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Transnational Nepalis' Pursuit of the American Dream in Sirjana Sharma's *Golden Gate*

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Abstract
This study examines the pursuit of the American Dream by Nepali immigrants, with a particular focus on transnational Nepalis, in Sirjana Sharma's *Golden Gate*. It explores their passion to cross borders and achieve freedom and prosperity, drawing on key scholarly works, including Susan Hangen's analysis of transnational politics in Nepali organizations, Bandita Sijapati's research on Nepali transmigrants, and Arun R. Joshi et al.'s study on Nepali migrants' aspirations in America. The analysis also garners support from Tristen Brusle's insights into migrants' motivation behind going abroad and Paul Jay's *Global Matters*, which provide a framework for understanding the socio-political, economic, and cultural push factors behind Nepalis' migration. Centering on the protagonist Mahima's adolescent dream of migrating abroad, the paper is substantiated by real-world narratives of Nepali migrants' experiences in their "dream" country. The study investigates the temptation of the United States, mainly made possible by the DV Lottery program, and the ambivalence migrants experience due to the stark contrast between their homeland and the foreign environment. Drawing on evidence from the novel, it concludes that success in the "dream" country is possible only at the cost of emotional detachment from loved ones, cultural alienation, and numerous other challenges to adopt to a completely new milieu.
Keywords: Ambivalence, American Dream, loss, success, transnational Nepalis

Introduction

Sirjana Sharma's *Golden Gate*, a narrative of Nepalis' passion for going abroad, primarily deals with the turmoil of a Nepali immigrant in the United States of America. A Diversity Visa Lottery winner, the protagonist, Mahima, struggles hard to cope with a completely new setting. Mahima expresses her desire to go abroad since her adolescence. At college, Mahima's friends usually "talked about America's DV, Australia and Canada's PR" and "my mind got tantalized to hear such words like America, Australia and Canada" as "my life would be meaningful if I reached these places" (15). Like most of her peers, Mahima "started dreaming about reaching the land of opportunities," where her "life would

transform into something extraordinary" (15). She then "filled up the DV Lottery form" and "frequently dreamt of winning it" (15).

The novelist sketches the common anxiety and sense of insecurity among the youths in Nepal in the backdrop of the decade-long Maoist insurgency. This situation fuels Nepali youths' desire to leave Nepal and go anywhere possible, and if it was America, what would they desire more! A *Nepali Times* article foregrounds this situation thus: "Since the end of the decade-long conflict in 2006, young men from almost every family in some villages have smuggled themselves to America," often facing severe risks like deportation and debt." Since America is not everyone's cup of tea, many youths tried their luck in the Gulf region and many of them flew to Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman since the beginning of the insurgency. India has been a common destination for many Nepalis, and the new destinations as the labor market opened up further avenues for the youths to escape intimidation and uncertainty. Joshi, Pradhan, and Shrestha further elaborate, "Career development and better quality of life are significant factors alongside economic considerations such as better employment opportunities abroad and limited job prospects in Nepal" (47), reinforcing the economic and social push factors driving migration.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis to examine the portrayal of Nepali immigrants' pursuit of the American Dream in Sharma's *Golden Gate*, focusing on the protagonist Mahima's transnational experiences. Primarily through close reading, the analysis identifies transnational encounters, cultural alienation, and emotional ambivalence in the Nepali migrants epitomized by the protagonist of the novel. To enrich the exploration of the issue, this study derives ideas from some pragmatic researches on Nepali migrants in the USA like those of Arun R. Joshi, Vibhav Pradhan, and Ruzel Shrestha who note, "The predominant migration motivations include educational opportunities, improved living standards, and job prospects," highlighting the allure of the U.S. as a land of opportunity (Joshi et al. XIII); Bandita Sijapati's explanation of this common mentality in migration aspirations who notes, "the poor state of higher education in Nepal; the prestige of a foreign degree; availability of funding opportunities, particularly in the USA; . . . social constraints; and political instability in Nepal" (252-53); Susan Hangen's analysis of transnational politics; and Tristan Brusle's finding "those who wish to go abroad are motivated by the novelty of *bidesh"* as they are driven by "the idea of discovering a foreign land and of seeing with their own eyes" what abroad is like. For some theoretical backup, this study garners support from Paul Jay's *Global Matters* in which he argues "migration is not just an economic act but a cultural and political one, shaped by global networks that redefine belonging and opportunity" (25), and analyzes the novel to explore how globalized aspirations fuel Mahima's dream.

