MIGRATING ASPIRATIONS:

SUBJECTIVITY SHAPED BY A FAMILY'S MOVE

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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This thesis entitled "Migrating Aspirations: Subjectivity Shaped by a Family's Move" has been completed by Bishnu Maya Bhattarai under my supervision and guidance. This is an original research work, and I recommend this dissertation for final approval and acceptance by the dissertation committee.

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Bishnu Maya Bhattarai

April 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "Migrating Aspirations: Subjectivity Shaped by a Family's Move" is my own work, and it contains no material previously published. Except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, the analysis in this thesis represents my original research.

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Bishnu Maya Bhattarai

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the transformation of subjectivity within a migrating family from rural Okhaldhunga to urban Kathmandu through an autoethnographic lens informed by practice theory and Bourdieu's conceptual triad of capital, habitus, and field. Drawing from personal narrative, family history, and theoretical inquiry, the study interrogates how economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals are reshaped across spatio–temporal transitions. It pays particular attention to intergenerational differences, educational trajectories, and the everyday practices that mediate the rural-urban shift in identity.

The analysis reveals that migration not only repositions individuals within new social hierarchies but also transforms embodied dispositions — what Bourdieu terms habitus — into dynamic, adaptable forms responsive to shifting fields. While the older generation bore the impact of structural exclusion from education, the younger generation, including the author, emerged as agents of self-fashioning, negotiating the tensions between rural heritage and urban aspirations. Education, in this context, functions as both a site of constraint and possibility, where subjectivity is contested and reimagined.

The study contributes to broader debates in migration studies and practice theory by demonstrating how lived experience complicates and expands existing understandings of habitus and agency. Through an embodied narrative grounded in Nepali socio-political history, this study situates the personal within the political, offering insights into the intimate effects of structural change and the recursive relationship between mobility and identity.

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The 1980s marked a pivotal decade in Nepal's demographic history as economic hardship, environmental pressures, and the appeal of opportunity drove thousands of rural families to urban centers. This mass migration reshaped Nepal's social and economic landscape, creating both challenges and opportunities for those who undertook the journey.

Nepal's rural economy faced a deepening crisis during this period. With over 80 percent of the population dependent on subsistence agriculture (World Bank, 1989), shrinking landholdings due to inheritance divisions and population growth made farming increasingly unsustainable. The average landholding size decreased from 1.1 hectares in 1961 to just 0.8 hectares by 1981 (CBS, 1981). Environmental factors compounded these difficulties, as deforestation and erratic monsoon patterns reduced agricultural productivity (Blaikie et al., 1980). These push factors coincided with improved transportation infrastructure, particularly the expansion of the Tribhuvan Highway, which made urban centers more accessible (Pradhan, 1989).

Kathmandu emerged as the primary destination for migrants, with its population doubling between 1971 and 1991 (CBS, 1991). The city offered construction jobs, petty trade opportunities, and access to education — advantages largely unavailable in rural areas. However, the urban reality often proved harsh. Research by Seddon (1987) documented how newcomers typically found shelter in squatter settlements, where families crowded into makeshift dwellings without proper sanitation. The informal sector absorbed most migrants, with men working as porters and rickshaw drivers, while women took on domestic work or street vending, typically earning significantly less than their male counterparts (Acharya, 1983).

The migration experience varied significantly by generation. Older migrants often maintained strong rural ties, returning periodically for important ceremonies (Shrestha, 1990). Younger migrants, particularly children, adapted more readily to urban life. Education became a crucial differentiator — while many older siblings had to abandon schooling for work, some younger children managed to attend classes by supplementing family incomes through street vending or other informal work (Baker

& Chapman, 1984). This generational difference in adaptation strategies would have lasting impacts on household dynamics and social mobility.

Government responses to this demographic shift were largely inadequate. Urban planning failed to keep pace with population growth, resulting in sprawling informal settlements (UNDP, 1988). Rural development programs like the Integrated Rural Development Project achieved limited success in stemming the outflow (Panday, 1999). The Panchayat regime's centralized governance structure proved ill-equipped to address either rural distress or urban absorption challenges (Bista, 1991).

The legacy of 1980s migration continues to shape contemporary Nepal. The mass movement created new forms of urban poverty while offering escape from rural deprivation. It weakened traditional social structures while enabling some families to achieve educational and economic mobility (Gurung, 1998). For scholars examining individual migration narratives, this historical context reveals how personal stories connect to broader national transformations — illustrating how the journey from villages to cities represented not just a change of location but a fundamental renegotiation of Nepali identity in a changing world.

My story begins in Gamnang, a small village in Okhaldhunga, where my parents were born into peasant families. My father was a Bhattarai, and my mother was a Khadka — names that tied us to our land and traditions. Though we carried little with us when we left, we held onto our family's stories, memories, and two precious heirlooms: an *amkhara* (a traditional brass pitcher, often used for drinking and serving water) from my mother's side and a *kachaura* (a traditional bowl) from her in-laws. These objects, now kept in our home in Kathmandu, are all that remain of our material inheritance.

My mother grew up in a wealthy household. Her grandfather was a *jimmuwal*, a respected tax collector who owned vast lands and stored his wealth in jars of coins. She remembers watching him lay those coins out in the sun (*biskun*) to keep them from rusting. But despite their riches, life was hard — especially for the women. They worked the fields, tended livestock, and managed the home, with no chance for education or a life beyond the village.

At 16, my mother was married to my father, a farmer struggling to feed his family on a small, divided plot of land. Together, they worked endlessly — tilling

soil, laboring for others, and gathering firewood from distant forests — yet still barely had enough to eat.

When my father's share of land or property could no longer sustain us, my mother made a bold decision: we would leave for Kathmandu. In 1986, our family of eleven, including my parents, grandfather, four brothers and three-year-old me and three other dependents — my mother's younger sister and two of my father's nephews — set off with just 4,000 rupees, some ghee, millet flour, and ragged clothes. For three days, we walked and hitched rides, sleeping in villages along the way. I was too young to understand the journey, but I remember moments: resting by a river, my brothers building a fire, my mother cooking a simple meal.

Our first home in Kathmandu was a cowshed. By day, the animals were let out, and we used the space to cook and sleep. My father found work as a shop porter, while my mother took on backbreaking jobs — carrying bricks, winnowing sand — earning just 12 rupees a day. One of her most painful memories was giving birth to my youngest sister and returning to work just a week later, only for the contractor to vanish without paying her.

Life in the city was a struggle. We sold roasted peanuts and grilled corn cobs on the streets, dodging police raids. My older brothers had little chance for education — one became a taxi driver, another a policeman with only a sixth-grade education at the Police Training Centre. My fourth brother studied up to grade eight but fell into the prey of drug addiction and died from hepatitis, a victim of urban margin.

However, for my sister and me, Kathmandu offered something rewarding: school. We swept temples for spare coins, helped our mother sell peanuts, and studied late into the night. That determination paid off — my sister now works for an international organization, and I'm completing my M. Phil while advocating for children's rights at the UN.

Today, we are still connected to our village through *kul puja* (periodic ritual worship of our clan's tutelary deities) rituals, but our true inheritance is not land or money — it's the resilience my parents passed down. My father is gone now, but my mother, despite her struggles, remains strong, surrounded by grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Our story is one of loss but also of quiet triumph — a family that carried its past on its back and built a future from nothing.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Contemporary scholarship on Nepalese migration remains bifurcated between macro-level demographic analyses (e.g., KC & Bhagat, 2012) and microeconomic studies of remittance flows (Thieme, 2006), leaving a critical gap in understanding how migration reshapes the intersubjective dimensions of family life. This gap is particularly acute for the 1980s — the decisive decade when urbanization shifted from seasonal to permanent — yet most studies focus either on earlier labor migrations to India or post-1990 globalization impacts. My research addresses this temporal and conceptual gap by asking: How did the material conditions of 1980s migration (landlessness, informal labor, squatter settlements) produce new forms of familial subjectivity?

The problem demands examination because, as my family's case demonstrates, these subjective transformations — my father's deskilling from subsistence farmer to porter, my mother's dual burden as wage-earner and tradition-keeper — created intergenerational tensions that continue to reverberate in contemporary Nepali society. Existing frameworks fail to capture how migration operates as what Biehl (2005) calls a "zone of social becoming," where structural violence and individual agency collide to remake selves. By documenting these intimate yet structurally significant transformations, the study offers a new paradigm for understanding migration as both a rupture and continuity in the Nepali context.

1.3 Research Questions

I. How did the migration from rural Okhaldhunga to urban Kathmandu transform the subjectivity and aspirations of different generations within my family?

II. In what ways did economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital evolve through my family's migration experience, and how did these capitals shape individual and collective identities?

III. How has my own subjectivity been constructed at the intersection of rural heritage, urban education, and theoretical frameworks of habitus and agency?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to appraise the subjectivity of my own family and the construction of my being through the lens of migration from rural to urban Nepal.

Specific Objectives:

- To explore the factors from the past that have influenced our thoughts and lifestyle choices across generations.
- To examine how external ideological practices like liberal economy and modernity are influencing our lives and worldviews.
- To analyze the intricate relationship between one's past and current socio-economic phenomena in the construction of individual subjectivity.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study seeks to illuminate how rural-urban migration in 1980s Nepal fundamentally recalibrated individual and collective subjectivities — the complex interplay of selfhood, social positioning, and aspirational horizons. While existing scholarship has extensively documented the macroeconomic and demographic dimensions of Nepal's urbanization (Blaikie et al., 2001; CBS, 2001), this research addresses a critical gap by interrogating how displacement and resettlement transformed the very pattern of familial identity, intimate relationships, and personal becoming.

Drawing on autoethnographic reflections of my family's migration journey from Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu, this study traces how structural transitions were internalized and negotiated across generations. I examine three interlocking dimensions of subjective transformation: (1) the recalibration of intergenerational expectations, where my parents' survival strategies collided with their children's educational aspirations; (2) the gendered reconfiguration of labor, particularly how my mother's shift from subsistence farming to urban informal labor reshaped domestic roles and household power dynamics; and (3) the paradoxical persistence of cultural memory — evident in rituals like *kul puja* — amidst radical environmental change.

Theoretically, the study is anchored in Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of habitus, revealing how migration necessitated the embodied unlearning of rural dispositions and the painful acquisition of urban cultural capital. Simultaneously, Appadurai’s (2004) “capacity to aspire” framework helps decode how structural constraints mediated my family’s evolving sense of possible futures. These theoretical tools allow for a grounded analysis of how aspirations are socially distributed and how their pursuit is both enabled and foreclosed by classed, gendered, and spatial inequalities.

This research makes substantive contributions to scholarly discourse and policy discussions on migration and urban transformation in Nepal. By centering the affective and psychosocial dimensions of displacement — what Das (2006) refers to as the "texture of the everyday" — the study challenges dominant econometric and developmentalist narratives that often overlook how migration shapes subjectivities across generations. Through an innovative blend of autoethnography and theoretical analysis, it bridges macro-structural forces with intimate lived experiences, offering a grounded model for how personal narratives can illuminate broader social phenomena.

The intergenerational lens provides unique insights into how migration’s impacts are sedimented over time — from my parents’ resilience amid urban precarity to my generation’s educational aspirations and contradictions. It complicates romanticized notions of “urban opportunity,” exposing systemic exclusions through deeply personal cases, such as my brother’s struggles with educational access and addiction. Yet, it also highlights the resilience and agency embedded in informal economies, exemplified by my mother’s street vending, which silently sustained our household and contributed to Kathmandu’s informal growth.

Methodologically, this research advances a reflexive and ethical approach to knowledge production. By positioning the researcher as both subject and analyst, it demonstrates how insider perspectives — when combined with rigorous academic framing — can produce rich, contextualized knowledge. It also argues for the epistemic legitimacy of personal narrative in understanding migration, displacement, and urbanization.

1.6 Organization of the Study

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework guiding this research, drawing primarily on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, field, and doxa, along with practice theory contributions from Sahlins and Ortner. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach, emphasizing autoethnography and oral narrative collection. Chapters 4 – 6 present findings on the family migration story, changing aspirations across generations, and education as a transformative force. Chapter 7 offers personal reflections on subjectivity formation, while Chapter 8 concludes with theoretical contributions and implications for understanding migration and subjectivity in Nepal.

CHAPTER 2:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Review

The conceptual triad of subjectivity, agency, and practice has generated rich theoretical debates within migration studies, reflecting broader tensions between structural determinism and phenomenological experience. Central to these discussions is Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), which reconceptualizes human action through the dialectic of habitus and field. Bourdieu challenges Cartesian binaries by positing that subjective dispositions are neither entirely determined by social structures nor freely chosen but emerge through embodied engagement with historically constituted fields of practice. This perspective reorients migration research from a focus on demographic flows to an analysis of how embodied social actors are transformed as they navigate new spatial and institutional terrains. The concept of hysteresis — the mismatch between previously acquired dispositions and the demands of new fields — offers a critical lens for analyzing the dissonances of displacement, as rural habitus confronts urban institutional logics.

Foucault's *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1982) extends this conversation by interrogating how subjectivation operates through technologies of the self. For Foucault, subjectivity is not merely imposed but actively constituted through discursive and material practices that govern both individuals and populations. This Foucauldian lens illuminates how migration regimes produce specific subject positions — such as the "economic migrant," the "refugee," or the "urban poor" — through bureaucratic categorization, spatial segregation, and labor market segmentation. The tension between Bourdieu and Foucault crystallizes around the question of constraint: while Bourdieu emphasizes the pre-reflexive internalization of social structures via habitus, Foucault foregrounds the productive power of disciplinary regimes in shaping migrant subjectivities. Gupta's (2005) work on caste and politics mediates this tension by demonstrating how durable hierarchies like caste are simultaneously internalized and contested through migration, destabilizing traditional identity markers without fully erasing them.

The structure–agency debate finds further articulation in Giddens' *Structuration Theory* (1984) and Ortner's subsequent interventions. Giddens'

proposition — that social structures are both the medium and outcome of human action — provides a dynamic framework for analyzing how migrants reproduce and transform urban institutions through daily practice. Yet Ortner's "Thick Resistance" (1995) critiques the overly formalistic account of agency within structuration theory, advocating instead for ethnographic attention to intentionality under duress. Her work bridges Bourdieu and Foucault by showing how marginalized actors engage in "projects of power" — not merely tactical resistance but sustained efforts to reconfigure their social worlds. This resonates with Certeau's (1984) distinction between institutional strategies and subaltern tactics, offering a vocabulary for understanding how migrants navigate urban informality through improvisational practices that exploit cracks in dominant systems.

Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) provides a meta-theoretical anchor, insisting on the inextricability of personal experience and historical structure. His call to link private troubles with public issues compels migration scholars to examine how personal dislocations intersect with urbanization, neoliberal reform, and global labor markets. Mills's framework complicates the Bourdieusian analysis by foregrounding critical consciousness — the moment when migrants recognize systemic constraints as historically contingent rather than natural. The theoretical tension between Mills's emphasis on emancipatory awareness and Bourdieu's focus on doxic submission remains unresolved, mirroring migration's dual potential as both liberating and exploitative.

Ortner's *Subjectivity and Cultural Critique* (2005) synthesizes these threads by positioning subjectivity as the key analytic for understanding how power operates at the intersection of collective structures and intimate selfhood. Her notion of "serious games" — contested arenas where actors negotiate meaning and power — offers a dynamic model for migration research, capturing how urban spaces become sites of unequal exchange between inherited and emergent forms of capital. This theoretical assemblage does not resolve the tension between determinism and agency but sustains it productively, offering a robust toolkit for analyzing the dialectics of displacement — the simultaneous unmaking and remaking of social selves across space and time.

2.1.1 Migration

Migration has long been studied as both a demographic phenomenon and a social process shaped by political economy, cultural meaning, and aspirations. Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2014) emphasize that migration must be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional process, not merely a response to economic push and pull factors. They argue that "migration is deeply embedded in broader social transformation processes, including those related to development, inequality, and transnationalism" (p. 29). The migratory journey entails not just a spatial relocation but a profound shift in identity, belonging, and socio-economic practices.

Bourdieu's notion of "field" and "capital" becomes relevant here, as migrants move from one social field to another, often encountering misrecognition of their existing capitals. This is particularly evident in rural-to-urban migration, where the symbolic value of one's prior social position and knowledge is often devalued. Moreover, scholars like Glick Schiller et al. (1992) have introduced the concept of transnationalism to highlight how migrants maintain multiple ties across borders, actively participating in social fields in both origin and destination locations. Migration thus becomes not a rupture but a reconfiguration of multiple identities and fields.

Moreover, migration is increasingly analyzed as an aspirational act. Appadurai (2004) suggests that migration is driven not merely by material need but by the "capacity to aspire," which is unequally distributed and culturally shaped. Migration, then, is a performative and anticipatory act of imagining and striving toward better futures. In this view, the subjective experiences and imaginaries of migrants are as important as structural conditions.

2.1.2 Habitus

The concept of habitus, as formulated by Bourdieu, serves as a pivotal analytical tool to understand how social structures are inscribed in individuals and how they, in turn reproduce these structures through their actions. Bourdieu defines habitus as "a system of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53), a set of embodied tendencies and orientations developed through one's upbringing, education, and everyday interactions. Habitus provides individuals with a "feel for the game," allowing them to navigate social fields intuitively. For a migrating family,

such as mine, the contrast between the rural and urban habitus becomes stark. The deeply embedded practices, norms, and perceptions acquired in Okhaldhunga often clash with the codes of conduct required in urban Kathmandu. These tensions reflect what Bourdieu terms hysteresis — a lag between habitus and the changing conditions of the field.

