

**Foreign Employment Issues in Contemporary Nepali Paintings**Jyoti Prakash B.K. ^{#*}[#]Central Department of Fine Arts, Tribhuvan University.^{*}Corresponding Author: artistjyotiprakash@gmail.com**Citation:** B.K., J. P. (2025). Foreign Employment Issues in Contemporary Nepali Paintings. *Journal of Fine Arts Campus*, 7(2). 30-38.<https://doi.org/10.3126/jfac.v7i2.98213>**Abstract**

Contemporary Nepali artwork shows the social realities, thinking, and living conditions of people. Artists show the inner emotional and mental states of their subjects, which are shaped by the surrounding social environment. These works do more than just record socio-political events; they give a critical understanding of the context by using visual images and colors to explain social changes. This article explores the emergence and elaboration of foreign employment as a central theme in contemporary Nepali painting. Over the once three decades, Nepal has witnessed a mass outpour of its pool to foreign countries, particularly in the Gulf and Southeast Asia. This socio- profitable miracle has not only converted pastoral communities and public identity but has also set up important visual expression. Art embraces the energy to form society with the aid of using changing public opinion and supporting participating values, it also allows reports to be communicated throughout special ages and societies. Art also serves as imaged image of its time, bringing essential social troubles to front. There's a deep relationship between art and society. Indeed, though an artist needs insulation to create, they remain connected to society. At last, the artist is told by social activities, and their creativity is shaped by those experiences. When an artist notices unique characteristics in the environment, he/she incorporates the characteristics into an artwork. On the other hand, when they face negative trends, they use their creative works to condemn social problems and show the loss of community value. Contemporary artworks from Nepal interact with the nation's socio- financial concerns related with foreign employments issues. This study uses qualitative methods for interpretation and analysis because the interpretation may vary from viewer to viewer.

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Keywords: Nepali contemporary art, Social Issues, remittance economy, foreign employment
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Introduction

Foreign employment has come one of the most defining social marvels in contemporary Nepal. According to the International Labor Organization, nearly one- third of Nepali homes depend on remittances from migratory labor, especially from the Gulf countries, Malaysia, and other global destinations. While migration sustains the public frugality, it also creates deep social, emotional, and artistic dislocations. These realities have come a central subject for contemporary Nepali artists, who create contemporary paintings and visual art as a medium to question, recite, and emblemize the proficiency of migration.

Contemporary Nepali artworks on social issues do lesser than report a miracle. It builds a collaborative emotional library. It offers shape to the silent pressure of parents, the exploited frame of the worker, and the wearied identification of the diaspora child. In doing so, it plays a vital countrywide purification, guarding up a reflection to a society converted



via means of transnational forces. This paper explores how Nepali contemporary paintings reflect issues of migration or foreign employment, family separation, profitable aspiration and exploitation. Identity relegation and internal pastoral- to-civic migration through emblematic forms and artistic expression. Migration, both internal and transnational, is a defining reality of ultramodern Nepal. It shapes frugality, redefines family structures, and creates a complex web of social issues. Nepali contemporary artists have forcefully responded to this occurrence using their white canvas to move beyond statistics and explore the profound mortal feelings, social dislocations, and artistic shifts caused by foreign employment issues.

Research Methodology

This research is based on qualitative research techniques focused on the interpretive evaluation of artistic endeavors and explanation of artworks which are related to foreign employments. Interview of the artist and art critics has been taken as primary data sources and books and articles are the secondary sources. Artist's studio has been visited to view artistic endeavors. Paintings were selected based on their direct participants with issues of foreign employment either through subject matter, symbols, or artists' own statements. This research design is mainly useful for examining how foreign employment issues are represented and communicated to society through contemporary issue-based paintings.