Nepalis' Transnational Journey to the USA

Though Nepalis have a long history of migration to many other countries such as India, Burma, Bhutan, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom, their migration to the USA is not that long. After Nepal started its diplomatic relations with the US in 1947, the US embassy in Nepal was opened in 1959. Even after the beginning of the diplomatic ties, the rate of immigrants from Nepal remained pretty low until the Immigration Act of 1990 established the current and permanent Diversity Visa program with 55,000 immigrant visas being available in an annual lottery. This policy on the one hand and Nepal's political unrest on the other contributed to Nepalis' migration to the US. In this context, Susan Hangen, in "Transnational Politics in Nepali Organizations in New York," writes:

The US stands as one of the most desirable destinations for Nepalis seeking to

> migrate abroad. Fewer Nepalis migrate to the USA than to the Gulf region, Southeast Asian countries, or the UK, primarily because of restrictive immigration policies. Despite this, Nepalis have migrated to the US in increasing numbers during the past decade. . . . According to the 2010 US Census, there are 59,490 Nepalis in the United States . . . . Immigration data from the US government suggest that the population of Nepalis is probably higher than the 2010 census figure: between 2006 and 2010, a total of 87,890 Nepali citizens entered the United States on non-immigrant visas, primarily on tourist or student visas. (234).

As stated by Hangen here, the number of Nepali migrants to the United States has increased in recent decades. From DV Lottery winners to students and tourists, Nepalis have made America one of the most desirable destinations, or a 'dream' country. The actual number of Nepalis living in the USA, however, has risen to 315,980 in recent years according to the South Asian Resource Center and Setopati's research, approximately 30,666 being DV Lottery winners, and it has been increasing further naturally because of the growing number of DV lottery winner migrants every year. Joshi, Pradhan, and Shrestha highlight the economic impact of this migration, noting, "Remittances constitute a substantial contribution from diaspora, with 59.6% sending money back to Nepal, and they are mostly higher-income groups" (XIII), illustrating how economic contributions sustain transnational ties. In *Adhikaar,* its Executive Director, Luna Ranjit, questions this temptation as: "What is the American Dream for Nepali people? Is it a myth or a reality? For the few who actually receive a visa, is the U.S.A. what they dreamt it would be?"

Mahima's American Dream and Her Struggles

In *Golden Gate*, Mahima, like most of the Nepali youths, knows no boundaries of her happiness to learn about winning DV Lottery. "After confirming my name in the list of DV Lottery winners, I hurried to the cyber opposite my house" and "telephoned my husband" in his office (Sharma 26). She cannot wait for her husband to arrive home and informs him, saying "Baba, we'll be able to talk to people around us holding our head high" as "I have won the DV Lottery" (26). Pranaya, her husband, equally ecstatic, replies, "God, it's all your vouchsafe!" and starts heaving praise on his wife, saying "Mahima, you really are a good omen for me" as "after getting married with you, I've been achieving success one after another" (26). He credits his wife for job promotion, salary increment, giving two children like 'Laxmi and Narayan', and, all in all, for making his dream of going to the USA come true. Paul Jay complements this perspective, noting that "the American Dream is a globalized narrative, promising upward mobility but often clashing with cultural dislocation and economic precarity" (87), foreshadowing Mahima's later struggles.

In Sharma's novel, Mahima then informs her father-in-law in Hong Kong. After hearing from her, he exclaims, "Even Hong Kong is like heaven, how great and pleasant America, the place where the king of the world lives, is!" He suggests that she go to America and "rescue his son and grandchildren" (28). He also expresses his own desire as: "We old couple will also get an opportunity to go there someday because of you" and "I've heard that elderly people get old age allowance there" (28). He, along with Pranaya, asks Mahima not to worry about the twins and just think about reaching America. Her mother-in-law, however, is not that positive, mainly because she will have to look after the twins after their mother's departure. Like Pranaya's mother, Mahima's grandmother also suggests she not leave Nepal, the land of deities. She also believes that if a woman decides to leave home, she invites maladies. But her friend Shova in Ohio advises Mahima to leave Nepal and promises to help her as much as possible.