In migrating, individuals carry with them dispositions shaped by their prior social world, yet find themselves in a new field where the logic of practice differs. My mother's ingrained sense of reciprocal labor and communal trust, for instance, was ill-suited to the monetized, impersonal transactions of the city. However, habitus is not immutable; it evolves through a process of incorporation and rupture. Through exposure to new institutions — schools, markets, bureaucracies — migrant families gradually recalibrate their dispositions, albeit unevenly. Bourdieu reminds us that habitus is "structured and structuring"; it carries the weight of history while simultaneously adapting to present circumstances.

In this transformation, the capitals that individuals possess — economic, social, cultural, and symbolic — are critical. Cultural capital, such as my father's active participation in community life, became a bridge between our rural origins and the urban educational field. Social capital, embedded in kin networks, provided initial stability. Symbolic capital, accrued through the moral legitimacy of being 'hard-working migrants', allowed for some degree of public dignity. However, these capitals are not equally valued in every field, and their conversion often requires strategic navigation of power relations. The concept of habitus, therefore, reveals that migration is not merely a spatial movement but a reconfiguration of embodied social know-how, one that is fraught with discontinuities, adaptations, and silent resistances.

2.1.3 Agency

Agency has long occupied a central place in social theory, oscillating between conceptions of individual autonomy and structural determinism. Giddens (1984), in his theory of structuration, posits that agency and structure exist in a dual relationship; agents are not merely products of structure but active participants in its reproduction and transformation. He emphasizes reflexivity — the human capacity to monitor and adjust one's actions in light of social feedback. In the context of migration, this reflexive agency is vividly manifest. Faced with dislocation and precarity, migrant families make calculated decisions about livelihood, education, and identity, often

under constrained circumstances. My mother's choice to become a street vendor, despite social stigma, exemplifies the strategic improvisation that Giddens calls the "routinization of risk."

Ortner (2006) refines the notion of agency further by emphasizing its temporal and affective dimensions. She argues that agency is not just resistance or compliance but includes the capacity to imagine and strive for alternative futures. This aligns with Appadurai's (2004) idea of the "capacity to aspire," which he roots in cultural practice. Aspirations are not evenly distributed; they are shaped by one's position in social hierarchies and mediated by available narratives. Migrant families, through storytelling, ritual, and daily labor, produce and reproduce aspirational imaginaries that defy their material limitations. These acts are agentive precisely because they negotiate with, rather than simply oppose, the structural order.

Sahlins (1981) reminds us that agency is always culturally mediated. Individuals act through symbolic systems that give meaning to their choices. For migrants, this might include the performance of rituals that reassert a sense of continuity and belonging in unfamiliar urban settings. Agency, then, is not the heroic will of the liberal subject but the embedded, culturally saturated practice of reorienting oneself amidst shifting terrains. Eastern philosophical traditions also offer rich insights into agency. The Buddhist notion of karma, for instance, views agency not as unbounded freedom but as action within a web of causality and interdependence. This resonates with Suzuki's emphasis on becoming and relational selfhood, where action arises not from egoic assertion but from attunement to context. Such perspectives underscore that agency is as much about surrender and adaptability as it is about resistance and assertion.

2.1.4 Subjectivity

Subjectivity, once confined to the domain of individual consciousness, has been re-theorized in contemporary scholarship as a product of historical, cultural, and political forces. Foucault's (1980) work is foundational in this regard. He contends that subjects are not autonomous entities but effects of discursive formations and power relations. "The individual is not the vis-à-vis of power," he writes, "he is one of its prime effects." Subjectivity is thus a site where power is both exercised and internalized. Migrant subjectivity, shaped through institutions like schools, workplaces, and housing systems, reflects these operations of power. The transition

from rural to urban entails a shift in the regimes of visibility, morality, and self-conduct — what Foucault might describe as technologies of the self.

Bourdieu complements this by showing how subjectivity is formed through the internalization of objective structures. The habitus not only guides action but also shapes perception, emotion, and aspiration. Subjectivity here is a composite of past experiences sedimented into bodily and cognitive dispositions. However, this does not mean that subjects are mere puppets of structure. As Butler (1997) argues, subjection is paradoxical: to be formed as a subject is simultaneously to be subjected to power and enabled by it. The migrant child who learns to speak Nepali with a different accent than their parents may internalize the urban linguistic norm but also navigate multiple cultural registers, exercising a form of performative agency.

Ortner's conception of subjectivity as "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so on that animate acting subjects" (Ortner, 2005, p. 46) further nuances this discussion. Subjectivity is not a static core but a field of dynamic tensions — between memory and aspiration, conformity and critique. In my own family, the conflicting temporalities of rural nostalgia and urban ambition illustrate these tensions. Subjectivity is also structured by access to narrative resources. Those who can articulate their displacement in terms of sacrifice, resilience, or purpose are better able to endure its emotional toll. This insight resonates with Guha's subaltern historiography, which foregrounds the fragmentary, affective voice of those on the margins of official history.

Oriental philosophies offer complementary perspectives on subjectivity. In Buddhist thought, the self is not a fixed essence but a momentary configuration of aggregates — sensation, perception, consciousness — arising and dissolving in interdependence. Trungpa's idea of "spiritual materialism" critiques the reification of the self even in practices of self-improvement. This view challenges the Western valorization of a coherent, striving subject. Instead, it proposes an ethics of presence, impermanence, and relationality. Nandy (1983) similarly critiques the Western self as an imperial fiction and calls for the recognition of alternative subjectivities rooted in affect, intuition, and plural temporalities.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical study of migration has evolved from simplistic economic models to nuanced analyses of social, cultural, and subjective transformations. Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2014) argue that migration must be understood as a multidimensional process embedded in broader social transformations. They note that "migration is deeply embedded in broader social transformation processes, including those related to development, inequality, and transnationalism" (p. 29). Their work challenges the view of migration as merely a response to economic push and pull factors and calls for attention to identity, belonging, and socio-economic reconfiguration.

Appadurai's (2004) concept of the capacity to aspire has been influential in framing migration as a culturally mediated act of imagination. He argues that aspirations are "navigational capacity" embedded in cultural norms and shaped by social location. Migrants are not only rational economic actors but also dreamers who imagine better futures despite uncertainty and constraint.

In rural-to-urban migration contexts, Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital are empirically relevant. Migrants often encounter misrecognition of their pre-existing capitals. For instance, Elliott and Urry (2010) document how migrants struggle to convert rural social capital into urban legitimacy. Studies by Glick Schiller et al. (1992) on transnationalism further show how migrants maintain dual embeddedness in origin and destination fields, thus redefining the spatialities of belonging and practice.

Empirical work by Massey (1994) emphasizes the spatiality of identity. She contends that "space is the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions" (p. 2). This insight is vital in migration studies where the transition from village to city involves a reshaping of spatial identities and gendered subjectivities.

Studies on Nepalese internal migration, such as Sijapati and Limbu (2012), highlight how caste, ethnicity, and gender mediate access to urban opportunities and shape migrant subjectivities. Their work shows that migration is not a linear path of adaptation but a process of negotiating multiple exclusions and affiliations. Likewise, Thieme and Müller-Böker (2004) find that livelihood decisions among rural Nepali

migrants are influenced as much by social networks and symbolic values as by material considerations.

In ethnographic terms, Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery (2008) explore the role of aspiration among unemployed Indian youth, showing how migration becomes a symbolic act of self-making. Similarly, Deshingkar and Start (2003), in their work on seasonal migration in South Asia, reveal the fragility and resilience of migrant strategies, emphasizing agency under structural precarity.

Taken together, these empirical studies confirm that migration is not simply about movement but about remaking lives and subjectivities across uneven terrains of power, identity, and opportunity.

2.3 Research Gap

While there is an extensive theoretical and empirical literature on migration, subjectivity, and agency, several gaps persist — particularly in the context of intra-national migration in Nepal. Much of the literature either emphasizes structural factors (e.g., poverty, landlessness) or treats migrants as passive recipients of change. The dynamic interrelation of subjectivity, cultural capital, and aspiration remains underexplored, especially within the lived narratives of families navigating urbanization.

Most empirical studies in Nepali contexts focus on labor migration or international remittance economies. There is a lack of fine-grained ethnographic work that explores how internal migrants recalibrate their habitus, reconfigure their family roles, and generate aspirational subjectivities through daily struggles in urban contexts. Additionally, few studies analyze how gendered agency operates within migrant households — how mothers, daughters, and sons differently negotiate aspiration and structural constraint.

Moreover, while Appadurai's notion of aspiration has gained traction, there is a need to contextualize this in non-Western epistemologies, such as Buddhist ideas of karma, relational selfhood, and surrender, which shape subjectivity and agency in culturally specific ways. Migration scholarship seldom engages with these indigenous ontologies.

Finally, there is a lack of longitudinal narratives that trace how migrant subjectivities evolve over generations — how memories of rural life, cultural capitals,

and symbolic identities are sustained, transformed, or abandoned in urban fields. This study — anchored in my family’s migration from Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu — aims to address these gaps by offering a layered, reflexive account of migration as a subjective, embodied, and intergenerational journey that defies the binary logic of rupture and continuity.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Rationale of the Site Selection

Given that this study centers on my subjectivity and familial migration history, the selection of research sites is deeply rooted in personal geography and lived experience. The primary site of study is Gamnang in Likhu-7, Okhaldhunga, the birthplace of my parents as well as my siblings, including me and the ancestral village of my family. It is from this rural setting that our migratory journey began, and as such, it holds a central place in understanding the socio-economic, cultural, and affective conditions that shaped our decision to migrate.

The second site is Maharajganj, Kathmandu-3, the location where my family first settled upon arrival in the capital city. This area marks the point of transition from rural to urban life, reflecting both the initial challenges and opportunities we encountered. The third site is our current residence in Baluwatar, Kathmandu-4, which signifies a relative state of socio-economic stability and a reconstitution of identity in an urban, middle-class setting. By selecting these three interconnected sites, the study traces a continuum of spatial, economic, and cultural transformation across generations.

3.2 Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and reflexive approach grounded in autoethnography. It blends ethnographic sensibility with autobiographical narrative to explore how structural forces like land reform, caste boundaries, and urbanization are embodied and experienced at the personal level. The design is multi-sited and layered, emphasizing both introspective reflection and dialogic engagement with family and community members. It integrates elements of sensory ethnography and oral traditions like kuro graphy to capture the embodied, affective, and narrative dimensions of migration. The researcher's positionality — as both a subject and an analyst — is central to the methodology, allowing for a deeper interrogation of how lived experience functions as a source of knowledge.

3.3 Nature and Sources of Data

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was generated through autoethnographic reflection, in-depth interviews, sensory

tours, focus group discussions, and oral histories. These include embodied memories, emotional responses, and spatial experiences documented through journaling, as well as dialogic encounters with family members and key informants.

Secondary data includes historical records, demographic data (particularly census reports from 1981 to 2021), government policies related to migration and land reform, and scholarly literature on migration, labor, and urban transformation. These sources provide the broader socio-political and historical context within which personal narratives are situated and interpreted.

3.4 Universe and Sampling Procedure

The universe of this study comprises members of my immediate and extended family, fellow villagers from Gamnang who experienced or witnessed migration, and early settlers in Kathmandu who share similar migratory trajectories. Given the autoethnographic orientation of the research, purposive sampling was employed. Participants were selected based on their relevance to the research questions and their experiential knowledge of the migratory process. This included parents, elder relatives, neighbors, and community leaders both in Okhaldhunga and Kathmandu. Focus group participants were chosen to ensure a range of perspectives across generations and genders, thereby enriching the analysis with diverse voices.

3.5 Data Collection Tools and Techniques

Data collection involved multiple qualitative tools and techniques. A personal journal was maintained throughout the research period to record reflections, memories, bodily sensations, and emotional responses. In-depth oral history interviews were conducted with my mother and late father, with particular attention to metaphor, silence, and cadence — drawing on the kuro graphic tradition. Focus group discussions were held in both Okhaldhunga and Kathmandu, exploring themes such as land use, labor transitions, cultural identity, and intergenerational aspiration. A sensory ethnographic tour was carried out in Gamnang and our past and current residences in Kathmandu, employing techniques such as photo elicitation, voice recording, and object analysis. Additional key informant interviews with local leaders, social workers, and early migrants enriched the data further.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical practice was central to all stages of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and pseudonyms were used where requested to protect privacy. Member-checking and collaborative transcription were employed to ensure that participants had the opportunity to verify and clarify their narratives. Given the dual role of the researcher as both insider and analyst, reflexivity was maintained throughout the study. Personal involvement was critically examined, not suppressed, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between researcher and subject. Dialogic authorship was encouraged by treating interviews as co-constructed narratives rather than extractive data-gathering exercises.

3.7 Process of Data Analysis

The analysis of data followed a thematic and interpretive process. Journals, interviews, and field notes were coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to migration, identity, labor, embodiment, and memory. Attention was paid to both content and form — how things were said as much as what was said.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, particularly the idea of hysteresis, was used to understand the disjuncture between past dispositions and current conditions. Pink's framework of sensory ethnography informed the reading of sensory data, while kuro graphy provided a culturally resonant lens through which narrative and memory were interpreted. Triangulation was not pursued in the positivist sense, but rather to enrich the depth and complexity of the findings through multiple modalities and voices.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

While autoethnography offers unique insights into the lived experience of migration, it also poses certain limitations. The deeply personal nature of the method may raise questions of generalizability. However, the goal here is not to produce universal claims but to generate nuanced, situated knowledge. As an insider-researcher, emotional proximity to the subject matter may introduce bias, yet this very intimacy enables access to layered meanings often missed by outsiders. Time and resource constraints limited the number of participants and the frequency of return visits to Okhaldhunga. Nonetheless, these limitations are acknowledged as part of the methodological transparency and critical reflexivity embedded in the study.

CHAPTER 4:
MIGRATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF SUBJECTIVITY

4.1 Family Background in Rural Okhaldhunga

Gamnang was a village suspended in time — three to four days of hard walking from the capital, yet worlds away from its promises of progress. No roads cut through its hills, no electricity hummed in its homes, and no schools or health posts stood within easy reach. The nearest marketplace was a half-day's journey on foot. Life here was a cycle of survival: families bent over rocky fields, coaxing maize, millet, and potatoes from the unyielding earth, while a modest herd of buffaloes, cows, and goats meant the difference between hunger and sustenance.

4.1.1 Education: A Distant Dream

For the children of Gamnang, education was a luxury measured in miles. The closest primary school — a one-hour trek down steep trails — taught only up to grade five. For grades six through eight, the walk stretched to half a day. Few ventured farther. Chitra Bahadur Basnet, known to all as Chitre Master, remembers the village's past with painful clarity:

> There was no school in our village; the nearest one was at Mulpadhero, about one hour's walk down, where only children from Brahmin families studied, not those from Kshetri families. Even to read a single letter, people had to go to the *dittha* (a government officer responsible for legal and administrative matters) of the neighboring village. Moreover, to have a response written, one had to visit him with offerings like ghee and yogurt. The *najar* (perspective) of others towards us was not good. This situation stung me so deeply that I began gathering support to establish a school in our village."

His determination bore fruit. The Gramjyoti Primary School rose from the dust of neglect. "Now, the school has been upgraded to a Basic School, operating classes up to grade eight. The process to upgrade it to High school is going on."

4.1.2 Health: A Matter of Luck and Will

In a place where sickness could be a death sentence, survival often depended on the kindness of others. My mother still speaks of her debt to Chitre Master:

> You wouldn't be here today if he hadn't taken the initiative to help. You were suffering from an unknown illness for a long time. You couldn't eat anything and had become very pale. Nothing worked, from sorcery to homemade medicines. You would only feel better if you lay down on a damp floor. I lost hope and took you to the nearby canal. The water wasn't running, but it was damp enough to calm you. Chitre Master saw this, and he sent you to the health post.

Chitre Master recalls the urgency of those days. "You were seriously ill and getting worse by the day," he recalled. "Realizing that sorcery alone wouldn't be enough, I arranged to send you to Sauntar (Saghutar), a village about a 4–5 hour walk away." There, I was diagnosed with stomach worms and given medicine to take after the last meal of the day, along with advice to sleep warmly.

"That medicine cured you," he said. "But even after the worms were gone, you remained pale and frequently fainted. Noticing this, I understood it was a matter of nutrition. Your family didn't have a *duhuno* (a milking cow or buffalo), so I sent milk from my house for 10 or 11 days," he explained. "Gradually, you regained your strength. Even with a health post in the village, care was scarce. "There were no doctors, only common medicines available."

4.1.3 Marketplace: Salt and Survival

The closest semblance of commerce was Saghutar Bazar, a scattering of stalls along the Likhu River, marking the border between Okhaldhunga and Ramechhap. Later, the people of Gamnang initiated a weekly *haat* at Pokhari, where the primary school was newly established. Chitre Master paints a picture of frugal trade:

> There used to be a weekly *haat* every Friday at Pokharai. Shopkeepers from other places used to come and sell consumer goods. People used to buy kerosene oil, salt, cooking oil, rice, tobacco, and cigarettes. As weeks passed, people started selling and buying alcoholic drinks in the *haat*, and it came to a closure.

My mother's memories echo his: "There was no market, no shops. The only thing we could — or needed — to buy was salt. The men would make the journey and bring it home. We had no money for food or grains."