Family Separation and Emotional Loss

Nepali modern paintings illustrate social and political themes in profusion, especially paintings related to foreign employment, which are created by only a few painters. Art is the mirror of society. Nepali contemporary artists try to reflect the reality of society through the combination of colors. Art not only always follows the direction of society, but it also helps society to guide the path of progress (Malla, 2007, p. 9). Some contemporary paintings are found to present the dignity of workers in a holistic manner. One can also see paintings that make one feel that the value of the sweat and blood of workers is being used for the benefit of humanity and the country. Nepali painters have created paintings that reflect the country's situation and the unbearable suffering of unemployment faced by the people. Senior painter Lainsingh Bangdil's painting titled Muna Madan powerfully portrays the painful lifestyle of the poor Nepali people and the separation of Muna Madan. Young painter Mek Limbu has also used the themes of foreign employment in his paintings. Nepali modern paintings can be seen to clearly depict the reality of poor and marginalized Nepalis. Painters have also tried to portray the pain and questions of Nepali women in their paintings (Sharma, 2021, p. 39). The most affecting representation of migration in Nepali contemporary paintings is family separation. Painters frequently depict mother, wife and children left behind. This emotional split is not just particular but also artistic. Artists show how communities lose cohesion when utmost of their youth leave.

A major theme is the exploitation of Nepali labor abroad. Numerous contemporary paintings illustrate workers with helmets, safety jackets, or construction tools, pressing their places in erecting foreign metropolises while remaining unnoticeable and underrated. In some paintings figures are faceless, emblemizing lack of identity and vulnerability.

This aligns with Bishwo Raj Parajuli's analysis where subaltern subjects' migratory sloggers, dogfaces, or revolutionists are represented as agents of history but also victims of structural inequalities (Gorkha Dogfaces and Ex-Rebels in paintings, 2019). Nepalese Killed



in Iraq a Documentary of Memories, a film by artist Nhooja Tuladhar, tells the story of the twelve Nepalis who were killed by Iraqi zealots in 2004 and the political and spiritual fermentation that followed their terrible demise. Still, during the once ten times, migration has increased dramatically on a global scale. The Foreign Employment Promotion Board (FEPB) of Nepal claims that over 1,700 Nepalis leave the country every day and return their earnings back to the houses they left behind. The World Bank claims that remittances to Nepal are among the highest in the world and account for about thirty percent of the country's GDP. Remittances sent by migrants have improved living circumstances and reduced poverty in migrant households (Tuladhar, 2019, p. 21).

Migration is undoubtedly regarded as one of the paradoxes since young people's departure is causing a demographic imbalance that has hindered Nepal's efforts to better its socioeconomic situation. In a nation where more than 60% of the population works in agriculture, the area is currently devoid of young men and women, farms are literally abandoned, and food insecurity is a serious concern (Sherpa, 2010, p. 8). In addition, migration raises issues of identity and belonging. In Nepali art, migratory workers are constantly shown as shadowy people tromping through foreign communities, pressing their invisibility. Sharma emphasizes in his exploration Nepali artists constantly immolate artistic durability to expose how global influences change identity through irony and parody. In addition to working abroad, the biggest issue in Nepali art is internal migration from pastoral to civic areas (Sharma, 2021, p. 8).

Many rural households have moved to Kathmandu due to its rapid urbanization, which has resulted in overpopulation, pollution, and cultural displacement. One of the most moving themes is this one. The homes and households left behind are portrayed by artists. Elderly parents are frequently shown in paintings sitting in courtyards, their eyes tired and distant. Unused tools, vacant seats, or pictures of missing spouses and sons are utilized to demonstrate a room. Silence, large empty expanses, and a tangible sense of waiting are all highlighted in the composition. The women who control families on their own are the focus of a sizable subtopic. Effective collections on this have been made by artists such as Man Gurung and Hitman Gurung. Their paintings convey a complex mixture of tenacity, grief, and resolve (Malla, 2007, p. 3).