Ambivalent, Mahima eventually decides to leave for America. "To get entry to America, as claimed by Sarina, is to get entry to Golden Gate," she asserts (30). Despite

being excited, she feels the agony of separation from her family, particularly from her children, and bidding farewell to them she "felt as if it was the farewell forever" (30). In her tears, she pleads with her husband to cancel her trip as she feels there is nothing more adorable than her children in this world. He, however, consoles her and asks her to be strong and trust him to take care of the children. With a heavy heart, she reaches the airport for the first abroad travel of her life and, that too, to the dream country with "a rare opportunity to enter the Golden Gate" (31). This is how she, defying all odds, ensures her entry to the USA. Prabhakar Bagchand captures this optimism, stating, "I now realize that America is a robust society; where a nobody can be a somebody," reflecting Mahima's initial belief in transformative opportunities.

Mahima's journey to the 'dream' land, however, begins with a premonition of perils she might have to face later in her life abroad. At the airport, she meets Adarsha, a middle-aged man with a charming personality, and thus gets impressed by his attire and cooperative nature. At the Bangkok Airport, he offers her a cup of coffee and takes her to a room he has reserved. He then suggests she not go outside in the shivering cold and to sleep in the room he has booked. Mahima, realizing his intention, attempts to leave the room to get rid of his probable assault. He then tries to convince her not to run away and, defining sex as something natural, he expresses his belief that "fearing this natural law, relating it to society, values and assumptions, religion and other aspects of society is simply backwardness" (37). He further argues that it will not be possible for her to adjust in a new land if she continues being narrow-minded as such. Her heart pounds faster as he pops out a condom from his pocket and gets ready for sex. She averts, "I'm just like your daughter" so "don't talk nonsense" (38), but he clutches her hand and attempts rape. Fortunately, she runs away and protects herself from his sexual assault.

After an uncomfortable transit and flight, Mahima reaches Los Angeles and prepares for Omaha, Nebraska. Unfortunately, she misses the plane and manages her flight the next day. At the airport, her cousin Vivek's roommate Ajay receives her and drives her to their residence. On the way, she feels surprised as America is not what she had thought of. When she suspiciously asks, "Brother, is this the real America?", Vivek assures, "America is really large, sister" and "there are huts to skyscrapers here" (44). After some time, her cousin returns from the funeral of two of his Indian friends who died in an accident and starts talking to her about what America really is like. He describes, "Indeed, sister, our energy increased after realizing this nation's practice of emphasizing discipline and work" and "that removed our laziness perhaps" (47). He wishes Nepalis visited America and learned its discipline, rule of law, civilization, and the culture of respecting all sorts of work. He further informs, "America has reached the summit of development making people work hard" and "every work is honored here, and every individual is aware of their rights and responsibilities" (47). He also argues that if one gets an opportunity, success, and respect in one's own nation, then no one will ever think of going to a foreign country, resonating the obligation to go abroad.

Mahima's anxiety grows as she cannot find any work even after a two-week-long stay at her friend's. Even "after crossing the Golden Gate," she "couldn't find any job" (51) and, having no option left, she starts working at Shova's as a nanny. She feels uncomfortable working as her friend's servant and starts feeling like returning home. Her husband in Nepal, however, suggests she struggle and settle. He consoles, "In America, even highly educated and rich people have been working as babysitters" and "have been working as dishwashers in hotels and restaurants" (52). He means to say that if such people can work that way, then why not Mahima, who neither has any training nor does she have any American degree. Tristen Brusle notes similar realities in these words: "Nepali men mostly work as low-paid laborers, such as construction workers, cleaners, or office boys"

while "women work as domestic helpers, cleaners, or saleswomen," highlighting the low-status jobs many Nepali immigrants undertake (215).

Bored and dejected Mahima decides to go to New York, hoping to get some work and settle. After reaching 'fabulous' New York City, she feels she "has really got into the Golden Gate" (54). She is mesmerized by the pacy and busy life, glass skyscrapers, and the colorful world and feels as if she is a 'fairy of this little paradise.' She wonders, "Wow! This is the heaven created by God to inhabit the blessed!" (54). In her ecstasy, she murmurs: "On the way from the airport, my mind got pleased to see a number of cheerfully walking people of Nepali and Indian origin and realizes she has "just reached the America of my dream" (55). She even doubts she was in America before reaching New York. For the first time, she sounds confident: "This city can offer various types of jobs even for the people like me" and feels "this is heaven indeed (55). In her ecstasy, she fancies, "I'll bring the family and "show them the heaven" as "my miseries will all vanish once I start living here with my family (55). In New York, she feels excited to eventually get past the Golden Gate and dreams higher. She starts weaving the tapestry of her prosperous life. Jay describes such moments as "encounters with globalized urban spaces that promise transformation but often mask underlying precarity" (45), reflecting the tension between Mahima's initial optimism and the challenges ahead.