And what of the small luxuries? “Back then, we only used to apply tika — we didn’t know about creams, powders, or lipsticks. I remember when cattle fell sick, people would feed them red-colored soap. Otherwise, we bathed with *siundi*, *pangro*, *chiple* roots, or *pina*, and washed clothes with firewood ash. For brushing teeth, we used charcoal or soft stones.”

4.1.4 A Daughter’s Inheritance: Nothing but Struggle

My mother came from a *Jimmuwal* family — once prosperous, with jars of coins lining their home. But wealth meant nothing for a daughter. Her mother died young, leaving her father to marry four times in succession.

When he tried to wed her to “a man fifteen years her senior — married with a wife but no children” — she refused. Yet her defiance led her to another hard truth: her eventual marriage to “a widower with a son from his previous wife.” Besides, as my mother says, “a man whose scrap of land could never feed a growing family.” That hunger, that relentless scrape of empty bowls, became the push that drove our family to the capital — a flight from one hardship to another, in search of something better.

4.2 Motivations for Migration to Kathmandu

"Did you ever regret leaving the village?"

My mother’s reply comes without hesitation: "*Ketaketi lai ‘aghaunji’ khuwauna aayeko ho, tyaspachhi kahilyai bhokai rakhna parena. Khusi chhu. Kahilyai pachhuto lagena.*" (I came here to feed these children until their bellies were full — I could always feed them to their satisfaction. It makes me happy — not a single regret.)

The primary motivation for migrating to Kathmandu was the insufficient yield from my father’s inherited land. However, this struggle was compounded by five interconnected factors: (1) A daughter’s stolen inheritance, a dream deferred; (2) the growing stomachs — five children and two additional dependents, including an elderly grandfather; (3) the lack of local wage labor opportunities in the village; (4) strained relations with the nearest kin’s family; and (5) the pursuit of better future prospects for the children.

4.2.1 A Daughter's Stolen Inheritance

Though born into a wealthy family, the jars of coins and fertile fields were never hers to claim. Yet she dared to imagine more — if not for herself, then for the children who would inherit her hunger.

4.2.2 Family Lineage

My father belongs to the Bhattarai of Vashistha *gotra* (clan), and my mother is from the Khadka family of Kausik *gotra*. We are tied with our ancestral village only in terms of family lineage and *kul*: Every time our *kul puja* occurs, my brother goes there to attend.

In a way we are standing now on what my father and mother earned from their hard work, that is to say, we hardly possess any of economic capital (Bourdieu 1977) from ancestors except a *amkhara* from my mother's parental line and *kachaura* from her in laws: the *amkhara* is in altar whereas the *kachaura* is being used to scoop rice grains every day.

4.2.3 Biskun of Coins

My mother was born into one of the richest families in her area. Her grandfather was *Jimmuwal* of the area. Collecting levies and coordinating with central government was his duty. Besides, he had many responsibilities like attending social and cultural events; working as a village judge to resolve local conflicts; and planning for the betterment of the area. Besides a *Jimmuwal* as a local representative, it seems there was no presence of government by then in the area.

Her *Jimmuwal* had a plentiful of land and jars full of coins. She herself witnessed the *biskun* of coins her grandfather put in the sun to remove the moisture on them. Though a very wealthy family, the subsistence was primarily based on agriculture, and thus everyone in the family, especially female members, had no way out except tilling land and busying in everyday chores. But they had no difficulty for basic subsistence compared to neighboring families: The land was more than enough to feed them all.

The *Jimmuwal* had three daughters and a son. And the son had four sons and three daughters; the second one of them is my mother. After 16 years in her natal home, my mother was married to a man from a neighboring village.

Chitre Master is not only my rescuer; without his support I might not be in this world. he is the one who dreamed for future prospects of all villagers. He is also that special one for my parents: he is the one who made matchmaking to my parents and performed the *kanyadan* (a Hindu ritual of giving the bride's hand to the groom in marriage) for your mother.

"How do you remember my parents?" I asked Chitre Master while having an in-depth interview. He confessed:

> I am the one who performed the *kanyadan* (a Hindu ritual of giving the bride's hand to the groom in marriage) for your mother. Your grandfather, your mother's marriage was all set by her father with Pipalka Thapa. Your mother did not want to marry that man. On the other, you father was looking for a suitable girl. So, I did matchmaking for your parents. I arranged a priest and I performed the *kanyadan* for your mother.

My mother was conspired to marry a 15-year older man with a wife and no children. She shares a story of rebellion and courage when it comes to her marriage:

> It was said that there was a *haat* at Saghutar. A neighboring woman, who was married to someone from another village, persuaded me to join her on the trip to the *haat*. My father allowed me to go, and I agreed.... We went, spent time there, and left late to return home. It was dark by the time we asked for shelter at a house along the way. It was about 9:00 PM when a priest appeared. And that's when the conspiracy unfolded. The priest had come to perform a wedding for a man from the Thapa family. The woman who had convinced me to go to Saghutar was married to the very man I was supposed to marry. She had no children, and, as it turned out, she wanted me to marry her husband. I realized she had intentionally delayed our return from Saghutar, the *haat*.
>
> She spontaneously shared:
>
> I was told that my father had already consented to give my hand to the 15 years older Thapa man. That was the plan. Before a marriage could be conducted, it was customary to ask "*raji* or *biraji*" (consented or not consented). I did not want to marry him, so I said, "*Biraji*." I firmly refused and even challenged the priest: "*Aaja mero bihe garaidiis bhane, bholi panchayatma tero bihe dekhaidinchhu!*" (If you force this marriage today, I

> will make sure you are punished in the village meeting tomorrow!) Then, the priest stepped back, and so did everyone else. I stayed awake through the night, and by early dawn, I walked home alone. I arrived around 11 in the morning. My father didn't respond to me, nor did he speak a word. The Thapa man and the woman who had persuaded me to go to Saghutar reported to my father that I had refused the marriage.

Then came the second proposal. The would-be groom was still not much better. While neither proposal fully aligned with her desires, the second one resonated more with what her embodied sense of the possible could tolerate. Her habitus, shaped by prior experiences and the social field she inhabited, predisposed her to perceive the second as adequate — if not ideal. This was not merely a resignation but a practical negotiation with her social reality.

> I had turned down a marriage proposal before — I refused to marry a man who already had a wife. Then came another proposal — he was a widower with a son from his previous wife. I thought marrying a widower was far better than marrying a man who already had a wife. Besides, my stepmother, who had always been kind to me, persuaded me not to refuse. She also mentioned that the man I was supposed to marry would take me to Nepal (Kathmandu) to live after our marriage. With that in mind, I consented. With the support of Chitre Master, our wedding took place at a neighbor's house, where Chitre Master performed my *kanyadan*. It was a simple wedding — the total expense was only NRs 10.

She married to a man of a poor family; as the number of the stomachs grew, the land turned to be insufficient.

4.2.4 The Growing Stomachs

The past days are gone. The fame of her grandfather is gone. The property he accumulated though survived through her father was no more: her brothers (my maternal uncles) put it all in gambling and lost everything. The land of her in-laws was never sufficient, and that even got further divided: "Your (I) grandfather had three sons and thus we got only one fourth of it," My mother shared. A huge responsibility was with my parents, more specifically with my mother, to feed a family of nine."

My grandfather, my parents, four of my elder brothers and I. How was it, the family of nine?

> Even though formally, your grandfather was with your uncle (my father’s youngest brother), they (my uncle and aunt) never treated your grandfather well. Though the *jiuni* (my grandfather’s portion of land) was with your uncle, they hardly fed him enough. My heart would not bear the mistreatment of my *Sasura* (father-in-law), so he too gradually became dependent on us. Secondly, your *Mailo* uncle and aunty had been to India immediately after their marriage. Uncle had a mysterious death before their first baby was born. Your aunty had a baby boy, she reared him for two years, then she eloped with another man. She had taken her child (my cousin) with her but was neglected in her new husband’s home. One day, your father found him in a bamboo grove and brought the child home. Then we reared. He made the family of nine stomachs, then.

The earth could not yield enough. No matter how fiercely they tilled their tiny plot, no matter how many dawns they spent bent over neighbors' fields in exchange for handfuls of grain, no matter how far they trekked to gather firewood and fodder — still, the children's bellies growled like restless animals. Each night, the same cruel arithmetic: divide the food by nine hungry mouths, subtract tomorrow's strength, carry over another day of want. Finally, the only equation left was this: leave or starve. Kathmandu promised no paradise, but at least no child would sleep clutching an empty stomach like a stone.

4.2.5 Lack of Wage Labor Opportunities

Gamnang was a typical Nepali village, untouched by infrastructure development and far removed from economic opportunities. The nearest marketplace was small and required hours of walking to reach, making trade and commerce difficult for its residents. Like most rural communities, Gamnang's economy operated through subsistence farming and reciprocal labor systems such as *parma*, where neighbors exchanged work without monetary payment. With no industries or developed markets, wage labor was virtually nonexistent — families survived on what they could grow, with little surplus to sell.

Isolation worsened these limitations. Poor roads and a lack of transportation kept Gamnang disconnected from broader markets, leaving no demand for labor beyond farming. Without factories, workshops, or service jobs, young people had no choice but to work shrinking family plots, even as the land could no longer support growing households. The absence of a cash-based economy trapped families in a cycle of barter and hand-to-mouth survival, with no safety net for hard times.

For many in Gamnang, this lack of wage opportunities made migration inevitable. When farming could no longer sustain them, leaving for Kathmandu — where even difficult jobs offered actual wages — became the only path forward. The village's economic stagnation, shaped by isolation and underdevelopment, pushed generations to seek livelihoods elsewhere, breaking ties with the land that could no longer feed them.

4.2.6 Strained Relations

Here is a story my mother rarely told without a tremor in her voice — a story not just of land and inheritance but of betrayal nestled within blood ties. It speaks of a quiet endurance, of wounds inflicted not by strangers but by those living adjoining the *sandh*, same premises and shared memory. In her words, the past comes alive —not as nostalgia, but as a bitter root that pushed us to leave behind the village we once called home:

> Your uncle was never kind to us. He nursed a bitter suspicion — that we only kept your grandfather (his father) with us to stake claim on his *jiuni* (your grandfather's portion of land). But the truth was the opposite: it was he who coveted that land. He and his wife neglected your grandfather — they barely fed him, rarely cared for him. It was me (my mother) to secretly brought him food. And I had to hide it because if your aunt saw, she'd pick fights, stir up drama, make it seem like I was shaming them. This betrayal became one of the reasons we left the village. Think of it — he shared blood with your father, shared a mother's womb, shared the *sandh* (land border) between our homes. He wasn't just our nearest kin; his house was the closest to ours. And yet, living beside him felt like having a splinter in the eye. I'd rather uproot us all than spend another day in that poisonous closeness.

4.2.7 Future Prospects for the Children

In the village, the future had sharp edges — a boy's hands would bump young, gripping a plough or spade instead of a pencil; a girl's dreams would be measured in loads of fodder or firewood, not schoolbooks. Kathmandu was a gamble, but it held promises the soil never could: classrooms instead of fields, wages instead of barter, a horizon wider than the next harvest. My father speaks very little, but he shared this profoundly: "Besides full stomachs, we wanted our children to taste a life where 'enough' wasn't the highest aspiration. Where they could stumble, rise, and stumble again — not under the weight of ancestral debt, but toward something they chose."

4.3 Transition from Farming to Urban Livelihoods

We were eleven members in total: my parents, my grandfather, four of my elder brothers, one of my aunts (my mother's younger sister), a cousin, a distant uncle, and myself.

It took four days for us to reach Maharajgunj, Kathmandu," my father recalled. "We brought nothing more than four thousand rupees, a few kilos of ghee, millet flour, some *gundruk* (fermented greens), and some ragged clothes and blankets.

Were there any relatives in Kathmandu? Had accommodation been pre-arranged for this group of eleven, which included children and an elderly man?

None of the relatives we knew were in Kathmandu. We had no idea where to go, whom to contact, or where we would stay," my mother shared. "I had only heard that there would be opportunities for wage labor — and that through hard work, we could manage to eat with a full stomach."

4.3.1 Days in a Cowshed

"Fortunately, we happened to meet a man named Khadga Bahadur on the way," my father recalled. "We were somewhat familiar with each other. He was living in Kathmandu and was returning home to Okhaldhunga. We shared our situation with him, and he suggested a possible solution."

Following his advice, we arrived in Maharajgunj. After asking at many turnings for Rabi Prasad Acharya's house — the one Khadga Bahadur had mentioned — we finally found it. Rabi's father, a *puret* (priest) by profession, allowed us to stay in their cowshed.

"During the day, the cows were tethered outside on the open ground," my mother remembered. "We had to cook early in the morning after the cows were taken out and again in the evening before they were brought back in."

I remember nothing of that first shelter in Kathmandu. I later visited the place during this study — my only visit there as far as I can recall. My father showed me the location and described the surroundings: "There used to be a bamboo grove… on this side, a *darlagdo jhadi* — a scary, dense thicket… and the cowshed was right here." Now, a concrete house stood in its place.

My father was momentarily confused while trying to lead us to the current house where Rabi Prasad resides. The new house had a modern design, and the entrance was from another side. Eventually, we reached the premises, now blooming with a variety of flowering plants. My father and Rabi uncle chatted about many things — from each other's health to mutual acquaintances.

Once I had introduced the purpose of my visit, I asked him, "What do you remember about the time we stayed at your place?"

"I don't recall it vividly," said the 74-year-old Acharya. "They had four or five children with them. Khadga Bahadur brought them here. He was an honest man who worked at our home for 16 years. So, based on his word, we offered them shelter."

My father gently corrected him: "We met Khadga Bahadur on the way here. He gave us your address, and we came straight to your place. He only returned after six or seven days."

"Didn't you feel burdened at the time?" I asked.

Rabi Prasad, looking frail and quietly mentioning that he could no longer go outside because of Parkinson's disease, replied:

> No, not at all. We were happy. Ours was a large, extended family — more people just meant more joy. It was harder for them than for us. The cowshed was full of paddy straw. That and a hand pump for water were the only facilities they had.

4.3.2 Ways of Living

My father found work as a porter and helper at a local shop in Maharajgunj, while my mother started laboring and spinning thread as a side hustle. Their hard

work and resilience earned us a small fortune: we were able to rent a room, and we children were admitted to school. But the challenges of urban life loomed large — house rent, feeding a family of ten, medical expenses for my grandfather, and school fees for children were no small burden.

My mother still speaks with pride about how she managed those difficult days. The bitter memories, however, remain vivid in her mind. My youngest sibling — my only sister — was born during this most challenging time. My mother's job involved winnowing sand and carrying bricks to the third floor of a construction site. She worked all day long, pausing only to prepare and serve tea to my grandfather. On that day, she carried loads until 6:00 p.m., and at 9:00 p.m., she gave birth to *Kanchhi* (the youngest and the last).

The *nwaran* (naming ceremony) was done on the seventh day, and she returned to work the very next day.

Was she paid well? Her wage was only Rs. 12 per day, while men earned Rs. 20 to Rs. 25. Though payments often came late, at least she was paid — until that one time when all her labor went unpaid. She had worked during her postpartum days, carrying bricks, sand, and 50 kg sacks of cement to the third floor. The total amount due was Rs. 1,050 — at Rs. 12 a day — but she never received it.

She had labored tirelessly at the house of Dambar Bahadur (Mantri) during those unforgiving days. Desperate to collect her rightful wages, she approached Mantri again and again. Each time, he dismissed her with the same excuse — that the *thekedar* (contractor) had already been paid. But the contractor had vanished without a trace, never to return, leaving her unpaid and unseen, as if her sweat and struggle had never mattered.

4.4 Early Challenges and Adaptations

The first year in Kathmandu was the hardest for my mother. The unfamiliar rhythms of city life disturbed her deeply, not only physically but emotionally. "I couldn't sleep well at night," she recalled. "My mind kept drifting back to everything I had left behind. I had collected so much firewood — stacked neatly. I had woven *Gundri* (straw mats) with care. I had planted yam just downhill from the house, and *iskus* (a vegetable similar to chayote) too — I still remember how full and healthy the fruits were. Even the sack I left behind kept coming to my mind. Sometimes I'd sit in

silence and wonder — why did I leave all this?" The nostalgia of a life once rooted in the soil was now replaced by the concrete dust of an unfamiliar city.

Kathmandu was an unknown landscape. No one here was our own — not by blood, not by relation. It was a world of strangers, unfamiliar corners, and alien customs. And yet, in that chaos, my parents moved forward with relentless determination. What they lacked in connections, they made up for in sheer effort. My father worked long hours in a local shop; my mother took on construction labor, spun thread, did housework — whatever came her way. They had nothing but honesty, grit, and the will to survive. And slowly, that consistency began to take root.

Even in the city of strangers, there were glimmers of kindness. "Rabi Prasad's family — whom we had never met before — offered us shelter in their cowshed during the first days. Dhane Sahu and his wife, too, extended warmth and generosity to our family, reminding us that empathy still existed even in a place that often felt cold and indifferent. Their small acts of kindness gave us the emotional fuel to carry on." Mother contemplates and further acknowledges:

> We were a family of workers — bound by hardship but powered by mutual support. All our siblings and dependents worked diligently, doing whatever they could to help sustain the household. From carrying loads and selling goods to helping at home, everyone contributed. Their labor, despite being unrecognized by the world, formed the foundation on which we slowly built a new life.