In 2004, a million Nepalese labored abroad (World Bank 2004) among 1996 and 2004 remittance inflows soared from 3% of GDP (US\$ 203 million) to 12% of GDP (US\$ 794 million), specially pushed via way of means of labor migration to the Gulf and Southeast Asia, in which income is a lot better than in India. The share of families receiving remittances additionally improved from 24% to 32%. The observer confirmed that nearly 1/2 of all hill families interviewed obtained remittances, and those represented nearly 35% in their income. According to the Nepal Rastra Bank, remittances rose via way of means of 42.5% in 2007/08, and the ratio of remittances to GDP improved to 17.4%. The general remittance influx improved via means of 67% at some point in the first 7 months of the monetary year 2008/09, no matter the worldwide economic disaster and consequent downsizing of industries abroad. The maximum influx of remittances has been to the Eastern Development Region, accompanied via way of means of the Central, Western, and, finally, Far Western, and Mid-Western Development Regions. The Far Western and Mid-Western Development Regions, in which migration is a prime supply of livelihood that has been practiced for generations, obtained the biggest quantity of remittances from India (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2009).

Interpretation of foreign employment issue some painting by some artists:**Hari Prasad Sharma**

In this painting, artist Hari Prasad Sharma created a realistic scene of the young painter and sculptor Araniko being bid farewell by his family and society as he leaves for Tibet. The pathetic sentiment of the artist Araniko as he leaves for the migration carrying his artistic materials can also be clearly felt. The painting depicts the farewell according to the traditions of the Newari community and the emotional aspect of the entire society being shaken by the farewell. Araniko's son tries to stop him not go to abroad. His mother is crying and leaning against the door and the father, patting his shoulder and assuring his son that he can spread his art around the world, can be clearly seen. The scene in the painting where the security personnel of the then Patan state are about to send gifts to the Tibetan king is also captivating. This painting is created in a realistic alien style, the unwavering love of a young son, the love of the entire society and the trust of the parents can be clearly seen. This painting is results of Sharma's fervent quest in the realms of architectonic and human relationships. Sharma's paintings portray sense of space, structure and performance. Sharma's strength as an artist in his depiction of oil colors in the People's expressions of awe, admire, and exasperation are captured in the fine shapes, lines and color combinations. He creates ambience of hope, love and confidence through such tonal variations of. At that time, one can feel that the trend of Nepali youth going abroad for employment in some way or the other had begun.



Araniko's Departure in China, 2057, Oil on Canvas

Lain Sigh Bangdel

This painting titled Muna Madan created by senior painter Lain Singh Bangdel, he has expressively depicted the compulsion of Nepali youth to go abroad for employment during that time. This painting was created based on the tremendous poem Muna Madan by the great poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota. Madan is seen trying to ease the pain of being forced to leave the country by placing his hand on his casket, while Muna is wiping away the gashes of separation with both hands, supporting herself with her hands. Both Muna and Madan are in a veritably sad and emotional state,



Muna-Madan, 1955, Gouache on Canvas

while the implements in the room are also empty. This has clearly tried to reflect Madan's poverty at that time. Madan's clothes are also torn, which further makes it clear that Madan has no choice but to go to the foreign employment. This modern painting is influenced by Picasso's Blue Period; it can be felt that painter Bandel has used sad color psychology with great brush strokes. Bandel try to juxtapose of current Nepali society and foreign employment issue through the creative way. Regarding this contemporary painting, Yama Prasad Sharma (personal communication, April 15, 2025) says that the psychology of colors used by Bandel and the poverty of the society of the time can be felt very close. The two empty vessels used in this area seem to be trying to figuratively present the love between the poverty of society and the love between the two. Art critic Mukesh Malla's (personal communication, May 14, 2025) analysis on this painting the natural scene, unnatural posture in Lain Singh Bangdel's Muna-Madan painting, focuses more on the depiction of the situation as being melted by the artist's own imagination than on reality. The references that describe the situation are more visible in the painting than in the expression of emotions. In reality, it is more of a reflection of the adverse environment caused by his wife than going abroad. Even the bowed head in the painting reflects the feelings of determination and leaving. The determination seen in his gestures shows that he is not going abroad just to earn money. It seems that he also has a desire. Muna, on the other hand, looks sad and lonely in the situation of being alone. This is also a reflection of the thinking and situation of women in the society of that time. It depicts the situation that women had to face at that time. She does not want to send her husband abroad at all. It seems that the objects and dark color tones are used to show the situation of the village and poverty. Adjusting Nepali costumes, the environment of the village, and one's own original structure is also a stylistic fusion of the world and Nepali.