Her life in New York, however, is not as easy as she had anticipated. Her first impression with her host family is upsetting as Nita bitterly reveals, "New York's habitation is not as easy as Nepal's" and "it's always difficult to please the guests" (55). She further discloses that hosting people in America is never easy and asks her "to pay ten dollars a day for your morning and evening meals" (55). Nita's husband Viraj even questions her character and asks how a woman could dare come to America alone. In her agony, Mahima pleads with him to find some work for her so that she could live away from them. This incident reflects Nepalis' traditional mindset even after living in America for years.

After living like a prisoner for a week, Mahima finds a job at a shopping center in Manhattan and starts living with an American girl, Nyangli, who works at a Casino Bar. Since they work at different times, they manage to live in a single room, sharing the same bed. As she gradually feels somewhat settled, she gets to know about American life. She observes the opulence of New York City during Christmas and gets thrilled by its exuberant decorations. The city, decorated like a bride, and the cheerful dwellers remind her of Dashain in her home country. Like any transnational migrant, she oscillates between home and abroad, comparing and contrasting ways of celebrating festivals. "In Nepal too, the haves afford new clothes and ornaments at Teej, Dashain, and Tihar," she compares, "and enjoy different varieties of dishes," whereas, "for the have-nots, these festivals are just curses on them" as "they can hardly manage the amount borrowed to celebrate the festivals" (59). "In America," however, she generalizes, irrespective of their class, people "cherish the festivals" because "prices of all goods go down during the festival time" and "people can purchase them at discount prices" (59). Christmas trees covered with colorful crisscross lights, Santa Claus sailing on a ship with toys, gift packets, and chocolates, and children gleefully playing along the street, hoping for Santa to come with gift packets, remind her of her children Sabin and Sabina back home. She wishes she was there with her children and husband in New York. Joshi, Pradhan, and Shrestha note, "Cultural integration identity is integral to the Nepali diaspora's narrative, with 85.3% being born in Nepal and 83% finding ways to preserve their Nepali heritage. Language, culture, and food shape their identity, while caste/ethnicity and political beliefs play a lesser role" (XIII), highlighting Mahima's efforts to maintain her cultural roots through these festival comparisons.

Mahima's life in New York gets going normally as she continues working at the shopping center and living with a loving and caring Nyangli. She even shares a bed with

Nyangli. Particularly in the winter months, they cling to each other and warm each other's bodies. Mahima explains: "Kind-hearted Nyangli used to understand my feelings. So, after arriving from her duty, she used to cling to me and sleep. When I didn't feel like getting up, I used to say, 'Human contact is warmer than that of clothes, let's come closer and sleep" (61). In Nepal, Mahima recalls, a girl sleeping with a girl is not reckoned evil. As they shared the bed, Nayngli would ask, "Aren't you feeling sensation? I'm feeling warm" (61). She would even stretch her hands towards Mahima's breast (61). Mahima expresses her feelings for Nyangli, a friend in need. She defines this relation as a purely friendly one. She does not seem to have any physical relationship despite physical contact between them. Touching each other's body for Mahima is just a means to warm each other. She, however, is aware of homosexual relations as she tries to assure Nyangli that girls' sharing of the bed together in Nepal is normal and not necessarily sexual as it can be thought of in America. For her, Nyangli is "as rational as a mother, as loving as a sister, and as cooperative as a friend" and nothing beyond (61). Jay's observation that "transnational subjects often navigate intimate relationships within new cultural frameworks, creating hybrid identities that blend home and host cultures" (62) illuminates Mahima's negotiation of this friendship, balancing Nepali norms with American contexts.