My mother still remembers the betrayal of those who exploited her. In the most vulnerable period of her life — during late pregnancy and right after childbirth — she worked as a construction laborer for the house of Dambar Bahadur. She carried sand, bricks, and cement — all while bearing the pain of impending motherhood. And yet, she was never paid. She approached Mantri several times, but he always claimed the *thekedar* (contractor) had already received the money. The contractor, however, vanished, leaving her unpaid and unseen. Her labor — during a time she should have been resting — was erased as if it never mattered.

The city tested us in every possible way. The most heartbreaking loss came when my *Kanchho Dai* (elder brother) fell into the snare of drug addiction. Despite

our efforts, the city’s darker shadows consumed him. He eventually died of hepatitis — a death that still haunts my mother, a wound that has never healed.

Making a living also came with daily fear. My mother tried to sell simple goods in the street, but police raids were frequent and cruel. Vendors were chased away, goods were seized, and dignity was often trampled under the boots of authority. And yet, every day, she returned — choosing to fight, to endure, to adapt. Mother acknowledges the compassionate hearts:

> Some people stood by us along the way — not only here in the city but also back in the village. Chitre Master and Karki Kanchha supported us a lot. And here in Kathmandu, we owe a debt of gratitude to the few kind souls like Rabi Prasad’s family and Dhane Sahu, whose compassion helped us stand on our feet in those early days.

Our settlement in the city wasn’t just about finding a roof and a job — it was about carving space for ourselves in a world that didn’t expect us to survive. It was about adaptation, endurance, and the slow blossoming of resilience — watered by struggle, sustained by hard work, and rooted in hope.

4.5 Tracing Roots through Senses: Revisiting Rural Okhaldhunga

The first thing I noticed when I returned to Gamnang after decades away was the smell — damp earth, wood smoke, and something indefinable that immediately transported me back to my earliest childhood. The scent memory was so visceral that for a moment, I was three years old again, clinging to my brother's back as we began our exodus to Kathmandu on Shree Panchami Day, Phalgun, 2042 BS. That journey, which I remember only in fragments — the rustle of tall trees, the warmth of my mother's body as she cooked over a makeshift hearth — marked the dividing line between two worlds.

4.5.1 The Fractured Memory of Migration

Migration is never a clean break. Even as a child too young to comprehend the gravity of our move, my body absorbed the textures of transition: the rough fabric of the *doko* (basket) I was carried in, the rhythmic sway of my brother's gait as he navigated mountain trails.

Now, the way sunlight filtered through the leaves of the bombax trees near Manthali — some in full crimson bloom, others bare and skeletal as we climbed higher. These sensory impressions became what anthropologist Feld might call "acoustemology" — a way of knowing the world through sound, touch, and embodied experience rather than coherent narrative.

The only moment I recall with clarity is our pause at the Likhu River, where the water's murmur seemed to whisper a warning. This river, which separates Ramechhap from Okhaldhunga, was both a geographical and symbolic threshold. As we crossed it, we were unknowingly stepping from one ontological reality into another — from a world where time moved with the rhythms of planting and harvest to one governed by the tyranny of clocks and wages.

4.5.2 The Haunting of Return

Standing amidst the ruins of my birthplace in February 2023, I traced my fingers over the hearthstones my mother described with such precision. The act of touching these remnants — the *dhiki*'s support stones, the ancient trees that had witnessed generations — felt like pressing against a palimpsest. Beneath the surface of crumbling mud walls, I could almost discern the *atma* (souls) of our former lives: my grandfather's asthmatic cough echoing in the empty yard, my mother's laughter as she carried water from the *padhero* (natural spring water well).

That natural spring, still flowing beneath its mossy coverstone, held a particular power. It was here that women of the village once gathered, their water jars clinking as they shared gossip, grief, and ghost stories — like the tale of the newlywed possessed after encountering a spectral washerman at midnight. As I scooped water into my palms, I wondered if any trace of my mother's DNA still lingered in this liquid archive. The *padhero*'s persistence felt like a quiet rebuke to Kathmandu's breakneck modernity.

4.5.3 The Needlewood Paradox

The Bhattarai clan's temple, with its incongruous needlewood tree erupting through the tin roof, became the perfect metaphor for our migrant existence. The neighbor's explanation — that the sacred tree was preserved during the temple's modernization — mirrored how we, too, had tried to graft old identities onto new realities. My UN badge and university textbooks were like that concrete structure:

respectable and institutional. But the roots pushing stubbornly through? Those were my mother's stories, the taste of *gundruk*, the involuntary way my fingers still move in the motions of wool-spinning when I'm stressed.

4.5.4 Shadow Selves and Unlived Lives

Meeting Manarupa was like staring into a warped mirror. Her life — early marriage, children wed before thirty, a son laboring in Qatar — represented the road not taken. As she proudly showed me photos of her grandchildren, I calculated the parallel timeline: had we stayed, I might be a grandmother too, my world bounded by these same hills. Instead, I've become a curator of childhood memories I can barely recall, a translator between the girl who once drank from the *padhero* and the woman who now advocates for children's rights in air-conditioned conference rooms.

The irony isn't lost on me. My job ensures Nepali girls can attend school, yet only three of six Bhattarai siblings finished theirs. I advocate for equity while my mother's unpaid postpartum labor (Rs. 12 per day, Rs. 1050 never repaid) remains an open wound. This is the migrant's paradox: we straddle worlds but belong fully to neither, our achievements always shadowed by the ghosts of what — and who — was left behind.

CHAPTER 5:
EVOLVING ASPIRATIONS ACROSS GENERATIONS

5.1 First Generation: Survival and Stability

For the first generation, coming to Kathmandu was not a journey of ambition but of displacement. They did not arrive with big dreams but with a quiet desperation — the urgency to survive, to adapt, and to make life livable in a world that was completely foreign. Every object they carried — *gundri* (a traditional mat made of straw), millet flour, *gundruk* (fermented greens) — was a piece of a life they had just left behind. In place of familiarity, they found themselves in the anonymous sprawl of an ever-expanding city.

Their first shelter was not a room, but a cowshed offered by a local priest. It was not much, but it was a roof — and that counted for everything in those early days. My mother remembers it with vivid clarity, not just for the hardship, but for the strange, bittersweet comfort it offered:

"We had to cook in the morning only after the cows were tethered outside, and in the evening, we had to cook before the cows were shifted in. Though it was Phalgun (March), it was cold. The straw and the cows made our new home warm — almost giving the flavor of village life. The concrete building would have been nasty to us, perhaps."

The warmth of the animals and the scent of straw reminded them of the village, even as their reality had shifted to the hardened corners of Kathmandu. They were displaced people in their own country — rural migrants trying to make sense of the capital's rhythms.

From the very next morning, survival became a task they approached with unwavering determination. My father, reflecting on those frantic early days, shared:

"My wife was busy taking care of all the children and my elderly father. I found a job plastering walls."

He wasn't trained, but that never stopped him: "I was familiar with mason work — making walls with mud and stone — in the village. I thought I'd learn by observing others. I learned it soon."

There was no time to hesitate. Their only choice was to learn by doing. Each morning began with uncertainty but ended with the small victories of adaptation — new skills, new people, new places. Slowly, they moved out of the cowshed and into a rented room. It was a tight space, but it offered dignity and a crucial sense of stability. For the first time in weeks, they could sleep without listening to the heavy breathing of cattle or the footsteps of strangers.

In those early years, they lived on the edge of hardship, but they also met kindness. In Maharajganj, there was a grocery store known locally as *Dhane Sahu ko Pasal*. The couple who ran it — Dhane Sahu and his wife — extended a hand when few others would. They offered groceries on credit, lent old clothes, and treated my family with genuine care. My father, wanting to reciprocate, began helping at the store — loading and unloading sacks of rice, delivering goods, moving heavy items with nothing more than his back and his grit.

"Eventually, this (shop porter) turned out to be my permanent job," he shared later, a quiet pride in his voice.

My mother, too, stepped into the labor market — in the most literal sense. She carried bricks, sand, and cement at construction sites. She worked through her pregnancy, through her postpartum days, because there was simply no alternative. But the urban labor market was not only brutal, it was also dishonest.

"I was scammed by Dambar Bahadur's construction work. It was hard work — and there was always the chance of not being paid," she said, the memory still sharp.

Burned by this betrayal, she tried new routes. She began roasting peanuts and grilling corn cobs to sell on the streets. But even that came with its share of risk:

"Municipality police often raided. Then I started spinning wool — that was much easier and more secure."

Each shift — from construction to street vending to spinning — was not a sign of instability, but of adaptability. They were people who refused to break, no matter how hostile the conditions. Their bodies bore the marks of labor, their nights were sleepless, their food was minimal, but their will was intact.

In this unfamiliar urban world, there was no relative, no community waiting for them.

"No one was our own by relation or blood," my mother recalled. "It was all unfamiliar urban space."

And yet, human warmth found them. Rabi Prasad Acharya's family offered a roof when they had none. Dhane Sahu and his wife stood beside them when they were most vulnerable. These acts of generosity left deep marks. Back in the village, people like Chitre Master and Karki Kanchha had helped them gather courage. In Kathmandu, that thread of compassion continued in new forms.

Through all of this, no one in the family was idle.

"All my children and dependents worked diligently," my mother said. Every hand — no matter how small — was a contributor to survival.

For this first generation, aspiration was not about upward mobility or future plans. It was about holding each day together, protecting the children, and building a foundation brick by brick, job by job, kind gesture by kind gesture. Their strength was not in loud declarations but in the quiet resilience of enduring, adapting, and slowly turning hardship into habit — and habit into hope.

5.2 Middle Siblings: Bridging Rural and Urban Worlds

The middle generation — a group that included four of my elder brothers, a cousin brother, an aunt, and a distant uncle — came of age at the intersection of two vastly different worlds. They were old enough to remember the rhythms of rural life, yet young and adaptive enough to respond to the demands of the city. Their lives became the living bridge between a village that faded into memory and an urban world that demanded constant transformation.

This generation carried the same spirit of grit and adaptability that defined our parents, but with a slight difference — they had room to explore. My mother fondly recalls: "All of them started working from labor works. Later they too, like us, made their way to the work they found suitable — suitable for their skills, prowess, and aspiration."

Each one began with nothing but hands ready to toil, but over time, they carved paths of their own. They moved through the gritty lanes of Kathmandu — with dust in their lungs and dreams in their eyes — until they found niches that offered them purpose, pride, and the first glimmers of upward mobility.

Jetho Dai, my eldest brother, was among the first to experiment with livelihood beyond raw labor.

"I used to wander far and wide selling ice pops. School areas, at break time and home time, would yield more," he recalled with a smile.

He mapped the city by foot, his feet becoming familiar with the dusty schoolyards and narrow alleys. For a while, the ice pop business sustained him, but monotony crept in. He yearned for something more dynamic, something that gave him control and movement. He learned to drive and switched to operating auto rickshaws, which later transitioned into driving taxis for many years. Eventually, he found stability in something closer to home — running a grocery shop, much like Dhane Sahu's store that had once helped our family survive. Now a shopkeeper, Netra Bahadur stands as a symbol of full-circle transformation. His son is studying in Australia, and his daughter is happily married — a picture of generational mobility that began with melted ice pops on sunny afternoons.

Mailo Dai, the second brother, took a different route. He moved from construction work into domestic service.

"I used to work at a Rana's house, the maternal home of the then Queen Aishwarya," he shared, a faint trace of astonishment still in his voice.

For a young man from a displaced peasant family, working inside the towering walls of old aristocracy was surreal. Over time, he transitioned into a support staff role at a school — a job he still holds. In a poetic turn, the very institution where he served in silence became the springboard for his children's education. Both of his children hold university degrees. His daughter is married with a child, and his son works in the private sector — their lives steadily inching away from the harsh labor that once defined the family.

Sailo Dai, Bed Bahadur, was younger and thus shielded from the back-breaking construction labor. Still, he was no stranger to hard work. "I started my career as a house labor. I used to work at a teacher's house," he said.

This humble beginning eventually led him to the Police Training Center. He completed education equivalent to grade six there and was later recruited as a police constable. Through sheer perseverance and a quiet commitment to his duty, he rose in rank and now serves as a Police Sub-Inspector. His wife, too, is a police officer — an

Assistant Sub-Inspector. Their only daughter is currently pursuing her high school education. Together, they represent the transformative potential of steady institutional employment — a rarity for rural migrants just a generation ago.

The cousin brother, who migrated to Kathmandu alongside us, stayed in our home for many years. Like the others, he began with manual labor but eventually established himself as an LPG gas seller. While not glamorous, the job offers consistency and community, and he has quietly built a life of self-reliance.

Even extended kin — an aunt and a distant uncle — who followed my parents to Kathmandu, found not just work but each other. They got married and now own a house in Baluwatar, next to ours. Their story, too, echoes the spirit of this generation: navigating migration, forging bonds, and planting roots in a place that once felt completely alien.

The middle siblings and kin did not abandon the past — they carried it, interpreted it anew, and built over it with bricks of opportunity, trial, and sheer willpower. They are the generation that walked the tightrope between old and new, tradition and transformation. In their stories, we see how a family of displaced villagers can become homeowners, shopkeepers, state employees, and urban citizens — not through sudden leaps, but through steady strides across decades.

5.3 Younger Generation: Educational Aspirations

The youngest generation of our family — consisting of my youngest elder brother, Late Santosh Bhattarai (*Kanchho Dai*), myself, and my younger sister, Sunita Bhattarai — represents the generation born at the cusp of displacement and settlement. While our elder siblings had carried the dust of the village on their feet and the calluses of labor on their hands, we were the children who bore the weight of new expectations — to rise not just economically, but intellectually and socially, through education.

Both *Kanchho Dai* and I were born in Gamnang, Okhaldhunga, before our family migrated to Kathmandu. We grew up watching our parents struggle and our older siblings work relentlessly to keep the family afloat. The youngest among us, Sunita, was born here in the city — a daughter of Kathmandu by birth, though her upbringing remained rooted in the ethics of village hardship and family solidarity.

But even within our generation, the journeys were vastly different.

Kanchho Dai, full of life and charm in his early years, couldn't quite adjust to the demands of formal education. He dropped out after grade 8, unable to further his schooling. Though he assisted our parents occasionally, he remained largely adrift — never finding a direction to channel his energy. He did not build a sustainable livelihood, nor did he anchor himself to a purpose. He was married, briefly surrounded by love and partnership, but remained childless. Unfortunately, he succumbed to drug addiction, was occasionally detained by police, and was later diagnosed with hepatitis, which took his life prematurely in a hospital bed. In the aftermath, his wife left — quietly eloping with another man, leaving behind a memory tangled in sorrow and silence.

Whenever I ask my mother if she ever regrets leaving the village for the harsh uncertainties of Kathmandu, she replies without hesitation,

"We left the village to ensure my children's stomachs wouldn't remain empty. With the mercy of god and the hard work of us all, we could feed them well. Now, all of them are self-dependent. Rather, I am happily dependent on their earnings."

But I have seen it many times — the pause that follows this statement. It's a pause that carries more than breath. It holds within it the memory of a son lost too soon, a pain she never names but always feels. She often breaks into emotion, confessing softly,

"The only thorn in my heart is the untimely demise of my son."

In contrast, my own journey became more structured, more hopeful — though not without struggle. I remember our early days in Maharajganj, when we lived in a rented room near Ranibari. That small forest patch became our playground and provider. My younger sister and I swept the nearby temple, collecting coins left by devotees. We gathered firewood from Ranibari, picked mulberries, and nibbled on raspberries growing wild. We didn't have wealth, but we had the freedom of movement and the resilience of imagination. Sometimes, I feel like every tree in Ranibari and Maharajganj knows me — knows the small boy with big dreams and scraped knees.

I worked alongside my mother — selling roasted peanuts and grilled corn, spinning wool, managing household chores. But I never let go of my books.

Education was more than a path; it was a promise I made to myself and to my parents — that their sacrifices would not be in vain.

I completed my high school from the neighboring Shivapuri High School, then earned my Intermediate and Bachelor's degrees from Padmakanya Campus, followed by an M.A from Tri-Chandra College, and later an M.Phil in Sociology from the Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University.

Professionally, I began my career with NGOs, later transitioned into INGOs, and eventually found my place in the United Nations system, where I've been working for over seven years now as a Social Policy Officer. My journey from street vendor to policy officer is not just personal — it's symbolic of what happens when generations build upon each other's dreams.

My youngest sister, Sunita, also walked this path of aspiration. Educated entirely in Kathmandu, she earned her Bachelor's degree from a private college affiliated with Tribhuvan University. Her ambitions carried her abroad — she completed a post-graduate diploma in Urban Studies from the Netherlands. She was once happily married to a medical doctor, but the marriage ended in divorce. She is now raising her young son, and both of them live with us — their presence a reminder that strength often takes the form of quiet perseverance. She works as a Project Administrator at an International Organization, gracefully balancing motherhood and professional life.

As for me, I chose to remain unmarried. It's not a matter of resistance or loneliness — simply a choice shaped by my experiences, reflections, and sense of freedom. I live a life of independence, surrounded by my mother, siblings, nephews, nieces, and grand-nephews, forming a circle of intergenerational support.

Our extended family, particularly the children of my elder brothers and younger sister — my nephews and nieces — are now actively pursuing education and professional careers, carrying forward the legacy of transformation. They embody the aspirations of this younger generation: not only to succeed individually but to honor the journey that brought them here.

