The single most thing I love about my husband is his good habit, such as he does not take drinks, waste time wandering without purpose and carries out domestic violence like many other men.

I am lucky because my husband is so loving and caring, there is nothing I am frustrated of him.

When he was away overseas, while my children were small I was in Surkhet and they grew up with support from their grandparents, but when I moved to Nepalgunj after separation with my in-laws they were a bit older to take care of themselves, however it was quite difficult for me to tackle alone as my husband was away overseas. I used the strategy that they have to be nice to be successful in life and need to get up early, do homework and not to be naughty when they would be mischievous or intolerant.

We moved to Nepalgunj from Surkhet because of providing quality education to children; they started going to private boarding school. My husband was physically absent and the children went to school, I felt lonely in the beginning, but gradually I became used to and did odd works like cleaning, washing, visiting offices to pay fees and taxes, and talking with neighbors, etc to engage myself throughout the day. Sometimes I visit to my friends and neighbors and sometimes they come to my home.

I communicate with my husband daily; we text messages and talk over Skype/viber.

My husband left the military two years ago. After he was retired, we decided that he needs to go abroad to earn because the children were still very young and we required some security for future too. The main motivation was money. We mutually decided for him to go as a private security contractor in Afghanistan through FSI, although he brought the information of the job.

The expenses are for food, because we have to buy everything, and children’s school fees and other costs, utilities, energy (cooking gas), etc accounts in an average to NRs. 40 to 50 thousand per month to run the household. This does not include other costs like cultural or festival expenses. Presently, I am able save a little each month deducting the expenses from the remittance he sends. His salary was not enough to meet all the expenses, but now we are saving something. We have not lent money for him to go to Afghanistan so there is no need to payback.

I worry about my husband’s safety more in Afghanistan compared to India, because the situation of Afghanistan is not tranquil and a dangerous place. He says his workplace inside the premises is safe and secure, but you never know the enemies ambush or fire explosives or attack clandestinely. I was very much worried when I heard of the recent explosions in Kabul, which injured some Nepalese security guards and I called him as soon as I learnt about the incident. He said her not to worry and replied that it was not at his workplace, but a bit further away and reconfirmed that it was safe and secure at their end.

I do not know exactly, but as per his information FSI is taking care of the security contractors’ safety and security including the work environment considering the risks in Afghanistan. I know that they are insured but I do not have detailed information about it.

I suggest FSI to make the life of family and wife of the security contractors easier by providing vacations sooner. Earlier he used to visit after eight months but he came after 14 months. The salary is satisfactory but it will be better if there is increase in salary to make life of the contractor’s families easier and convenient considering the children’s education and saving for future.

I have the contact number of the company in case I need to get in touch with it.

The Indian army does not offer family liaison services to provide services like information on whereabouts of the soldier, children’s rearing and caring and so on to the families; it merely has the pension.

I have not heard about increasing trend of domestic violence in Gurkha families, but it occurs in the other migrant workers families. We also do not have such incidences. The reasons could be long period of stay abroad, husbands disappearing abroad, some wives also are not faithful or misusing the money.

I have not felt harassment and violence against women in the community however it is not safe for women and girls to walk without escorts after evening in the streets, so I worry about my children.

I suggest my daughters and nieces to be disciplined, not to go out alone, not to make fun while walking on the streets, walk in groups safely, not to speak or reply if any stranger or unrelated person calls you, and so on.

My eldest daughter is at home after appearing the exams of the 12th grade. She is married already to a Gurkha. Considering my experience I would not have arranged her to marry a Gurkha but she chose herself to be a Gurkha wife and I am happy of her marriage to a Gurkha because it was her choice, a love marriage.

I do not want my son to be a Gurkha. I want him to continue and acquire higher education, take up science and become an engineer. I do not want him to be a Gurkha because of the experiences of his father, his hard life, high risk and long time away from family.

I have not thought of the marriage of the younger daughter.

End of transcription