In Brooklyn, Mahima meets a Nepali girl, Sahara, who had entered America on a student visa. But instead of going to college and completing her degree, she has been running a beauty parlor and massage center. In Nepal, Mahima had heard Sahara's parents talking about their daughter's exciting life in America as they believed their daughter was studying on a scholarship and managed all her expenses on her own. Sahara represents those Nepalis who go to America for studies but drop out before completing their degrees. On the basis of her case studies, Sijapati writes: "Those who attend college in the United States are more likely to find jobs in the professional sector, but many Nepalis who begin college drop out before completing their degrees" (qtd. in Hangen 235). Primarily because they fail to cover their expenses and college fees, Sijapati adds, "Some students drop out of college when they realize that they have the opportunity to earn larger salaries than they could earn in Nepal even without completing college" (qtd. in Hangen 235). Sahara's trajectory underscores the irony, revealing the stark contrast between her parents' optimism back home and her real conditions of living abroad. Sahara echoes Sijapati's finding about the realities of Nepali students who initially enter America with a view to continuing their studies but mostly drop out before completing their courses and start working somewhere outside. Mahima now realizes the reason behind Sahara's reluctance to talk to her and behave like a stranger. Jay's analysis of "the tension between maintaining cultural identity and adapting to globalized urban spaces" (45) reflects Sahara's shift to a new identity, distancing herself from her Nepali roots.

Mahima in Brooklyn meets Bhagat and through him gets connected with Yam, another Nepali boy working as an accountant at a 24-hour shopping center in Queens. With Yam's support, she meets a new roommate, a Filipino girl, Josefina. Initially impressed by her appearance and friendly manner, Mahima feels comfortable living with her. Her joy, however, turns into frustration after she faces an unpleasant incident in the room. She sees Josefina kissing her boyfriend, a Black, meaty, bald-headed middle-aged man. Instead of asking for an excuse, Josefina announces, "Today I have dating with my boyfriend" and informs that her boyfriend is living with her tonight (70). Mahima can do nothing but take a corner and sleep as Josefina and her boyfriend make love in her presence. She does not only feel bad for making sex this cheap but also fears whether the man could turn towards her after having sex with his girlfriend.

After a series of disappointments, Mahima starts living with Yam. An ex-Maoist

combatant from Rolpa who had joined the insurgency since his school days, and has been living in America since he had been brought there by an American woman he had met in Kathmandu while working at a rich man's house after narrowly escaping probable death at the hands of some army men, Yam, disciplined and hardworking, provides Mahima with brotherly affection. And as their relationship, like a brother and sister, just develops, she loses him too as 'an unidentified gunman shoots him to death' while on duty. The boy "who happened to reach America after escaping death in Nepal eventually encountered a murderer" (85). After his loss, Mahima feels she "lost her last support in America" (86). Despite desiring to return to Nepal with a view to doing good to the nation and intending to die in the home country, his funeral takes place in a foreign land. His passion to reunite with family in Nepal ends with "his cremation by Nepali Society and friends in New York" (87).

Despite adverse circumstances, Mahima adapts to the American lifestyle. She starts attending ceremonies like Thanksgiving Day and gets acquainted with foreign cultural practices. At her Nepali friend Rubina's in Maryland, for example, she meets many Asians—Nepalis, Indians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Lebanese. Though initially reluctant to mix with people from different cultural backgrounds, she gradually gets rhythm and enjoys their company. Irrespective of different nationalities, they all "felt like relatives" (81). Without any feeling of hierarchy in terms of caste, class, and gender, they "enjoyed juice, cold drinks, wine, beer, and whiskey" with "Mo:Mo: and chutney" and "danced playing Nepali, Hindi, and English songs" (81-82). Despite representing different nationalities and cultures, they "mixed up like brothers and sisters of the same family" and "cherished each other's company till late night" (82). Rajendra K. Tamot observes this tendency as: "Regardless of English language proficiency, Nepalese immigrants do not structurally adapt to American society," preferring to socialize within their community (14). Joshi, Pradhan, and Shrestha's observation that "cultural integration identity is integral to the Nepali diaspora's narrative, with 85.3% being born in Nepal and 83% finding ways to preserve their Nepali heritage" (XIII) underscores Mahima's engagement in these cultural gatherings. Jay adds that such spaces are "sites of cultural hybridity, where immigrants negotiate their identities within globalized social networks" (62), illustrating how Mahima balances her Nepali identity with her American experiences.