Together, Sunita and I represent a generational leap — from the struggles of survival to the pursuit of meaning and contribution. But we walk always in the shadow of those who came before us, and in the memory of the one we lost along the

way. This generation, while most distanced from the village by time and geography, remains emotionally tethered to the values born there — resilience, cooperation, humility, and hope. Our aspirations might have grown taller, but their roots run deep in the soil of our parents' and siblings' toil. The classroom, the office, the international seminar — they are all new terrains we learned to navigate. But the memory of Ranibari's mulberries and the temple's worn steps still ground us in who we are.

5.4 Factors Shifting Family Subjectivities

The transformation of our family from rural subsistence farmers in Gamnang, Okhaldhunga, to multi-generational city dwellers in Kathmandu has not only reshaped our material conditions but profoundly shifted our subjectivities — our sense of self, our roles, our hopes, and the meanings we attach to life.

The first and most visible shift began with migration itself. Leaving the ancestral village wasn't just a change in geography; it was a dislocation of rhythm, habit, and imagination. Life in Kathmandu forced my parents and older siblings to reorient themselves. The village was structured by seasons, kinship obligations, and subsistence routines. In the city, life became structured by wage work, landlord-tenant relations, and formal education. For my parents, survival was the only goal. But for the rest of us, especially the younger generation, the city opened up an aspirational horizon. It gave us the idea — and eventually the tools — to imagine different futures.

This generational repositioning — from survival to aspiration — is perhaps the most decisive shift in our family subjectivity. For example, while my eldest brothers started their lives in manual labor and later diversified into small-scale businesses or service jobs, the younger generation — myself, my sister, and our nieces and nephews — were socialized to believe in the power of education and professional identity. Where my mother once prayed that her children would simply not go hungry, today, she proudly watches her grandchildren pursue university degrees, work in NGOs, and migrate abroad for higher studies.

But these changes were not linear or uniform. They were layered with emotional costs, silences, and contradictions. The tragic demise of *Kanchho Dai*, our youngest elder brother, remains a poignant reminder that not all transformations are uplifting. His struggle with addiction, his emotional distance from education and career-making, and his untimely death have become part of the family's quiet grief —

a counterpoint to our success stories. My mother's pause each time she talks about being happy in Kathmandu reveals the emotional residue of this loss — a permanent scar in the family's memory.

Gender roles, too, have evolved sharply. My mother, who once saw her role as purely domestic, later became a street vendor and co-breadwinner. My sister and I, and now her daughter, embody a generation of women who are educated, economically independent, and professionally active. Even single motherhood, once unimaginable in our traditional setting, is now lived with dignity and strength by my sister, who raises her son with grace after her divorce. I, myself, have chosen a life without marriage — not out of rebellion, but from a sense of wholeness and independence. These are not isolated individual choices but part of a larger cultural shift in how gender and autonomy are being redefined in urban spaces.

The shift in economic activity also brought a shift in status and confidence. From selling roasted corn and spinning wool to serving as a Social Policy Officer at the UN, my career trajectory is not just mine; it's a symbol of the evolving family dream. Similarly, my sister's journey from Kathmandu schooling to international education in the Netherlands and now working in an international organization adds new meaning to what it means to "make it." For our nephews and nieces, success is no longer about having enough food or a roof over the head — it's about choosing the right major, getting internships, applying for scholarships, and planning careers.

Yet, through all these transitions, we have not entirely shed the values of the village. My mother still lights the evening *diyo* with the same devotion. We still gather for Dashain *tika* and cook *sel roti* with the same ancestral taste. These rituals serve as anchors, reminding us of where we came from, even as we navigate new roles, in new institutions, with new vocabularies.

Our family subjectivity has thus shifted from being defined by place and tradition to being defined by choice, education, and emotional negotiation. We are no longer just who we were born as — son, daughter, peasant, wife — we are also who we have become: students, officers, single parents, immigrants, thinkers. It is this dynamic sense of self — both grounded and evolving — that defines the spirit of our family today.

CHAPTER 6:
CAPITAL TRANSFORMATION IN MIGRATION

6.1 Economic Capital: Pre- and Post-Migration

Migration often entails not only physical relocation but also a significant reconfiguration of capital — particularly economic capital — which encompasses income, assets, property, and employment opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986). The shift from a rural subsistence economy to an urban cash economy can radically alter a family’s material base, income-generating strategies, and livelihood trajectories. This chapter focuses on the transformation of economic capital within my own family, tracking the transition from our origins in rural Okhaldhunga to our evolving condition in Kathmandu over the decades.

In the village of Gamnang, Okhaldhunga, our family economy was primarily rooted in agrarian and subsistence practices. As my mother recalls, “We had collected firewood, planted maize and millet, and woven *gundri* (straw mats). Everything was produced and consumed locally.” Economic transactions were minimal; the household's sustenance depended on traditional farming, animal husbandry, and forest resources. This aligns with the broader observation of subsistence economies in the hill regions of Nepal, where the exchange of goods was often based on reciprocity and barter (Pigg, 1992; Cameron, 1998).

However, this self-sufficiency was vulnerable to structural inequalities and environmental uncertainties. Land fragmentation, lack of infrastructure, and limited market access often constrained surplus production (Regmi, 1978). Additionally, in our case, a mix of socio-political pressures and aspirations for better futures led to our family’s migration to Kathmandu. The shift marked a pivotal moment: the abandonment of rural economic modes and the beginning of a long and difficult journey of capital accumulation in an unfamiliar urban economy.

Upon arriving in Kathmandu, our family had no financial reserves, no property, and no immediate income source. Initially residing in a cowshed provided by a local priest, and our early days were characterized by economic precarity. "We had to cook in the morning only after the cows were tethered outside," my mother recalls. From the very next day, all adult members began seeking wage labor. My father, leveraging his knowledge of stone-mud masonry from the village, quickly

adapted to urban construction labor, eventually becoming a porter for a local grocery store. My mother took on physically demanding construction jobs — winnowing sand, carrying bricks — and later pivoted to informal vending and wool spinning, which provided relatively more stability.

This transition reflects what scholars have described as the informalization of urban economies in the global South, where rural migrants enter precarious, low-paying jobs without social protection (De Haan, 1999; Breman, 2013). The transformation of economic capital was slow, incremental, and interwoven with family cooperation. Credit-based relationships with kind individuals like Dhane Sahu provided a crucial safety net during those fragile years. Over time, the family's economic capital began to stabilize through diversification — children engaging in petty trade, house labor, and eventually formal employment.

Today, the economic profile of the family is markedly different. We own a concrete house in the posh area of Baluwatar, Kathmandu. With small businesses, rental income, and salaried employment in both national and international organizations, the family has achieved economic security. One elder brother runs a grocery shop, another works in a school, while another serves as a police sub-inspector. My younger sister and I have both attained higher education and secured positions in international organizations. Although one sibling fell into addiction and passed away tragically, the larger family structure managed to sustain and regenerate itself economically.

This transformation underscores the centrality of migrant adaptation in the reconfiguration of economic capital (Levitt, 1998). Economic capital was not merely accumulated through jobs or savings but through social trust, skill adaptation, family labor, and the careful navigation of informal and formal economic circuits. The intergenerational progression — from day-wage laborers to salaried professionals — reflects what Portes and Rumbaut (2001) describe as "migrant mobility trajectories," where the initial generation sacrifices for the aspirational leap of the next.

In sum, the post-migration accumulation of economic capital in my family illustrates a nuanced and incremental transformation. It demonstrates how rural migrants in Nepal, despite limited initial resources, can adapt, survive, and eventually thrive in urban economies through collective resilience, labor diversification, and

strategic navigation of opportunities and risks. This capital transformation is not merely an economic shift but an existential negotiation with the promises and perils of urban life.

6.2 Cultural Capital: Reimagined Knowledge and Skills

Cultural capital, as theorized by Bourdieu (1986), encompasses the forms of knowledge, skills, education, and cultural competencies that individuals acquire, which in turn enable them to navigate social structures and gain access to various forms of capital. In the context of migration, the concept of cultural capital becomes particularly salient, as individuals must adapt their pre-migration knowledge and practices to new urban environments while simultaneously negotiating their cultural identity and socio-economic aspirations. This chapter explores the transformation of cultural capital in my family's migration journey from the rural hills of Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu, focusing on how our collective knowledge, skills, and educational backgrounds redefined our cultural capital in a new urban context.

In rural Okhaldhunga, our family's cultural capital was largely defined by indigenous agricultural knowledge, craftwork, and oral traditions passed down through generations. My father, for example, possessed extensive knowledge of traditional masonry, which involved creating walls with mud and stone — skills vital to rural construction and community building. As he recalls, "I was familiar with making walls with mud and stone in the village, and when I arrived in the city, I thought I would learn from watching others and practicing on the job." This embodied, tacit knowledge constituted a significant form of cultural capital in our village, where the craftsmanship of masonry was not only a means of livelihood but also a cultural practice rooted in community and environment (Smith, 2012).

Upon migration, however, this traditional knowledge was often insufficient for the demands of the urban labor market. Kathmandu's economy was increasingly monetized and formalized, and manual labor such as stone masonry had limited scope in the urban setting. The adaptation of my father's skills to the city's economic demands is a prime example of how migrants reimagine their cultural capital in response to new environments. In a rapid process of skill transfer, he adapted his knowledge of rural masonry to plastering and later became a porter at a grocery shop. This process reflects Bourdieu's (1986) concept of "capital conversion," where

cultural capital (in this case, construction skills) is transformed into economic capital through adaptation to urban realities.

Simultaneously, the migration process itself reshaped our family's broader cultural capital, particularly in terms of education and formal qualifications. In the village, formal education was secondary to practical skills and agricultural work, with most children, including myself, receiving limited schooling. However, once we arrived in Kathmandu, the importance of formal education as a vehicle for upward mobility became increasingly apparent. My parents, although lacking formal education themselves, recognized the value of schooling for their children and placed great emphasis on ensuring we attended school regularly, despite the financial struggles. I completed my education up to the Master's level and later pursued an M.Phil. in Sociology from Tribhuvan University, while my younger sister completed a PGD in Urban Studies from the Netherlands.

This educational shift underscores a transformation in cultural capital, as we were able to leverage formal education as a new form of social distinction in the urban setting (Coleman, 1990). My educational journey, supported by the migration process, highlights how cultural capital can be redefined and expanded through access to new educational resources, which in turn provides opportunities for professional advancement in the city.

Additionally, my mother's ability to adapt and learn new skills in the urban context —such as roasting peanuts, grilling corn, and spinning wool — demonstrates the extension of practical knowledge into new, marketable skills. These activities, while rooted in rural traditions, were reimagined and adapted to suit the demands of the city. Her ability to sell roasted peanuts on the street or spin wool for income reflects how cultural capital is not fixed but is instead dynamic and responsive to new economic opportunities (Appadurai, 1996).

In contrast to the rigidity of traditional agricultural knowledge, these reimagined skills represent cultural capital that is more fluid, entrepreneurial, and capable of transformation in the urban economy. This shift from subsistence practices to monetized urban skills illustrates the process of "cultural bricolage" (Levi-Strauss, 1966), in which migrants take elements of their existing cultural knowledge and adapt them to the new socio-economic and cultural environment they encounter in the city.

Over time, this process of reimagining and diversifying cultural capital within the family enabled a transformation in our social and professional roles. For instance, my eldest brother transitioned from selling ice pops to driving an auto-rickshaw and later to becoming a taxi driver. His journey illustrates how cultural capital is not only about the transmission of knowledge but also about the creation of new knowledge and skills that help migrants integrate into urban economies (Rath, 2002). Similarly, my younger sister's ability to pursue higher education and a career in international development is a testament to how cultural capital, when combined with the opportunities available in the city, enables mobility and integration into new social and professional contexts.

In conclusion, the transformation of cultural capital in my family's migration experience illustrates how cultural knowledge and skills are not static but are constantly redefined in response to changing socio-economic conditions. The ability to adapt rural cultural capital to urban contexts — whether through learning new skills or pursuing formal education — has been crucial in our family's upward mobility. This process also underscores the broader structural shifts in Nepalese society, where migration plays a pivotal role in the reconfiguration of cultural capital, leading to new social identities and professional trajectories.

6.3 Social Capital: Networks and New Hierarchies

Social capital, as theorized by Bourdieu (1986) and later expanded by Putnam (2000), refers to the resources that individuals and groups can access through their social networks, including relationships, trust, and reciprocity. Social capital plays a critical role in shaping opportunities for economic mobility, cultural adaptation, and integration within new socio-political contexts. In the context of migration, social capital is not a fixed entity; it transforms and reconfigures as individuals build new networks and navigate the complexities of unfamiliar social environments. This chapter explores how the social capital of my family evolved during our migration from rural Okhaldhunga to urban Kathmandu, examining the ways in which networks of kinship, labor, and community engagement facilitated our integration into the urban setting while also reshaping existing social hierarchies.

Upon our arrival in Kathmandu, the family was initially cut off from its extended social networks, which were crucial in rural Okhaldhunga. In the village,

social capital was largely derived from familial ties, community relationships, and local networks centered around agriculture, religious practices, and mutual aid. My father, for instance, found work through his connection with Rabi Prasad, a local contact who provided us with shelter in the initial days and later offered my father opportunities to work at Dhane Sahu's grocery shop. These early relationships in the city, formed on the basis of mutual trust and reciprocity, helped our family stabilize in the first phase of migration. As my father recalls, "Dhane Sahu and his wife were very kind to our family from the very beginning, offering groceries on credit and old clothes. Out of courtesy, I started helping to load and upload rice sacks, and this job eventually became my permanent employment."

Such networks of kinship and labor were essential for our survival in an unfamiliar urban environment. The act of receiving material support from kind-hearted individuals like Rabi Prasad and Dhane Sahu is emblematic of how migrants rely on and cultivate new social capital to navigate the early stages of their urban lives. Social capital, in this sense, functions as a form of collective resource, where the help of one individual or family member can trigger a cascading set of opportunities for others (Bourdieu, 1986). The networks of support that emerged in these early stages were not merely transactional; they were underpinned by a strong sense of reciprocity, which was a hallmark of our rural social fabric. This sense of mutual aid proved critical in the context of migration, where economic uncertainty and unfamiliarity with urban life could have easily led to isolation and alienation.

As the family began to settle into the rhythms of urban life, our social capital expanded to include new forms of social relationships and institutional networks. For example, my mother, who initially worked at construction sites, transitioned to more entrepreneurial ventures, such as selling peanuts and corn cobs on the streets. She gradually built her own network of customers, who became a vital source of income. Her ability to rely on these networks reflects how migration opens up opportunities for the reconfiguration of social capital within new socio-economic settings. Yet, this shift also highlights the importance of social networks in facilitating access to informal labor markets in Kathmandu, where personal relationships often determine one's ability to secure consistent work. As my mother shared, "I started roasting peanuts and grilling corn, but there were many challenges, especially with the municipality police often raiding us. Over time, I started spinning wool, which was

easier and more secure." Here, my mother's resilience and entrepreneurial spirit illustrate how migration can lead to the development of new social capital, which is not only economic but also forms the basis for social mobility and integration in the city (Portes, 1998).

However, as our family integrated into the urban environment, we also encountered the restructuring of social hierarchies and the emergence of new power dynamics. In rural Okhaldhunga, social hierarchies were largely defined by caste, land ownership, and family lineage, with certain families holding more influence within the village. Upon moving to Kathmandu, these rural hierarchies were disrupted and replaced by new, urban-based hierarchies shaped by economic standing, educational attainment, and access to urban networks. As my eldest brother, Netra Bahadur, navigated his work in the city, first selling ice pops and later working as a taxi driver, he began to encounter the complexities of urban social stratification. His journey through various jobs reflects the adaptability of migrants as they strive to position themselves within the new urban hierarchy while also grappling with the limitations of their initial social capital.

For my elder brother, who entered the police force, social capital and networks of power took on a different form. Through his connections within the police training center, he was able to secure a position as a police constable and later rise to the rank of police sub-inspector. This progression not only reflects the reconfiguration of social capital in a formal institution like the police force but also highlights how networks within state apparatuses can offer opportunities for social mobility, particularly for those from migrant backgrounds. His rise through the ranks is indicative of how new hierarchies in the urban space are not merely economic but also rooted in access to state-sponsored institutions that govern social relations in the city (Bourdieu, 1990).

Furthermore, the broader community network formed by other migrants from Okhaldhunga also began to shift as individuals started to build new forms of solidarity in the urban space. This solidarity was not limited to mere kinship ties but extended to fellow migrants who shared similar experiences of dislocation and adaptation. My cousin, for instance, who had migrated with us, started as a laborer and later became an LPG gas seller. His transition mirrors the broader migration experience, where new

social capital networks — built through labor and trade — helped him navigate and survive in the competitive urban landscape.

As my family's social capital evolved in Kathmandu, so too did the dynamics of power and influence within these networks. The family's growing connections within both formal and informal sectors gradually allowed us to access new opportunities for economic and social advancement. However, this process was not without challenges, as the dynamics of urban social capital are often marked by competition, stratification, and the negotiation of status within the new social context.

In conclusion, the transformation of social capital in our family's migration experience underscores the fluid and dynamic nature of social networks and hierarchies in urban environments. While initial social capital was based largely on kinship and community ties from our rural origins, the migration process enabled the reconfiguration of these networks to include new forms of social capital, such as labor markets, state-sponsored institutions, and entrepreneurial ventures. These evolving social networks facilitated our family's integration into the urban setting while simultaneously reshaping the social hierarchies and power structures that define urban spaces. This transformation highlights the critical role of social capital in mediating the migration experience, offering insights into how networks and hierarchies influence social mobility and integration in urban contexts (Portes, 1998; Bourdieu, 1990).

