**Rama**

(Preliminaries)

Amanda: Can you just tell me something about you? Who are all these people you live with? What is your family background? Where are you from?

Rama: I was born here. I was married off into a family in the remote hills quite further high up. I have been living with my parents not at my husband’s home with his parents. My elder and younger brothers, their wives, their children and my girl child live together with my parents.

Amanda: Why did you decide to leave your husband’s family? What I understand it is common to move into husband’s family after marriage. Why did you decide to stay here?

Rama: I found it difficult to carry out household chores in the remote high hills as I was not used to live in such place. He also realized that a girl from this location cannot bear the difficulties of and sustain in the remote high hills. We decided to run the shop here. However, the business did not go well and he went overseas to work leaving me here.

Brother: I am her elder brother. I think she is feeling hurt so I explain on her behalf. Actually, my future brother-in-law, Khagendra, was operating a shop before marrying her in this cluster. He continued his business but it was not successful and he decided to go overseas. He is from remote high hills quite far away from here, where no facilities like water, electricity, roads, school, health institution, etc exist. That is why he left her with us here.

Amanda: Thank you. So, can you tell me about your husband and his family uphill?

Rama: He has three brothers and one of them is also lives down here and the other two brothers live with his parents there.

Amanda: Was it his sole decision to work abroad? Did he consult with you? Did you make that decision together or he decided on his own and let you know?

Rama: He consulted with me and went off abroad after we discussed and decided.

Amanda: What motivated you to decide your husband to go overseas to work? Why not other works in Nepal?

Rama: Income from the shop was very little, not as expected or sufficient enough. It is difficult to get a job and if you get one, the salary or wage for work is very little is Nepal. So, higher income in short period of time motivated us to make the decision for him to go abroad for work.

Amanda: Why security work? Why not coffee shop, restaurant, hotel, driver or construction work? What attracted you to let him go for security work?

Rama: He had previously worked as a security worker for five years in Dubai. He invested his earning in the shop here after he returned, but it was not successful. So we made up our mind for him to go abroad for work. He had experience in and certificates on security work and so it was easier and comfortable for him to go for the same.

Amanda: Did he have any security background, like police or army, before he went to security work in Dubai earlier? Why he initially chose the security industry?

Rama: I do not know much about the initial work prior to my marriage. I was married when he returned from Dubai. He went to security for the recent one to Qatar as he was selected for that job and got visa.

Brother: He was neither in police nor in army previously.

Amanda: Do you know much about the work he does? What is the name of the company he is working with? What is his day’s work like inside or outside?

Rama: He works inside a shooting spot. Earlier he was in a college but now placed recently. He works for the Qatar Foundation, which is good.

Amanda: How often do you communicate with him; everyday or once a couple of days?

Rama: We communicate daily.

Amanda: What sort of things do you talk about?

Rama: We talk about general things; like how you are, how children are, what is going on in work or at home, how he/she is surviving, etc.

Amanda: Do you feel he is happy with the work he does? Or there are times when he gets really frustrated or down because he misses his family? Do you think he shares with you everything or hides being low in overseas?

Rama: Yes, I feel he is happy there. He is working inside at a cool place not outside under the hot sun. I believe he shares everything with me.

Amanda: Do you find difficult when he is away? You have a pretty good support base, but are there times you find difficult him being absent?

Rama: Yes, sometimes I feel missing something, I feel sad to be living apart. But you can not change the situation. We need to earn to improve our financial condition. I have to soothe myself.

Amanda: Do you share with him about those moments you miss him? Or do you keep that to yourself?

Rama: No, I do not share, but keep it to myself. I do not want to stress him.

Amanda: How many children do you have?

Rama: Only one. The other children are my elder sister’s, who is also a migrant worker.

Amanda: A true migrant family. How many migrants are there in this family?

Rama: This brother recently returned and all the rest are working abroad.

Amanda: Do you plan to go overseas again, back to Saudi?

Brother: I went to Qatar the first time for 19 months. Then I went to Saudi for 25 months. And now I am back here.

Amanda: Do you want to go back overseas again?

Rama: No, I don’t. It’s very hard to work there.

Amanda: What work did you do overseas?

Rama: I was a salesman in Qatar and a supervisor at a construction company in Saudi Arab, where I worked inside the New Doha International Airport.

Amanda: How do you teach your child including your sister’s children to know and love their father and/or mother respectively when they are physically absent?

Rama: The children talk with him/her over the phone through video calls and know their father/mother. They recall and remember many things about father/mother. We also remind them regularly of their mom/dad.

Amanda: What kind of role do you expect of your husband as a father to play? What sort of role does he play over Skype? Does it include disciplinary role? Do you raise your son with that kind of understanding of why his father is as well?

Rama: He is not strict on the child. He says the child is still young. He reminds him not to be naughty and obey me. He does not scold him and never beat him when he was at home.

Amanda: What about your sister talking to her daughters? Does she scold them?