As she finds some solace in Yam's brotherly affection, she loses him. His loss, haunts her and feels lonely and restless after his murder. Her desire to go back home intensifies, and she shares it with her husband on Skype. She says, "Yam had shouldered his responsibility like a brother" and "after his departure my daily life has been really tough" therefore as "I'm unable to carry the burden of my work, I want to return home, Baba" (89). Struggling to gain some stability, Yam's murder also exposes the vulnerability of a migrant and this incident terrifies Mahima. She, therefore, talks to her husband back home and expresses her fear and anxiety, expecting some emotional support.

As Sijapati rightly points out: "One of the strongest transnational ties that persists among Nepali immigrants in the United States is that of family and kinship ties in Nepal. Benefiting tremendously from advances in communications such as telephones, the internet, and air transportation, Nepali immigrants talk on the phone and/or send emails to family members as well as close friends on a regular basis, and those who can afford it (for many, airfares remain rather expensive), make occasional trips to Nepal (generally, once a year or every two years) whenever 'time and money' permits" (141). As mentioned above, Mahima sometimes makes phone calls and talks to her family members in Nepal, whereas at other times she communicates via other means of communication like Skype. As Sijapati maintains, "The relationships enacted over the telephone, internet, etc., are not limited to casual exchanges of greetings between family members and friends as would have happened in the past. On the contrary, mediated by modern technology, members of the family,

despite the geographical distance, continue with their prescribed roles and responsibilities" (141).

After losing Yam, her 'last hope,' Mahima becomes paranoid: "'Check your health,' her supervisor advises, 'if your health is fine, you can find jobs'" (90). After her supervisor's constant nagging, she loses interest in continuing to work and goes to Prem and Maya's, and shares her terrible experience. She reveals "These days, a giant follows me every night" hence she feels "afraid to come out" (90). Despite Prem's effort to pacify her, the giant steals into her room though she latches the door. All of a sudden, she starts talking about Bastipur of Lahan and describes her childhood experiences there. She talks to the couple as if they are familiar with everything she describes and even blames them for losing all the memory. As she speaks, she bursts into tears and fears she is approaching Yam's fate. After sensing a serious psychological disorder in her, Prem and Maya take her to a psychiatrist who advises her to return home and unite with her family.

Between Nepal and America: Mahima's Cultural and Emotional Ambivalence

And as per the advice given by the psychiatrist, Mahima returns home and reunites with her family. She murmurs, "Wow! I reached home! No tide will tumble me" and thus "my days of hardships ended" (93). On the way back home, she evaluates the changes in Nepal since she had left it and expresses her discontent: the same "Long live and Go down" slogans painted on the wall and "the political unrest" (94). She, however, feels uncomfortable responding to her uncle's series of questions about America, her status there, and Pranaya's visa. To his query, she replies, "I won't return to America" as "I'm done with it" (95). She further asserts, "the fragrance of one's own soil cannot be found even in heaven" and thus she is neither interested in going back nor is she worried about Pranaya's visa and rebukes, "At this moment, I'm not interested to even utter America" (98). He insists, "I'll complete my PhD at a prestigious university there" and after getting a good job, "I'll earn" and "our children will get quality education" and suggests her not to get afraid of the future because of the unpleasant past (98). Their argument for and against Mahima's return to America comes to an end after she concludes, "I can't stand the struggle for life in America alone" (98).

Fed up with endless struggle in America, Mahima, however, has no respite in Nepal as extortions, kidnappings, and the Madhesi-Pahadi conflict have paralyzed the nation. This political unrest has resulted in the mass emigration of the youths to the Gulf and other countries to save life as well as seek some means to manage living. On the way to Pashupatinath, she overhears the conversation between two young men who narrate their heartrending stories in the Gulf region. She identifies herself with them and elicits the conclusion that wherever Nepalis go, what binds them is hardship. In Gulf countries, "Nepali men mostly work as low-paid laborers, such as construction workers, cleaners, or office boys," Tristen Brusle writes in "No One Wants to Go Abroad; It's All About Obligation," while "women work as domestic helpers, cleaners, or saleswomen" (215). He also reveals that since they are isolated women in private houses, they are vulnerable to sexual harassment and domestic violence.