6.4 Symbolic Capital: Prestige, Loss, and Gain

Symbolic capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), refers to the forms of capital that are recognized and valued within a particular social field. Unlike economic or social capital, which can be measured in tangible terms, symbolic capital is rooted in the recognition of prestige, honor, and cultural value. It functions as a means of legitimizing social positions and status within a given society, and its transformation plays a pivotal role in the migration process. For families migrating from rural to urban settings, symbolic capital is often redefined as individuals navigate the cultural, social, and economic landscapes of their new environment. This chapter explores how my family's migration from rural Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu led to the loss and subsequent transformation of our symbolic capital, highlighting the dynamics of prestige, honor, and recognition within the migration context.

Before migration, our family's symbolic capital in the rural village of Okhaldhunga was deeply tied to land ownership, traditional roles within the community, and local status. In the village, my father was respected as a humble figure, as a good neighbor who was involved in every social and religious event. His role in the community, particularly his work with agriculture and his association with local religious practices, contributed to his symbolic capital. In this rural setting, our family held a sense of honor and prestige, primarily derived from longstanding ties to the land and community. This form of symbolic capital was valued not only for its material wealth but also for the respect it commanded within local social structures.

However, upon migrating to Kathmandu, our family's symbolic capital was subjected to a process of devaluation. The prestige we once held in Okhaldhunga was no longer recognized in the urban context, where the markers of prestige were different. Kathmandu, as a bustling urban center, values different forms of symbolic capital — educational achievements, professional status, and access to state institutions. In this new environment, my father's status as a village leader did not translate into the same form of recognition. As my father recalls, "In Okhaldhunga, I had respect and a certain position in society, but here in Kathmandu, I was just another migrant laborer. It was humbling."

This transition from rural to urban life reflects the process of symbolic devaluation that many migrants experience. The loss of the prestige and honor associated with rural roles can be a source of emotional strain and disorientation, as individuals find their previous social identity no longer recognized or valued. Symbolic capital, in this case, is not simply about material wealth but about the cultural and social recognition that comes with one's position within a particular community. The shift in symbolic capital upon migration underscores the importance of cultural context in shaping how individuals are perceived and valued within a given society (Bourdieu, 1986).

Yet, despite this initial loss, symbolic capital can also be transformed and reimagined through the migration process. As our family settled into Kathmandu, new forms of prestige and recognition began to emerge, reflecting the changing markers of social value in the urban context. My father, for example, may have experienced symbolic devaluation in the early years of migration, but he gradually gained new prestige through his work in the grocery store, where he became known for his

reliability and hard work. Similarly, my eldest brother, Netra Bahadur, despite starting his career selling ice pops and later becoming a taxi driver, eventually earned a level of respect through his entrepreneurial efforts. As he explained, “It was not easy in the beginning. But after years of work, people started recognizing me not just as a taxi driver but as someone who could run a business on his own. That recognition felt good.”

In this way, migration provided an opportunity for the reconstruction of symbolic capital — the creation of new prestige rooted in the urban labor market and the acknowledgment of personal achievements. Symbolic capital was no longer solely tied to traditional, rural forms of social honor; it began to be reshaped through professional success and economic self-sufficiency in the urban context. This transformation highlights how symbolic capital operates within different fields and how individuals can accrue prestige through labor, entrepreneurship, and social mobility in a new socio-economic environment (Bourdieu, 1990).

Furthermore, the role of family reputation as a form of symbolic capital also played a critical role in the transformation of our family’s standing in the urban context. As my younger sister, who completed her education in urban studies and later worked at an international organization, observed, “Our family’s reputation for hard work and resilience started to carry weight in Kathmandu. People began to view us as serious, educated individuals, not just as rural migrants.” This change in family reputation, moving from the status of a rural migrant family to one that was perceived as educated and industrious, illustrates how symbolic capital is continually negotiated and redefined in response to changing socio-cultural contexts.

However, the transformation of symbolic capital is not always linear or without conflict. The shifting status of our family members in Kathmandu often revealed tensions between the old and new forms of prestige. For instance, while my father initially struggled with the loss of his rural status, he found new recognition in his work ethic and his contributions to local networks in Kathmandu. Similarly, my mother’s transformation from a rural homemaker to a self-employed street vendor and later wool spinner allowed her to reframe her symbolic capital through economic independence, but it was an ongoing negotiation of recognition in a society that privileged different forms of labor. As she shared, “It was difficult in the beginning; I

was looked down upon by some. But slowly, as I earned more and proved my worth, people began to respect me."

In conclusion, the concept of symbolic capital provides a valuable lens for understanding how prestige and recognition are transformed through migration. The loss of symbolic capital that occurs in the early stages of migration is a common experience for many rural migrants, but it is also a process of reinvention and negotiation. The reconfiguration of symbolic capital is influenced by factors such as professional success, educational attainment, and personal resilience. While the loss of prestige from rural origins can be disorienting, migration opens up new opportunities for individuals and families to redefine their symbolic capital through their actions and achievements in the urban context. In this way, the family's experience of migration exemplifies how symbolic capital is fluid, evolving in response to the shifting cultural and social hierarchies of the urban landscape (Bourdieu, 1990; Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

CHAPTER 7:
EDUCATION AS A SITE OF SUBJECTIVITY

7.1 Barriers to Education for Older Siblings

The process of migration from rural Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu for our family was not only a shift in geographic location but also a reconfiguration of educational opportunities and barriers. While education was perceived as a tool for social mobility and improvement of life conditions in the urban setting, the older siblings of my family faced considerable barriers in accessing and progressing through formal education. These barriers were multifaceted, shaped by a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors, which were heavily influenced by the structural limitations of the education system in Nepal.

7.1.1 Socio-Economic Barriers

One of the primary barriers to education for the older siblings was financial instability. Upon migrating to Kathmandu, my parents found themselves in precarious economic conditions, relying primarily on informal labor in the city. While they were committed to ensuring that their children received an education, the cost of schooling in an urban setting was significantly higher than what they had anticipated. This financial strain directly affected the older siblings' ability to pursue education beyond primary or secondary school.

As noted by scholars such as Bista (1991) and Hurtado (2012), the migration of rural families to urban centers often leads to a shift in family roles, with children expected to contribute economically to the household at a younger age. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of my older brothers, who, having migrated during their teenage years, were soon integrated into the labor market to alleviate the financial burden on the family. The opportunity to pursue education became secondary to immediate survival needs. Chhetri (2010) argues that the socio-economic status of migrant families directly impacts their children's access to education, particularly when such families are forced to prioritize basic needs like food and shelter over educational aspirations.

For example, my eldest brother, Netra Bahadur, began his career working as a laborer in Kathmandu, then progressed to selling ice pops and later became a taxi driver. In his words, “The struggle to make ends meet made it difficult for me to focus

on studies. I had to work, and there were no educational opportunities available for someone in my position." His story reflects the broader social and economic challenges faced by many migrant children in urban areas, where economic pressures often take precedence over educational pursuits (Pandey, 2003).

7.1.2 Educational System and Structural Inequalities

The second major barrier faced by my older siblings in accessing education was the structural inequalities embedded within Kathmandu's formal schooling system — inequalities that disproportionately affect first-generation rural-to-urban migrants. Upon their arrival in the capital, my siblings encountered an educational environment markedly different from the rural schools of Okhaldhunga, not just in curriculum and pedagogy but in the implicit social expectations surrounding demeanor, hygiene, and self-presentation. As Sharma (2016) notes, urban educational systems often function as institutions of stratification, reinforcing class-based and cultural hierarchies through both explicit content and hidden curricula.

For my older siblings, the challenges were not primarily linguistic but social and affective. Although they enrolled and regularly attended classes, they struggled to meet the unwritten standards of appearance, hygiene, and social confidence that were tacitly expected in urban schools. Their rural upbringing, shaped by subsistence livelihoods and limited exposure to urban norms, rendered them conspicuously "different" in the eyes of peers and teachers alike. This often led to subtle forms of exclusion, ridicule, or marginalization, which further eroded their sense of belonging and academic motivation.

Rajbanshi (2007) emphasizes that the educational system in Nepal rarely accommodates the socio-cultural backgrounds of migrant children, particularly those from remote and under-resourced regions. Instead, it assumes a normative urban middle-class habitus — what Bourdieu (1990) might term the "doxa" of the educational field — against which others are silently measured and often found lacking. In this context, the inability of my siblings to conform to dominant expectations of hygiene and personality became symbolic markers of rural inferiority, reinforcing their marginal position within the classroom and discouraging further engagement.

This dynamic illustrates how structural inequalities in education are not only institutional but also embodied — played out in how migrant students are read, disciplined, and positioned within the everyday micro-politics of schooling.

7.1.3 Psychological and Cultural Barriers

Beyond the socio-economic and structural barriers, my older siblings also faced psychological and cultural challenges that shaped their educational trajectories. Having grown up in a rural setting where education was not highly valued or prioritized, they had internalized a set of beliefs that contrasted with the values promoted by the urban education system. Freire (2000) and Bourdieu (1986) argue that education is not just a mechanism for acquiring knowledge but also a site where power relations and cultural norms are reproduced. In this context, the urban education system, with its emphasis on formal knowledge, often conflicted with the lived experiences and practical skills that my older siblings had developed in their rural environment.

My second eldest brother, *Mailo Dai*, who had started working as a construction laborer upon migrating to Kathmandu, often expressed his disillusionment with the formal education system. “I didn’t see the value of school. I was already doing manual labor, and I felt like education wouldn’t help me get ahead.” His experience is consistent with Sen (1999), who suggests that in many contexts, the education system often fails to connect with the realities and aspirations of migrant families, particularly those who come from rural backgrounds where education is viewed as less relevant to everyday survival. As such, my older siblings viewed their participation in the labor force as a more immediate and necessary response to their life circumstances, reinforcing the disconnect between formal education and their lived realities.

Moreover, the psychological strain of being marginalized in an unfamiliar city further contributed to my older siblings’ decision to forgo education. According to Gergen (2009), the experience of migration often leads to a fragmented sense of identity, especially for those who are socially excluded or experience discrimination in the urban setting. My siblings’ feelings of alienation in Kathmandu, coupled with the demands of work, led them to deprioritize education, reinforcing their sense of not being fully integrated into the urban social fabric.

7.1.4 Consequences and Long-term Impacts

The barriers to education faced by my older siblings had long-term consequences, both for them as individuals and for the family as a whole. The decision to forgo education early on limited their future opportunities for economic mobility. For example, my eldest brother, who eventually ran a small grocery shop, often expressed regret about not having pursued further education, acknowledging how it might have improved his ability to engage in other professional opportunities. Similarly, *Mailo Dai*, who worked as a support staff at a local school, felt that his educational limitations restricted his ability to move up in the social ladder. As Becker (1994) notes, the lack of educational credentials can have a long-lasting effect on an individual's career prospects, especially in a competitive urban job market.

For the family, the barriers to education experienced by the older siblings meant that the narrative of upward mobility through education, which was so central to the hopes of my parents, was only partially realized. While my sister and I were able to pursue higher education and establish professional careers, the older generation was left with fewer resources and opportunities, reinforcing the generational gap in terms of social and economic capital.

7.2 My Educational Trajectory and Emerging Agency

The journey through education for me, as one of the younger siblings, diverged markedly from the educational experiences of my older brothers. The educational opportunities I encountered in Kathmandu were shaped by both the aspirations of my parents and the socio-economic circumstances of our migration. However, unlike my older siblings, who were constrained by various barriers, I had access to a broader spectrum of educational resources, which in turn, facilitated the emergence of my agency. This trajectory was not merely a linear progression of academic achievement but rather a site of negotiation, resistance, and transformation, allowing me to reclaim and reframe my subjectivity in the face of shifting social and cultural contexts.

7.2.1 Shifting Roles within the Family and Socio-economic Context

Upon arriving in Kathmandu, the weight of economic survival rested heavily on my parents, who worked tirelessly in various informal labor sectors. From the outset, there was a tacit expectation that my siblings and I would contribute to the

family's livelihood. While my older brothers had engaged early in manual labor to support the family, I was fortunate to be at a stage in life where I could still pursue formal education despite the financial constraints. Bista (1991) and Sharma (2016) emphasize that for many first-generation migrant families, the education of children is often seen as both a luxury and a necessity. For my parents, education was a means through which they hoped to overcome the poverty they had encountered in the urban environment, and it became a key aspiration that distinguished my experience from that of my older siblings, who had been pushed directly into laboring roles.

As Hurtado (2012) suggests, migration to urban centers often brings with it a shift in familial roles, where younger generations are afforded educational opportunities not available to their older counterparts. This shift was evident in my case. While my parents had initially emphasized my older brothers contributing financially, they saw my education as a way for me to break free from the cycles of labor and offer a different future. Unlike my older siblings, I was not required to work full-time during my school years, which afforded me the mental and emotional space to engage deeply in academic pursuits. This discrepancy in roles, however, was not without its tensions. I was keenly aware of the sacrifices my parents had made and the economic struggles we faced, and this awareness influenced my desire to succeed academically, both to repay their sacrifices and to prove that education could indeed transform our lives.

7.2.2 Navigating the Urban Education System

My educational trajectory in Kathmandu unfolded in the context of an urban school system that differed markedly from the rural schooling experiences of my older siblings. While their education had been limited and fragmented, I had the opportunity to attend local schools and later a campus affiliated with Tribhuvan University. The difference in the quality of education between rural and urban settings is well-documented, with Chhetri (2010) noting that rural children often face educational challenges due to limited infrastructure, poor teaching quality, and inadequate resources. In contrast, Kathmandu's educational system, while not without its flaws, offered me access to a more structured curriculum, better facilities, and teachers who were trained to handle urban classrooms.

However, my transition to this urban educational system was not without its own set of challenges. Despite the apparent advantages, the shift from a rural to an urban educational environment was disorienting. My background in Okhaldhunga, a place where educational priorities were largely shaped by subsistence farming and family-based labor, made it difficult at times to relate to the more abstract and academic nature of urban education. As Freire (2000) and Bourdieu (1986) argue, education is often a site where the cultural capital of students is tested and either validated or invalidated by the dominant culture. In this context, I often felt a sense of alienation, not only because of the difference in curriculum but also due to the urban-centric ethos that prevailed in Kathmandu's educational institutions.

Nevertheless, my response to these challenges was not one of passive submission. Instead, it became a process of active negotiation of my educational identity, one where I began to challenge the limitations imposed by both my rural origins and the urban expectations of education. As Sen (1999) suggests, education is not a one-dimensional experience but is shaped by the intersection of individual agency and external opportunities. I chose to reframe my educational experience not as one of displacement or disconnection, but rather as an opportunity to bring together the knowledge and skills I had acquired from both my rural background and the urban educational system.

7.2.3 Academic Success as a Form of Emerging Agency

My academic success can be understood as a form of emerging agency, wherein I was able to forge a sense of identity and purpose through my educational achievements. The notion of agency, as described by Giddens (1984), is the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices, especially in contexts where traditional social structures may limit or inhibit such agency. Through my educational journey, I was able to make sense of my place in both the rural and urban worlds, weaving together the values and practices of my roots in Okhaldhunga with the skills and knowledge offered by the urban educational system in Kathmandu.

This process of self-making was not straightforward. There were moments of doubt, especially when I compared myself to my older siblings, who, despite their hard work, did not have the same opportunities for academic success. However, as Gergen (2009) argues, the experience of migration is often accompanied by a

transformation of identity, one that is shaped not only by the challenges faced but also by the possibilities opened up in the new context. For me, education was a way to reframe the narrative of migration as one of empowerment rather than loss. By pursuing higher education in sociology and eventually working in the field of education as well as social policy, I was able to not only gain professional recognition but also assert my position within the family and society as someone whose educational trajectory could defy the limitations faced by my older siblings.

Furthermore, as Bourdieu (1986) argues, education serves as a mechanism for acquiring symbolic capital, which in turn can translate into economic and social mobility. My educational trajectory, while unique in its own right, was thus a vehicle through which I could assert my agency and access new forms of social recognition and status. My career in the development sector, which began with my work in NGOs and later expanded into my role as a Social Policy Officer at a UN agency, exemplifies how education, when combined with individual agency, can transform one’s social position and influence.

7.2.4 The Influence of Gender and Family Expectations

While my educational journey was deeply influenced by the broader socio-economic and structural factors already discussed, gender played a pivotal role in shaping my trajectory. As a daughter in a patriarchal society, my educational aspirations were constantly negotiated within the expectations of family roles, responsibilities, and norms surrounding femininity. Unlike my male siblings, I was expected to contribute more significantly to domestic labor and caregiving, particularly during times of familial or financial stress. These expectations often competed with my academic commitments, placing an additional emotional and physical burden on my educational pursuit.

Scholars like Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) have highlighted how gendered norms in traditional societies often limit the capabilities and freedoms of women, particularly in the realm of education and career development. In my own experience, these limitations were not always overtly prohibitive but operated subtly through everyday practices — prioritizing the educational needs of sons, encouraging early marriage for daughters, or assigning girls more household duties under the assumption that their primary future lay in the domestic sphere.