Mekh Limbu

Through this digital art, young artist Mekh Limbu has depicted thousands of Nepali fathers forced to work in extremely dangerous jobs abroad, using their own father's passport to depict people doing dangerous construction work. The painter Limbu's digital art of his father doing risky work on scaffolding, and his attempt to portray life as not only risky but also an open prison, is clear. Using his own father's passport as a representative, the fathers of millions of Nepali youths have artistically presented the current Nepali society, where they are forced to live abroad. In this digital art, the main theme is the passport photo, while the three photos inside the passport and the three workers on the scaffolding clearly show the intimate relationship between them, or the hardships their own father endured in the province, which is even harder than prison life. In today's Nepali



***My Father in DOHA QATAR since 23 Year,
2012, Digital Art***

society, a passport is more a symbol of one's identity than a person's suitability for risky work. Mukesh Malla (personal communication, May 14, 2025) says his art seems to capture the suffering of a father working hard in the scorching heat of Qatar, and the imagination of a son living at home. In the son's imagination, the father earns money with great difficulty. He tries to save himself. He takes care of his children who are living abroad. This is what a son who lives at home thinks about. It is true that this situation has been created by the situation here. Youth indirectly reflects the son's passion and dissatisfaction through art. The son himself is strong and ready. He has courage. He is also energetic. However, it is also a depiction of a situation where he is unable to do anything. This painting, which looks ordinary and natural on the outside, is also a painting that contains a serious concept inside. The passport has become a document with thousands of questions within its limitations for Nepalis. Regarding this digital art, art critic Ramesh Khanal (personal communication, August 19, 2025) says that the painting created by Mekh Limbu is always of a nature to highlight Nepali society and spread awareness, and this painting presents foreign employment in a very profound way. Which appears to be using scaffolding as prison bars, he is trying to show through art the story of millions of Nepalis who have gone abroad for employment and are forced to live a difficult life similar to prison life.

Hitman Gurung

This contemporary painting is created by young artist Hitman Gurung is also related to the contemporary Nepali issue of foreign employment. This painting, which has the power to directly question the 10-year armed people's war waged by the Maoist Party in Nepali politics, depicts the situation and the compulsion of the then young guerrilla fighters to sweat in the scorching sun of the Gulf. The village is the same, the surroundings are the same, but the clothes are different, the life is different, the mind is different, the history is different, the reality is different, the transformation is different in Nepal, the real reality, the artist Hitman Gurung has presented himself as a representative of the entire guerrilla movement in this contemporary painting that carries hundreds of such questions. In one picture, a man is wearing a guerrilla uniform with a gun in his hand and a star-embellished scarf on his head, while in the other side he is wearing the uniform of a worker working in the Gulf countries. The red star on the fighter's head seems to be questioning the helmet on the worker's head. In this picture, revolutionary hands that have fired hundreds of times in war are seen, while in the other picture, decent hands are seen. Same face but different clothes: One was a dream, the other was reality. Art Critics Mukesh Malla writes the issue of migration is depicted with the current situation and as a reaction to it. In a situation where there is no food, it reflects the common people (like me or myself) going to the Gulf and trying to survive by facing any situation. On the other hand, it is also a preparation to change the situation by rebelling. In this way, the artist seems to be trying to present the inner conflict within the mind. It depicts the situation where one has to struggle to bring about a change in the situation that one seeks



Untitled. 2010. Acrylic on Canvas

or can live in harmony, or the state of being in a state of doubt as to how one can live by oneself without going to the other side. The picture woven in the surrealist form seems to be more focused on the concept than on emotion or expression in terms of structure. This is also the highest example of postmodern art (Malla, 2006, p. 46).