The migrant workers abroad suffer from such painful experiences while their women ironically live a lavish life on that hard-earned money here in Nepal. Mahima, at her schoolmate Sheela's, learns about the unbecoming lifestyle of such women. Sheela expresses her discontent over Mahima's hasty return and mocks her 'pitiful' condition. She boastfully talks about her husband's job in South Korea and his frequent suggestion to his wife to celebrate life: "We have to wear beautiful clothes" and "spray heavily-scented perfume," she brags (114). Mahima is shocked to hear from Sheela that "women who go abroad get their sexual gratification through alternative means if they don't get a boyfriend"

(116). Sheela's irritating questions one after another and other women's obscene chatting along with their unbecoming lifestyle frustrate her. She fathoms the hostility of their life and returns home with a heavy heart.

A series of irritating questions by her relatives and Pranaya's discontent make Mahima rethink her decision to stay in Nepal. "I'm thinking about returning to America," she discloses to her husband, "I don't think we can secure our future here" (121). Her revelation pleases her husband as he had been expecting her to return, though he had been feigning that it was all up to her whether she returned. "If I were you, I would return without divided mentality," he reveals his true self and suggests she not retreat after such a tough struggle (121). After exploring her husband's true self, she feels lonely and decides to address his feelings by going to America rather than staying in Nepal and hurting him. She infers, "I'm alone in life" and "I'm alone in this world" (122).

This time Mahima goes to Baltimore and lives with Karuna and Umesh, her relatives, from whom she learns about yet another dark side of American life. The couple shares with her the painful experiences of how their son gets spoilt and eventually forces them to return to Nepal, and that they, after being embarrassed by family members—brother and sister-in-law—return to America again. Those who had left Nepal "to conquer the world" now feel completely defeated and are "living for the sake of living" (138). Reflecting on their decision to leave Nepal, Karuna laments: "The base of a root is the soil it germinates in" and adds "It withers once it is uprooted from the soil. Its existence tumbles" (139). Karuna and her husband represent one of the worst possible situations of an immigrant family abroad. America is not necessarily a land of prosperity for all, but is equally hostile if the situation does not favor. Their dreams of enjoying the fruits of American prosperity and securing a bright future for their son get shattered in a single blow. As a result, they lament their decision to leave the birthplace and seek prosperity abroad. Jay's insight, "globalization complicates the pursuit of national dreams, creating both opportunities and profound losses" (95) resonates with Karuna's disillusionment, highlighting the emotional and cultural costs of migration.

Despite facing a series of hostile incidents and hearing a number of painful stories, Mahima has to continue her struggles. She goes to New York to work at a Sweet House and starts living at Rodd's, a 92-year-old unmarried Indigenous American man. To evade boredom, she keeps on visiting a park nearby after returning from the office. One day, at the park, she meets Rupesh, an established engineer of Indian origin, with his son Rahul, and on his offer, she starts working as a nanny. Though she initially feels uncomfortable living with a single man, whose wife, an American, after giving birth to Rahul, had deserted him, leaving the responsibility of the boy all on his own, she gradually feels attached to the family. With his support, she gets admitted to a college for a healthcare nursing course that increases her chance of getting settled in America: "I've started taking a healthcare nursing training, Baba," she proudly shares with her husband in Nepal, "it's a nine-month course" (155). On hearing that, her husband expresses his gratification as he believes that the door of their luck has clearly opened for them.

Satisfactory income, cozy habitation, college admission, and probable visa for her family are more than enough for Mahima to relieve her heavy heart and taste the colorful American life. On her friends' offer, she readies herself for a nightclub. "Wishes should be fulfilled through experience," she affirms, "as one ages with time" (156). She describes the mesmerizing atmosphere as: "The club was decorated with colorful lights. . . ., trembled in the loud sound of the drum and my heart leaped in its rhythm" (156) . on seeing everyone rejoicing the music, her heart "swung in the loud tune of an English song played nearby" and "Margarita, gin, tonic, and wine were served with snacks" (156). In this colorful world, "By clinking the glasses and chanting cheers, I started drinking" (156). The colorful world

of the club provides Mahima with an escape from her usual life–children and in-laws at home in Nepal, Rupesh and Rahul, Pranaya's obsession to come to America for a PhD–and feels like being in a different world. Intoxicating effect of wine and exciting music take her beyond obligations.