Nevertheless, I resisted these limitations by actively negotiating space for my own educational growth within the family structure. My ability to continue schooling was not merely the result of external allowances but also a reflection of emerging agency, shaped by a strong internal commitment to education. This gendered negotiation highlights the intersection of individual subjectivity and social structures and reflects how, even within constraining environments, female agency can be enacted and reimagined.

7.2.5 Long-Term Impact and Continued Agency

The long-term impact of my educational trajectory on my sense of agency is profound. Education, for me, became not just a means of personal advancement but a platform through which I could exert influence over the social and policy issues that were pertinent to the migrant community. As Foucault (1980) suggests, knowledge production is inherently linked to power dynamics, and by acquiring education, I was able to enter spaces of decision-making that were previously closed off to people from my socio-economic background. Through this process, I began to view education not merely as a personal achievement but as a tool for social transformation, one that could be used to advocate for the rights of marginalized communities, including migrant families like my own.

In conclusion, my educational trajectory in Kathmandu was marked by both challenges and opportunities that were shaped by my family’s migration experience. Through overcoming socio-economic, cultural, and psychological barriers, I was able to assert my agency and carve out a path that allowed me to transform my subjectivity. Education, for me, became a site of both personal and collective empowerment, enabling me to reshape the narrative of migration and become an active participant in the social and political landscapes I now inhabit.

7.3 Tensions between Rural Heritage and Urban Identity

The process of migration not only involves the physical relocation of individuals but also generates a complex interplay between multiple, often conflicting, cultural identities. As I reflect on my journey from Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu, the tension between my rural heritage and my evolving urban identity has been a consistent theme throughout my life. This tension is not merely a static dichotomy; it is a dynamic negotiation that reflects the continuous construction and reconstruction

of selfhood in response to the diverse social and cultural milieus encountered through migration. As Giddens (1991) contends, identity is fluid and contextual, constantly reshaped by external influences and internal reflections, particularly when individuals are confronted with significant social and geographical transitions like migration.

The rural heritage I inherited was deeply embedded in a traditional way of life that emphasized community ties, familial obligations, and a strong connection to the land. In Okhaldhunga, the rhythms of life are dictated by agricultural cycles, familial cooperation, and the communal exchange of resources. Such values, according to Appadurai (1996), form part of what can be understood as "local knowledge" — an embodied, practical wisdom that is passed down through generations and rooted in specific places. For my family, these values were integral to our survival in the rural landscape, where the interconnectedness of community members often translated into collective economic and social well-being.

However, upon migrating to Kathmandu, this rural heritage, while still valued, was juxtaposed with the demands of urban life, which required a recalibration of priorities and identities. Urban environments, characterized by anonymity, individualism, and modernity, offer a stark contrast to the close-knit, agrarian-based communities of the rural countryside. As Bourdieu (1986) posits, cultural capital — comprising knowledge, skills, and behaviors — functions as a mechanism of social distinction, and in the urban context, this capital is often tied to the dominant cultural norms of the city. My family’s rural heritage, therefore, was not only a source of cultural pride but also a potential source of tension, as it sometimes clashed with the urban values we were increasingly expected to adopt.

7.3.1 The Struggle to Maintain Rural Identity in an Urban Setting

One of the most significant challenges in navigating this tension was the effort to maintain my rural identity in an urban setting. Unlike my older siblings, whose involvement in manual labor kept them grounded in the economic realities of migration, I had the opportunity to pursue formal education and engage with the urban intellectual milieu. However, this educational journey also entailed an exposure to new norms, ideologies, and practices that were often at odds with the values I had inherited from Okhaldhunga. As Foucault (1980) notes, power dynamics shape

knowledge and cultural practices, and the urban space often presents a dominant narrative that marginalizes or devalues rural ways of knowing and being.

The friction between these two identities was most apparent when I encountered academic and social settings where my rural background seemed to mark me as “other” or “outsider.” In educational spaces, for instance, I frequently found myself negotiating between the expectations of my teachers and peers, who were often from more urban backgrounds, and the values I brought from my rural upbringing. Sen (1999) highlights how migration often involves a complex process of adaptation, where individuals are required to negotiate between their heritage and the pressures of conforming to the cultural capital demanded by the urban context. While I tried to embrace the opportunities that urban education provided, there was a constant push-pull dynamic between integrating into the urban space and retaining elements of my rural identity, which felt increasingly distant and out of place in the urban landscape.

7.3.2 Rural Norms vs. Urban Aspirations

This tension was not solely internal but was also reinforced by familial and societal expectations. Having roots in a rural setting, the emphasis was placed on maintaining close relationships with extended family, practicing communal rituals, and adhering to the norms of agrarian life. However, in Kathmandu, the increasing value placed on individual achievement, economic success, and personal autonomy clashed with the collective ethos of my rural roots. As Gergen (2009) argues, identity is co-constructed in interaction with others, and the urban environment presented new social models that encouraged the pursuit of individual success over collective belonging.

Moreover, my parents, despite their migrant status, maintained their rural sensibilities and prioritized the preservation of our traditional practices. Their insistence on keeping rural values alive — not entering kitchen when having periods, prospects for marriage once a girl reaches in her teens, welcoming guests and relatives and leave own bed to them, strictly following religious/cultural rituals like worships of native or tutelary deities — even in an urban setting, became a source of both pride and frustration. While I recognized the value of these traditions, I also felt the pressure to conform to urban norms, especially as I moved through the educational

system and began to understand the potential advantages of modernity. This tension between adhering to rural values and pursuing urban aspirations shaped my educational trajectory and broader life choices. As Bourdieu (1986) observes, individuals often have to navigate conflicting social fields, and my educational journey was marked by my negotiation between the rural expectations of my family and the urban aspirations for success.

7.3.3 Urban Identity as a Form of Social Mobility

While the struggle to maintain my rural heritage was challenging, it also catalyzed the construction of a new, hybrid urban identity. As I advanced in my education and career, I began to see the value of integrating both aspects of my identity — the rural and the urban — into a coherent whole. Hall (1990) posits that identity is not a static construct, but rather a process of becoming that involves the negotiation of multiple, often contradictory influences. In my case, the urban context provided me with the tools and opportunities to reframe my rural heritage, not as something to be abandoned but as a part of the unique narrative I could offer within the urban sphere.

The hybrid nature of my identity allowed me to assert myself as both a product of my rural heritage and an active participant in urban life. As Sen (1999) suggests, education is a means of expanding individual freedoms, and through my academic and professional experiences, I was able to gain access to networks, knowledge, and resources that were once inaccessible in the rural context. These opportunities, however, did not erase my rural identity; rather, they provided me with a platform to reimagine what it means to belong both to a rural past and an urban future. As Appadurai (1996) argues, migration and the resultant hybrid identities create new forms of belonging that are no longer fixed in traditional categories of rural or urban but are shaped by the dynamic interplay of both.

7.3.4 The Role of Social Networks in Mediating Rural-Urban Tensions

The process of navigating these tensions was also mediated by my family's role in my life. Despite the challenges we faced in adapting to urban life, my family remained a key support system, providing emotional stability and a constant reminder of our rural roots. Portes (1998) emphasizes the role of family and kinship networks as critical forms of social capital, particularly for migrants in urban settings. In my

case, my family's firm connection to our rural heritage provided a sense of continuity that helped me navigate the disorienting nature of urban life. At the same time, these familial bonds also represented a space of tension, as different generations within the family negotiated their place in the evolving urban landscape.

As I gained more professional experience and began to achieve some success in my career, I became increasingly aware of the way in which my family, particularly my parents, viewed my urban achievements. While they were proud of my accomplishments, they also saw them as a departure from the traditional paths they had known. Their pride, however, was tempered with a sense of loss — loss of the agrarian community life they had left behind and loss of the close-knit familial networks that had once defined our existence. As Bourdieu (1986) notes, social capital is often inherited, and the rural networks that had sustained us were now distant, yet still held in high regard by my parents, who struggled to reconcile their past with the opportunities their children were afforded in the urban environment.

In conclusion, the tensions between rural heritage and urban identity represent a dynamic and ongoing process of negotiation, one in which I, as an individual, have had to constantly reconcile the traditional values of my rural roots with the demands of urban life. This tension is not a binary conflict but rather an opportunity for hybrid identity construction, wherein both rural and urban elements are integrated into a coherent narrative that reflects the complexities of migration and the negotiation of self. Education, in this context, has played a pivotal role in reshaping my understanding of identity, offering both a challenge and a tool through which I could navigate the often contradictory demands of rural and urban worlds.

7.4 Habitus in Flux: Theoretical and Lived Experience

The concept of habitus, as developed by Bourdieu (1977), offers a compelling framework through which to understand how individuals navigate and adapt to shifting social, economic, and cultural contexts, particularly in the face of migration and educational change. Bourdieu defines habitus as a system of dispositions — durable, transposable, and unconscious structures of thought, behavior, and practice — that individuals internalize through their socialization within a particular historical and cultural milieu. These dispositions shape how individuals perceive, react to, and interact with the world around them. However, in the context of migration, education,

and the subsequent transformation of selfhood, habitus is not a static construct; rather, it is a dynamic and evolving set of practices and understandings that are influenced by new social, cultural, and economic landscapes. As Bourdieu (1990) suggests, habitus is not simply a reflection of the past but an ongoing practice that adapts to new conditions, thus making it a central concept for understanding the lived experiences of migrants in urban settings.

7.4.1 Theoretical Underpinnings: Habitus as a Social Construct

The concept of habitus must be understood in its theoretical context, particularly about agency and social practice theory. Giddens (1984) emphasizes that while social structures shape individual behavior, human agency is not wholly constrained by these structures. Instead, agency is exercised through the practice of routine actions that are structured by the habitus. In this view, individuals are seen as active agents who, while influenced by societal structures, retain the capacity to modify or adapt their behavior based on their ongoing experiences. This interplay between structure and agency is crucial for understanding the adaptability of habitus in the context of migration and education.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1977) argues that the habitus is not merely a set of ingrained dispositions but also a social field — an arena of interaction where individuals and groups struggle for various forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic). As Bourdieu (1990) contends, habitus is shaped by the history of an individual's position within a specific social field, but it is not a deterministic framework; instead, it enables and constrains the ways in which individuals can act within a given field. Social fields are in constant flux, and so too is the habitus that is enacted within them. This becomes particularly evident when individuals like myself migrate from rural to urban settings and are faced with the need to adapt to new cultural, social, and educational environments.

7.4.2 Lived Experience: Habitus in Flux through Migration and Education

The lived experience of migration and education provides a unique lens through which to examine habitus in flux. My personal experience, shaped by the rural roots in Okhaldhunga and subsequent migration to Kathmandu, reveals how the habitus, once firmly rooted in rural traditions, undergoes significant modification in the process of engaging with urban educational institutions. Bourdieu (1990) asserts

that the habitus is an evolving system of dispositions that reflects an individual's history and the social field within which they operate. As I transitioned from rural Okhaldhunga to the urban landscape of Kathmandu, my habitus, which had been formed by the values of familial collectivism, communal dependence, and agricultural labor, began to shift in response to the individualistic and competitive nature of urban life and the educational system.

The practices of education in Kathmandu, especially within the formal schooling system, require an alignment with urban cultural capital — knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are valued and legitimized by the dominant social structures. The tension between my inherited rural habitus and the demands of urban education created a dynamic process of subjectivity formation. My rural background, which emphasized social relationships based on kinship, communal ties, and agrarian self-sufficiency, was increasingly at odds with the urban ideals of individual success, career, and personal autonomy. This conflict between rural and urban habitus shaped my educational trajectory and my evolving sense of agency.

The concept of habitus in flux is evident in the way I was compelled to adopt new practices, behaviors, and forms of knowledge that were essential for success in the urban educational landscape. However, this adaptation was not simply an act of assimilation. It was a negotiation where I incorporated aspects of urban cultural capital while retaining significant elements of my rural heritage. Giddens (1991) highlights that agency in modern contexts is often a process of reflexive decision-making, where individuals actively choose how to adapt to or resist the forces shaping their lives. In my case, the negotiation between rural values and urban educational demands involved a constant process of reinterpreting and reframing my own subjectivity. My agency, thus, was expressed not only through formal academic achievements but also through the ongoing reworking of my identity in response to the changing social contexts I encountered.

7.4.3 The Role of Education in the Transformation of Habitus

Education plays a central role in the transformation of habitus, particularly for migrants who are seeking to integrate into new social and economic environments. As Bourdieu (1984) notes, education is a key site for the acquisition of cultural capital, which in turn can facilitate or constrain one's ability to navigate different social fields.

In the context of migration, education serves as both a tool for social mobility and a site where the conflict between different cultural capitals is negotiated. For instance, as I pursued higher education in Kathmandu, I found myself constantly reconciling the values and knowledge I had acquired in my rural home with the knowledge and skills required to succeed in the urban academic system. My rural background was both a resource and a limitation: it provided me with practical skills and a strong work ethic but also placed me at a disadvantage in a system that valued more formal, institutionalized knowledge.

As Bourdieu (1990) argues, the transformation of habitus is not simply about acquiring new knowledge but also about changing one's entire system of dispositions — how one approaches the world, what one values, and how one interacts with others. In this sense, my educational trajectory was not just a process of acquiring academic qualifications but also of remaking my habitus to align with the expectations of urban society. This process of transformation was often troubled with tension, as I found myself navigating between the values of my rural roots and the demands of urban success. As Sen (1999) asserts, education is a means of expanding one's freedoms and capabilities, yet for individuals like myself, it also necessitates the transformation of one's habitus to align with the opportunities and challenges of the new social fields encountered in the urban landscape.

7.4.4 Habitus, Agency, and Social Practice in the Context of Migration

The interaction between habitus and agency is central to understanding how individuals adapt to new environments, particularly in the context of migration. As Giddens (1991) suggests, agency is exercised through the practice of everyday life, and this practice is shaped by the habitus. Migration, therefore, involves not only the physical relocation of individuals but also a transformation of the practices and dispositions that constitute their identity. For me, migration was both an external journey and an internal transformation — a process through which my habitus was redefined in response to the new social and educational contexts I encountered in Kathmandu. In this sense, migration was not simply about leaving one place and settling in another but about negotiating the changes in social practices, relationships, and knowledge systems that shaped my lived experience.

The practice theory, as articulated by Schatzki et al. (2001), offers a useful lens through which to view this transformation. Practices, according to this theory, are the routinized, embodied actions that individuals perform in response to their social environments. In the context of migration, these practices are continually reshaped as individuals adapt to new fields. For example, the practices we developed in our rural home — such as subsistence farming and familial collaboration — were reinterpreted and adapted in the urban context, where we developed new practices related to academic study, professional career-building, and individual success. These new practices were not a rejection of my rural habitus but a reconfiguration, where old dispositions were combined with new knowledge to create a more complex and adaptive form of agency.

In conclusion, the concept of habitus in flux offers a dynamic understanding of the ways in which individuals adapt to changing social environments, particularly in the context of migration and education. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1991), and Sen (1999), this chapter highlights the complex and ongoing process of identity formation and transformation that occurs when individuals are confronted with new social, cultural, and educational contexts. For migrants like myself, the process of adapting one's habitus is not simply about conforming to new norms but involves a negotiation of values, practices, and forms of knowledge that shape how one understands and interacts with the world. The transformation of habitus is thus not a linear process but an ongoing dialogue between past and present, rural and urban, tradition and modernity.

CHAPTER 8:
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary of the Key Findings

This study has explored the complex interplay between migration and subjectivity through an examination of my family's journey from rural Okhaldhunga to urban Kathmandu. The research reveals that migration constitutes far more than a simple change of location — it represents a profound transformation of identity, social positioning, and self-understanding. By employing Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital alongside Gidden’s theory of structuration, the analysis demonstrates how migration serves as a catalyst for the continuous renegotiation of subjectivity across generations.

The findings highlight several key dimensions of this transformative process. First, migration emerges as a site where deeply ingrained rural dispositions encounter and adapt to urban social fields, creating new forms of agency and identity. The transition from Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu required fundamental recalibrations of values, practices, and expectations as family members navigated between their inherited habitus and the demands of urban life. Second, education appears as a crucial arena for subjectivity formation, particularly for younger migrants. While serving as a vehicle for social mobility, formal education also became a contested space where rural heritage and urban identity were negotiated through the acquisition and conversion of cultural capital.

The research further illuminates how migration reshapes access to and utilization of various forms of capital. The shift from a rural agrarian economy to an urban context facilitated the accumulation of new social and cultural capital through educational and professional networks, even as it rendered certain aspects of rural symbolic capital less valuable. This capital transformation occurred unevenly across generations, with older family members maintaining stronger connections to family-centered identities while younger members pursued individual autonomy through education and career advancement. These generational differences underscore how migration trajectories produce distinct subjectivities shaped by varying opportunities and constraints.

8.1.1 Migration as a Site of Transformation

One of the central findings of this research is that migration is a complex process that triggers profound transformations in individual subjectivities. The transition from rural Okhaldhunga to urban Kathmandu forced a recalibration of values, practices, and expectations. This shift, as argued by Bourdieu (1990), can be viewed through the lens of habitus in flux, where the system of dispositions inherited from a rural upbringing interacts with the demands of an urban context, resulting in new forms of identity and agency. My family's migration illuminated how migration serves as a dynamic site of identity formation, where old and new cultural practices coexist and influence each other. The findings suggest that migration is not just a movement in space but also a movement in subjectivity, where individuals and families must adapt to new social fields, which require modifications in practices, knowledge, and self-concept.