About this painting Sharma writes, an artist fined himself unemployed. In the end, he departs to become a migrant worker in a Gulf nation. This story raises important questions: What became his true motivation for rebellion? Who suggested that he take up arms? Is it obvious that the revolution was successful? The artwork invites a reflected picture in this bitter irony through the contrasted visual of those situations (Sharma, 2021, p. 115).

Man Gurung

In this masterpiece young artist Man Gurung, it can be clearly seen that the men of the country have gone abroad for foreign employment, leaving only women, mothers and sisters in the village. In the background of this painting, the logos of remittance companies that have been opened to send money to the country in exchange for labor from all over the world are placed, those who dream of a golden or colorful future. Usually, the foreground is colorful and the background is less colorful, but in this painting Man Gurung tried to experiment exact opposite has been used. In masterpiece, one can clearly feel the absence of family in the hearts of all the characters, while in the hearts of each child, the pain of their father being abroad, the loneliness, and the desperation seen in taking photos, the painful feeling of not being with their father within the proximity of their mother, can be clearly seen. Each face seems to be a blend of the current reality of Nepal and its golden future. A closer look at this picture will make the viewer wonder if remittances can bring smiles to the faces of these children. Regarding this painting, art critic Madan Chitrakar (personal communication, June 23, 2025) says that the reality of society becoming colorless due to foreign employment, the dream of buying happiness with money, and the question of whether nature is possible without men can be found in this painting.

Gurung's artwork shows the problems of dependency and the growing remittance culture. They also show current changes and the changing faces of villages. The paintings tell stories of dependency and displacement, separation and pain, and confusion and insecurity, which have become common in the present time.

A close look at Gurung's painting shows the effects of remittance culture on the Gurung community of Korla village. Easy money has led many people to leave traditional work and move to cities. Because of this, the community has become dependent on market goods instead of being self-reliant. The woman in the painting represents this struggle between cultural roots and the new life shaped by remittance income. Although she is surrounded by the bright signs of remittance companies, she still wears traditional clothes.



Lost in Transition, 2021, #24 Oil & Acrylic on Canvas,



Her face shows struggle, confusion, and loneliness. The dark colors highlight the difficulties of her situation. She represents modern Nepali society (Lama, 2024, p. 6).

Mukesh Malla (personal communication, May 14, 2025) argues on this painting. The combination of women and children is a depiction of the situation of the future if their husbands or sons (in the case of men) do not go abroad to earn money. It is also a simple depiction of the situation where they are unable to earn money on their own. Or their pictures are seen as an acceptance of the status quo or as a reflection of the acceptance given in a simple and easy way by themselves, the same culture, the same customs and the same way. There is no rebellion. There is no sorrow or dissatisfaction. It depicts a situation where one is stuck in faith in fate and lives with the interpretation. There is no sign of any change in the thinking of the village women. The direct reflection of these and similar situations is the specialty of his paintings.

Conclusion

Nepali contemporary paintings serve as a vital social attestation and a form of critical commentary on migration. It gives a mortal face to a public extremity, landing the grief, adaptability, irony, and complex feelings that define the experience for millions of Nepali people. Contemporary Nepali painting questions the prevailing perception that foreign employment is presented as a dream of prosperity. Artists break this illusion by using distorted shapes, incongruous combinations, and fragmented structures. A key feature of these paintings is their exposure of the hidden suffering, exploitation, and identity crisis behind outwardly visible economic prosperity. Most importantly, these paintings are not just reflections of reality, they are also a means of resistance. The artists challenge the tendency of the state and society to institutionalize the human value of foreign employment, often presenting it as an indispensable means of development. Finally, in contemporary Nepali painting, foreign employment emerges as a powerful analytical medium that raises profound questions about identity relations and the concept of the nation. Here, the migrant is not just an economic figure but a symbol, a symbol that represents hope and constraint, progress and dependence, and the complex relationship between home and abroad. Nepali artwork acts as a mirror to society, showing ways to see social structures, individual artists, and wider system issues. Beyond simple reflection, many artworks actively engage with social situations and creatively address them through visual language, giving clear artistic social criticism.

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