Mahima continues with her work at Rupesh's and healthcare nursing training. She gets to learn more about American life as she observes Halloween. She sees many kids in costumes coming to Rupesh's, asking for treats with the phrase "Trick or treat," just like children traveling from house to house to play Deusi-Bhailo at Tihar in Nepal. At Halloween Fair, however, she feels uncomfortable seeing the primitive life and supernatural events. She is terrified by the unusual displays at the Fair and falls sick after coming back home. She recovers after Rupesh takes her to the hospital and serves her. "Rupesh, you saved me," she thanks him, "Had you not rushed me to hospital in time, I'd have not been alive" (162). She also feels Rupesh's love for her. And on her birthday. She gazes at Rupesh's face amorously and cherishes his 'simplicity and prudence' (166). As she rests her head on his chest, she "forgot everything" and "immersed herself in him" (166). For her, this physical relationship is a "pious consummation of their feelings for each other" and thus "there was no regret at all" (166). Despite exchanging their love for each other in this fashion, however, she is committed to her husband and thus declines Rupesh's proposal to live together as a couple.

After the completion of her healthcare nursing course, Mahima starts working at an Old Age Care and Rehabilitation Center and welcomes her husband and children in America. On his arrival, Pranaya expresses his gratitude for making his wish come true. "Your struggles, patience, and hard work will make my dream to do a PhD in America," he thankfully says, "I'll support you to relieve your burden" and then "our life will reach new heights" (180). As Pranaya weaves his dream of a prosperous life, he is, however, exposed to the dark side of American life. Tony, an old man, who has been living alone in an apartment after his wife's death, unravels the hardships of life in the apparently abundant land. Father of two sons who hardly meets his children twice or thrice a year and his 96-year-old mother living alone with her own miseries tell the story about 'how hard life is'. "How painful the heat of loneliness is, only the one who experiences it knows," he mutters (189). To Pranaya's surprise, Tony, who seems to have some knowledge about Nepal, valorizes Nepali culture by saying, "There is great significance of family and community" as "respecting and serving seniors is the culture there" (186-87). He reckons that Nepalis are lucky to be born in the country of the Buddha and apparently expresses his resentment at being thrust into a void in American society. As Tony exposes the reality of American life, Pranaya, both shocked and disillusioned, sensing "the gap between the America he had dreamt of while in Nepal and the real America," asks Mahima, "Is this the value of human sensibility in America, whose value is universal?" (189).

Life in America is not that easy for Mahima's husband either. At a Graduation Party, Pranaya is thunderstruck while he overhears the conversation between two of the guests who seriously complain about Mahima's intimate relationship with Rupesh. Shattered, he hurries home and furiously asks his wife about her relationship with the man. Though she tries to convince him by explaining: "Rupesh was my only support while I was struggling the most" (195). She further asserts that it is all because of Rupesh's support that she has been able to stand on her own and "it's also the fact that as we lived together, our relationship defied the social barrier" (195). She bravely utters, "It's not necessary to explain what happened between Rupesh and me" and "I don't intend to put blame on anyone else" (195). Asking Pranaya to either accept her as she is or opt to separate from her, she is ready to face any circumstances that come her way. Her hard struggle in a foreign country has earned her that confidence and courage, and unlike a traditional wife who easily

succumbs to her husband's power, Mahima, a transnational, with adequate exposure to individualism and autonomy, challenges Pranaya to make a decision as per his choice. Infuriated by her outright revelation of her extramarital relationship with the man, he first thinks that he had received an American visa at the cost of sending his wife to a brothel and even ponders returning to Nepal with his children. But as he tries to fathom her struggles in a 'hostile' American society, he starts empathizing with her and eventually chooses possible prosperity over emotion.

Conclusion

Mahima's journey in Sharma's *Golden Gate* entails the Nepali American dream's complexity as it is initially luring but is later repelling due to low-wage work, estrangement and a sense of alienation. Split between home and abroad, her transnational ties sustain her connection to Nepal, yet the persistent temptation for success prevents her from staying in Nepal, and thus she goes back to the USA. Despite experiencing multiple instances of hostile encounters, she, irrespective of ordeals on her way to success, sticks to her ideals, that is, the promise of the American Dream. Since abroad locations create both opportunities and loss, Mahima's pursuit of prosperity comes at the cost of emotional and cultural alienation. She persists in navigating the transnational space to assert her identity and future, but uncertainty looms over her success in the 'dream' country.

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