Rama: No, she never scolds the children. She tells them to obey grandma’s instructions and be nice girls; but they make fun of her. The follow their mom’s only one instruction - to abide by grandma’s orders - but do no heed to other instructions. They are not serious in discussions with their mom, but just tease her.

Brother: They get instructions, guidance and discipline from their mother to which they just pretend to readily accept but would not put those into practice. They are not afraid of their mom.

Amanda: Who is the disciplinarian then?

Brother: I am the discipline man for the children. However, the small boy is very young and clings to his grandma for playing, eating, sleeping, etc. and he is not very naughty yet. He seeks for his mother when he needs milk.

Amanda: Growing up small babies are grandmas’ job. That makes sense.

Do you want to have more children?

Rama: No, I do not. One is enough.

Amanda: Because this family is a planet household, when your husband sends money, who is in-charge of managing it? There are respectable elders too in the family. Who makes decisions on what to spend the money he sends home?

Rama: I make the decisions.

Amanda: Do you consult with any other family members? Do you have expectations to spend? Can you do as you wish without consulting Khagendra?

Rama: Yes, first I consult with Khagendra, my husband. I never spend the money without his advice.

Amanda: Are you guys able to save any money he sends home or is it just enough to cover your expenses?

Rama: Yes, I have saved some money from what he sends home. I have bought a small piece of land and have been able to save some for our future too.

Amanda: Have you discussed how long he is going to work overseas? How many years? Have you discussed end-plans on what to do when he comes back? Or work there as long as he can?

Rama: Tentatively, I expect him to work for 10 years abroad. We need to build our own house and start some business here for our future.

Amanda: You got to see him once every two years?

Rama: Yes, he comes on leave one time in every two years.

Amanda: Has he come from Qatar yet? Has he done his second year and come home? How long has he been to Qatar?

Rama: Its18 months, so he will be coming pretty soon.

Amanda: Do you have special plans to welcome him? Either go on a little trip or cook him a big feast? What special plans do you have for his home coming?

Rama: Yes, we plan to visit Pokhara and other places. Of course, the special cooking, eating, drinking and merry-making go continuously not only once in a blue moon, but during the entire leave period.

Amanda: How did you pick the recruitment company because there are 785 Community organizations registered in Nepal?

Brother: Actually, we just follow the demand. Many people are looking for good job with plenty of blood. Maximum people are looking for special for job. They do not care for good/bad overseas companies. There are some little bit good overseas companies. It is different if the recruiting organizations try to take interviews; they take up demands of good/famous multinational companies only. There are big crowds gathered at those companies for recruitment during selection process. People aspiring to go overseas do not want to go through those institutions surrounded by huge crowds and long 4-5 interviews. Usual practice is to look for a good job, rather than this or that, good or bad recruitment agencies.

Amanda: How did you pick the manpower more streamlined to job, so you need not go through all the long process?

Rama: We studied through newspaper, television and radio advertisements.

Brother: We usually look for positions and work/job specifications. Normally we look for nice job whether we have skill/experience or do not.

Amanda: How did you navigate all these manpower companies? How did you pick the one out of the multitude?

Rama: When he found the advertisement, he identified the job suiting his skills/experience and he contacted the manpower companies by visiting Kathmandu and chose himself. I do not have good idea about how he did it.

Brother: I also did the same thing.

Amanda: You hear a lot of stories of people being tricked; people paying lot of money and not getting job while the manpower providers disappear. And you also hear people saying ‘retail job’, but as they get to their destination country they are shoved to another low job. Likewise, people say the manpower companies/brokers help the aspiring migrants to forge documents and are put into jails. These risks are associated with overseas recruitment; so given these risks, how do you navigate that? How can you feel confident that a manpower provider would not do that to you?

Brother: The liaison with the manpower provider company is the key. The people from remote areas have no knowledge and idea and are cheated easily by brokers/agents. They just want to go abroad; they even give no care to the type of work or salary. They are illiterate or have very little education and skills/experience, they try to go abroad a lot but do not get visa. Therefore their intent is to anyhow go overseas. Families also are forcing youths to go abroad imitating their relatives or neighbors if s/he is not able to find a job in the country. Hence, the people with less education and unaware/uninformed of the process are more susceptible to risks in foreign employment. Persons with good literacy skills and smart even communicate with their friends and/or relatives abroad about the company hiring them or their would-be employer and become well informed.

Amanda: What sort of fees, e.g. medical, passport, visa, documentation, processing, recruitment and overheads were levied including many times domestic travel for your husband to go overseas?

Rama: He paid NRs. 30,000 at first and after interview and selection he handed over the passport to the manpower company. It cost him NRs. 60,000 including travel and accommodation during the process within Nepal.

Amanda: Did the manpower company explain why the 30,000 was charged for? Some people more than 100,000 for going abroad. What that fee goes for? Overheads or what?

Rama: No, they did not explain the details. My husband contacted directly the recruitment company at Kathmandu and paid less. He would be charged more if he had gone through a local broker or agent.

Mom: We hear that many poor people are cheated and swindled by local brokers, agents and manpower companies.

Brother: The manpower or recruitment companies never show the breakdown of the fees they take.

Amanda: I have heard people say that they prefer to pay the local level agents so that they can hold them accountable if something goes wrong, although they charge more. Have you heard that as well?

Brother: Yes, it’s true. If they do not get any job the local brokers are forced to refund the money they have taken. It’s something like a deposit or guarantee if they are not successful going abroad.

Amanda: Job was important for him when your husband went overseas the first time. Was the country important too? Did you guys research a little about the country or just the job?

Brother: Most Nepalese prefer at most for Dubai or Qatar, and then Kuwait because we want freedom and are fun-lovers, and these countries are relatively free. Only those who go for job’s sake go to Saudi and other gulf countries, which are strict. These are based on my experience.

Rama: He had gone to Dubai for the first time and selected Qatar knowing it also is free.

Amanda: That makes sense. /some interviewees said that they had been working for two years in Doha but had seen very little of it. They just went from labor camp to work and back, that was how they lived there and was very disappointing.

There are a lot of researches on migrant families that highlight high rate of divorce and the trend of higher family breakdown. There are problems within families which tend to frictions, and domestic violence. This is because of physical absence of one of the partners for long time after marriage. Is divorce common for migrant families? Or is it something that worries you? Are you pretty secure of your marriage?

Rama: That depends on the individual.

Brother: What you said also is true. There are many cases when the wives have disappeared with the money the migrant worker sent.

Amanda: Do you think domestic violence is common in Nepal? What are the reasons?

Brother: Most parents and elder family members of the migrant worker are uneducated. They demand money at first in every call they make or he makes from abroad, instead of inquiring of his health and work conditions. That frustrates them. Many youngsters are not marrying the girls arranged by their parents, and domestic violence could break out if the parents do not like the love-married bride or if she is from ‘lower caste’. In other cases, if the migrant worker sends money to her, the families insist on her to ask him not to send money to her. Thus friction starts leading to domestic and other forms of violence.

Amanda: Are you married? Was that arranged?

Brother: Yes, I am married and it was love marriage.

Interpreter: Parents, family members and relatives including neighbors look at the caste of the spouse in the love marriages; it will be acceptable if the caste is similar.

Amanda: For you, how do you maintain strong marriage with your husband overseas? What is important in being a good wife and mother when your husband is away, abroad?

Rama: The attributes of a good wife and mother of a migrant worker are should be practical, use and manage the money he sends properly, be kind to his family members, respect and understand each other, behave nicely to relatives and neighbors, and take good care of children.

Amanda: What sort of expectations do you have of your husband, other than money, as a husband and father?

Rama: Maintain good understanding, be faithful and honest, and take care of his health and safety.

Amanda: What do you do at home? How do you busy your day?

Rama: I perform domestic chores and give most of my time to the children.

Amanda: Do you have any aspirations or dreams beyond mother or wife; like go to university/college, a job, be a nurse or travel?

Rama: Nothing yet. I want to take good care of the child and spend time with family. I want to be a full time house-wife.

Amanda: With the money your husband is able to send home, have you noticed the difference as a family, the things you do now with the money from his overseas job? Did you do improvements in the house or buy a new TV or what new things you were able to do with that money?

Rama: Yes, I spend some in the house and a little bit for the children; the rest, most of it, goes to saving.

Amanda: What do you plan to do with that saving?

Rama: We want to build a new house.

Amanda: In terms of your daughter, what is most important for your daughter?

Rama: I want to provide her better and higher education. I want to see her go abroad for studies and get good government job.

Amanda: What do you think is the best and worst thing of being a migrant worker?

Rama: The best thing primarily is obviously money and the social status, while the worst thing is his long absence in our prime time of life, missing him.

Amanda: Why do you decide no more work abroad? What was the reason for that?

Brother: I was in Saudi. I had to work for almost 16 hours a day. I can’t explain how I endured that and passed the time. I had to stand up during the work. I had no time to rest and sit down, except the 10 minutes in which I had to do everything that included eating, sitting and going to wash-room. That was physically demanding. They treated us as if we were animals, not human beings. They used very abusive languages to us. I faced many problems and frustrated too, because I was not well. I used to ponder over a question: How much will I earn in such an inhuman situation? Do I need to spend my youth, my life just for NRs. 50,000? It is certain I will not be able to earn that much if I go and work in my country, but I will be living happily with my family leading a dignified life. I will be eating, sharing, loving, and caring together with my family. So, I decided to put a ‘full stop’ going abroad.

Amanda: What are you doing in Nepal now?

Brother: I am doing a business. I have a ‘shoe palace’. It is a retail shop. I am doing well. Let’s see what is in my future. But I am happy now.

End of transcription