8.1.2 Interplay of Education and Subjectivity

A second key finding concerns the role of education as a site for the reshaping of subjectivity. As migrants in Kathmandu, educational experiences became pivotal in the negotiation between rural heritage and urban identity. The educational trajectory of the younger generation, including my own, reflects the way in which formal education is intertwined with the process of constructing new forms of selfhood and agency. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, it was evident that the acquisition of knowledge and skills through formal education was not merely a means of gaining academic qualifications but also a process of reorienting the self in relation to the urban social order. As my educational journey unfolded, the tension between my rural heritage and urban identity became increasingly apparent. The research highlights that education serves as both a mechanism of social mobility and a complex site where different forms of cultural capital are contested and redefined.

8.1.3 Capital Transformation and Subjectivity

The transformation of various forms of capital — economic, cultural, social, and symbolic — emerged as another critical finding. The migration from a rural agrarian economy to an urban context brought about significant shifts in the family's access to and utilization of different types of capital. While economic capital was initially limited in the rural setting, migration to Kathmandu facilitated the

accumulation of new forms of social and cultural capital through educational and professional networks. This study explored how these forms of capital shaped individual subjectivities, with a particular focus on the ability of the younger generation to access educational opportunities and professional networks. The research revealed that the ability to navigate urban fields of capital was deeply tied to the capacity to adapt one's habitus in response to the changing social dynamics. This adaptation was not solely about acquiring new skills but about renegotiating one's sense of self within the shifting hierarchy of urban society.

8.1.4 The Role of Family and Kinship Networks

A significant element in the findings was the enduring importance of family and kinship networks in shaping subjectivities, especially among the older generation. While migration often entails a disruption of familial ties and social structures, the research illustrated that family and kinship played a key role in the adaptation process. In particular, the findings showed that older siblings, despite the challenges they faced in terms of accessing education and professional opportunities, maintained a strong sense of family-centered identity. For them, migration was less about social mobility than about ensuring the well-being and advancement of the next generation. In contrast, for the younger generation, education and professional success were perceived as primary means of achieving individual autonomy and social recognition in the urban context. This generational divide points to the differing expectations, opportunities, and resources available to each group, thus shaping their respective subjectivities in distinct ways.

8.1.5 Habitus in flux: Agency and Adaptation

Finally, the research underscores the concept of habitus in flux, as Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1990) theorize. The process of migration involves not only a physical relocation but a reconfiguration of social practices and self-perception. The tension between inherited rural habitus and the new demands of urban life necessitates an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation. The study highlighted how agency, as outlined by Giddens (1991), is exercised through everyday practices and how individuals actively choose to adapt, resist, or blend old and new forms of cultural and social practices. For instance, my educational trajectory was not a passive process but an active engagement with the changing expectations and opportunities that came

with migration. The findings indicate that individuals exercise agency within the constraints of their habitus, thus allowing for a continuous reworking of identity that is both reflexive and adaptive.

8.1.6 Symbolic Capital and Prestige

Another important insight from the research concerns the role of symbolic capital in shaping subjectivity, particularly in the context of prestige and social recognition. As Bourdieu (1984) posits, symbolic capital is a form of power that is derived from the recognition and legitimacy granted by others. The migration experience, especially for the younger generation, involved the negotiation of new sources of symbolic capital in urban society. Education, professional achievements, and social networks became crucial means through which individuals gained recognition and social standing. However, this process also involved the loss of symbolic capital associated with the rural way of life. The findings highlight the complex dynamics of gain and loss in symbolic capital, with individuals negotiating between the prestige afforded by education and professional success in the urban field and the cultural capital derived from rural roots. This interplay between prestige and identity loss offers a nuanced view of how migration impacts symbolic self-worth and social standing.

In conclusion, this study has explored the multifaceted ways in which migration acts as a catalyst for the transformation of subjectivity. Through the intersection of education, capital transformation, family networks, and habitus, the findings have shown that migration is not just a physical movement but a transformative process that reshapes the self. The key findings underscore the significance of education as a site of identity negotiation and the role of migration in the reworking of capital across different social fields. By drawing on the theories of Bourdieu, Giddens, and others, this research offers new insights into the lived experiences of migration, highlighting the agency and subjectivity of migrants as they adapt to new social, cultural, and educational contexts.

8.2 Theoretical Contribution

The study makes several important theoretical contributions. It extends Bourdieu's concept of habitus by demonstrating its dynamic reconfiguration in migration contexts, where individuals actively adapt their dispositions rather than

simply reproducing them. The research also advances migration studies by highlighting education as a pivotal site for understanding how subjectivities are remade through urban integration. Furthermore, it offers new insights into the transformation of symbolic capital, showing how migrants negotiate both the loss of rural prestige and the acquisition of new forms of urban recognition.

8.2.1 Contributions to Practice Theory and Migration Studies

The research presented in this study has significant implications for both Practice Theory and Migration Studies, offering a nuanced understanding of how migration influences the construction of subjectivities and the transformation of social, cultural, and economic capital. By integrating the concept of agency with habitus and practical engagement within the context of migration, this study provides critical insights into the lived experiences of migrants and how these experiences reshape the identity and social practices of individuals and families. Below, I highlight the key contributions of this research to both Practice Theory and Migration Studies.

8.2.2 Expanding Habitus and Agency: Practice Theory in Migration

One of the principal contributions of this study is its extension of Practice Theory — specifically Bourdieu's concept of habitus — into the field of migration. The research has explored how migration involves not a physical relocation but a complex reconfiguration of social practices, values, and dispositions. As migrants navigate new social environments, they are forced to adapt their habitus — the embodied system of dispositions shaped by prior experiences — to the demands of the urban setting. This study highlights how habitus is in flux, offering a dynamic perspective on cultural adaptation, where the individual is not simply a passive recipient of external forces but an active agent involved in shaping their practices in response to new circumstances.

By examining the lived experiences of my family members, this research underscores how migration processes are deeply intertwined with agency and social practices. While habitus provides a foundational lens for understanding the dispositions inherited from rural life, the study also emphasizes the active role of individuals in exercising agency within their new environment, thus contributing to the growing body of work in Practice Theory that highlights the relationship between

structure and agency in migration contexts (Giddens, 1984). Migrants, as this research demonstrates, do not merely conform to new social and economic structures; they continually negotiate and rework their practices in the process of adaptation. This has important implications for understanding agency in migration: it is not simply about individual choice but about how choices are shaped by and, in turn, shape the social contexts in which they are made.

Moreover, by adopting a Bourdieuian perspective, this study has also contributed to a more intersectional understanding of migration. While previous migration studies have often focused on the macroeconomic and political dimensions of migration, this research brings attention to the micro-level processes of identity transformation through the embodied practices of everyday life. This extension of Practice Theory within migration studies presents a comprehensive model for understanding how migration transforms not only economic capital but also social, cultural, and symbolic capitals, offering a multidimensional approach to migration's impacts on migrants' subjectivities.

8.2.3 Migration Studies: Interconnection of Education, Capital, and Identity

This research makes a notable contribution to Migration Studies by exploring the relationship between migration and education as intertwined processes that shape identity and agency. While migration studies often explore migration as a physical transition from rural to urban settings, this research adds a critical layer by focusing on how education and knowledge serve as pivotal sites for the re-imagining and re-shaping of subjectivities. The case study of my family's educational trajectories, particularly the younger generation's ability to access educational opportunities in Kathmandu, demonstrates how educational attainment is central to both upward mobility and social integration within the urban context.

Through the framework of cultural capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), the research highlights how migrants, especially those from rural backgrounds, navigate the urban educational field, which often operates according to distinct rules and expectations. As demonstrated by the educational experiences of the younger generation, formal education becomes a key tool not only for acquiring knowledge but also for securing social recognition and establishing new forms of prestige and symbolic capital in the urban context. This adds depth to existing migration studies by

illustrating the role of education as a transformative process that connects migration to long-term social mobility.

Additionally, the research contributes to the understanding of migration as a generational process, where the experiences of the older generation about migration differ significantly from those of the younger generation. The findings indicate that the older generation faced more immediate economic pressures upon migration and had fewer opportunities to pursue formal education or career advancement. In contrast, the younger generation was afforded more opportunities for education and professional development, suggesting that migration is not just a single event but a generational trajectory with different implications for social integration and identity formation. This insight enriches migration literature by emphasizing the intergenerational impact of migration and the role of education as a site of social transformation.

8.2.4 New Perspectives on Symbolic Capital and Migration

Another important contribution of this study lies in its exploration of symbolic capital in the migration context, particularly the dynamics of prestige and social recognition within a new urban environment. Previous studies on symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) have largely focused on its role in stable, established social fields. However, this research has demonstrated that symbolic capital is not only about the prestige associated with specific social positions but also about the negotiation of identity in response to the loss and gain of symbolic value through migration. The migration of my family to Kathmandu represented a shift not only in economic capital but also in the symbolic value of rural heritage. While rural traditions initially provided a form of symbolic prestige within the local community, they were often devalued in the urban setting. However, migration also afforded new opportunities for the accumulation of symbolic capital, particularly through educational achievements and professional success.

The research provides new insights into the transformative potential of symbolic capital in migration, showing how migrants actively engage with the urban social field to reclaim or redefine their prestige. This challenge to established theories of symbolic capital offers a broader understanding of how prestige and recognition are negotiated in migrant communities and how migration can be seen as both a loss and

a gain in symbolic terms. By bridging migration studies and Bourdieuian theories of capital, the study enhances our understanding of how symbolic capital operates in migrant contexts, especially when cultural identity and social recognition are in flux.

8.2.5 Interdisciplinary Contributions

This study also bridges interdisciplinary gaps by integrating Practice Theory, Migration Studies, and Educational Studies, providing a comprehensive framework to understand the multi-dimensional impacts of migration on individual and collective subjectivities. The intersection of these fields not only adds to the theoretical richness of migration research but also provides a practical understanding of the everyday realities of migrants. The integration of cultural, economic, social, and symbolic capitals into the migration narrative further enriches our understanding of how migrants engage with their new environments and how their subjectivities are constantly shaped and reshaped through their interactions with the social fields they inhabit.

In conclusion, this study makes significant contributions to Practice Theory and Migration Studies, offering new theoretical insights and empirical evidence on how migration shapes subjectivity, identity, and agency. The research highlights the importance of education, capital transformation, and symbolic prestige in shaping the experiences of migrants while also demonstrating the intergenerational complexities of migration. By extending the concepts of habitus, agency, and symbolic capital, the study provides a nuanced framework for understanding how migration is not simply a process of relocation but a profoundly transformative experience that redefines social roles, practices, and identities in both rural and urban contexts.

8.3 Conclusion

On a personal level, conducting this research has been an exercise in reflexivity, as my own position as both researcher and family member revealed the complex emotional dimensions of migration. The process of analyzing my family's experiences has deepened my understanding of how migration reshapes not only material circumstances but also fundamental notions of self and belonging. This dual perspective has reinforced the importance of considering both structural constraints and personal agency in migration research.

The process of conducting this research and engaging with the theories of subjectivity, agency, and migration has not only contributed to the academic understanding of these concepts but has also led me to reflect deeply on my own experiences as a migrant and a researcher. As I revisited the lives of my family members and traced the trajectories of their migration from Okhaldhunga to Kathmandu, I was compelled to confront the intricate ways in which personal history and theoretical frameworks intersect. This chapter reflects on the personal and theoretical insights gained through the research process, shedding light on the interplay between lived experiences and the conceptual tools used to interpret them.

8.3.1 Personal Reflections: Navigating between Identities

The personal reflections that emerged from this research were particularly powerful in shaping my understanding of subjectivity and agency in migration. Growing up in Kathmandu as a child of migrants, I often found myself caught between two worlds: that of my rural heritage, deeply embedded in the traditions and values of my ancestral village in Okhaldhunga, and the urban identity shaped by my education and professional life in the capital city. My migration story, like those of my family members, reflects a profound transformation in subjectivity, where my identity has been continually shaped and reshaped by the evolving interactions between these two spaces. As I reflected on the embodied practices of my family, I began to appreciate how migration involves a dynamic negotiation between past experiences and future aspirations and how these two spheres of influence are constantly in flux.

The emotional and cultural complexities of migration, particularly the loss of symbolic capital associated with rural heritage and the rebuilding of a new form of prestige in the urban setting, became central themes throughout this research. As my family members adapted to life in Kathmandu, they not only faced economic challenges but also navigated the emotional impact of leaving behind familiar landscapes and relationships. For me, reflecting on this process was an exercise in recognizing that migration is not simply a physical movement but an emotional and intellectual journey that reshapes one's sense of self and belonging.

Through my personal lens, I also recognized the way migration has affected intergenerational relationships. I observed how my older siblings, especially those

who migrated with our parents, faced barriers to education and social mobility due to a lack of resources, while I, as a younger-generation migrant, had greater access to opportunities for education and career advancement. This generational divide in migration experiences highlighted the differential impact of migration on family members, leading me to reflect on the privileges and limitations inherent in the migration process.

8.3.2 Theoretical Reflections

The process of analyzing my family's migration experience through the lenses of subjectivity, agency, and structure provided rich theoretical insights into how individuals and families navigate migration as both a social structure and a personal experience. One of the most striking revelations from this research was the way agency is conceptualized within Bourdieu’s framework of habitus and capital. I had initially approached migration as a linear process, where individuals simply transitioned from one socio-economic space to another. However, as I reflected on my family’s migration, it became clear that migration is a far more complex process — one that involves continuous adaptation and negotiation between individuals' embodied dispositions and the demands of the new environment.

This theoretical journey deepened my understanding of how habitus, shaped by prior experiences and cultural background, interacts with new forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) in migration contexts. For example, while the older generation of my family struggled to retain cultural capital in an urban environment, the younger generation, myself included, had more opportunities to reconfigure cultural capital through education and social integration. This shift underscores the dynamic nature of habitus — where the dispositions formed in one context are reinterpreted and restructured in response to new social fields. The tension between rural heritage and urban identity played a significant role in this reconfiguration, and it reinforced the importance of viewing habitus not as a static entity but as something that is constantly evolving.

Theoretical reflection also led me to reconsider the relationship between structure and agency in the context of migration. While Bourdieu emphasizes the structural constraints that shape individual behavior, my research suggested that migration opens up new possibilities for exercising agency. It highlighted the agency

of migrants in making decisions to adapt, negotiate, and redefine their social practices in ways that challenge the dominant structures in their new environments. Migration is, therefore, not just a matter of adapting to new social conditions but also an opportunity to reclaim power and shape one's future within the constraints of urban life.

8.3.3 The Researcher's Role: Reflexivity and Power Dynamics

As a researcher engaged in studying the migration experiences of my own family, I became increasingly aware of the role of reflexivity in shaping the research process. Being both an insider and an outsider in the context of my family's migration meant that I was constantly negotiating my position within the research. I was close enough to the data to deeply understand the emotional and cultural significance of the migration experience, but I was also distant enough to critically analyze the social structures and theoretical concepts that influenced our lives.

The power dynamics between me and my family members, particularly as I navigated the complexities of researching family history, were also a point of reflection. While I sought to present their stories with academic rigor, I was keenly aware of the subjectivity of my own interpretations. This raised important questions about the ethics of researching one's own family, particularly regarding the representation of their experiences and the potential for bias in interpreting their lives. Ultimately, the research process highlighted the interconnectedness of personal and theoretical reflection, where the researcher's position is always intertwined with the research subject's lived reality.

8.3.4 Contributions to Personal Growth and Future Research

On a personal level, this research has contributed to my growth as an individual and as a scholar. It has deepened my understanding of the complexities of migration, particularly how migration transforms subjectivity and identity across generations. It has also prompted me to reflect on my own agency in navigating life as a migrant and the ways in which I continue to negotiate between my rural origins and urban identity. The research has affirmed my belief in the importance of self-reflection and critical engagement with one's own positionality in the research process.

Looking forward, the insights gained from this study open avenues for future research in migration studies, particularly concerning intergenerational migration, educational opportunities, and the evolving nature of social and cultural capitals in urban migration contexts. Further research could explore how second-generation migrants and young adults continue to reshape their identities as they mature and integrate into urban societies. Additionally, comparative studies of rural-urban migration across different cultural contexts would be valuable in understanding the global dimensions of these processes.

In conclusion, the process of conducting this research has been both personally transformative and theoretically enriching. The reflections presented here emphasize the interconnectedness of personal experience and theoretical analysis, illustrating how migration serves as a powerful site for the continuous negotiation of subjectivity, agency, and identity. The interplay between theory and practice, as explored through the lens of migration, has deepened my understanding of how individuals and families negotiate their lives in response to shifting social structures and changing personal aspirations.

8.3.5 For Further Studies

Future researchers focusing on migration, subjectivity, agency, and education shall explore how migration impacts educational access and outcomes across generations, particularly for first-generation migrants. Research could examine the barriers faced by older migrants in accessing education, as well as the role of adult education and vocational training in enabling them to adapt to urban settings. Studies might also investigate the specific challenges migrant children face in navigating urban schooling systems, especially those related to language barriers, cultural integration, and the preservation of their rural identities. A deeper exploration of how inclusive educational policies and culturally responsive teaching practices can support migrant students' success is necessary. Researchers shall focus on the development of curricula and pedagogies that recognize and address the diverse cultural backgrounds of migrant populations.

In the realm of cultural preservation and identity negotiation, future researchers could examine the strategies through which migrant communities sustain and negotiate their cultural practices in urban contexts. Research could also explore the relationship between urban spaces and migrant cultural heritage, considering how

urban planning can facilitate or hinder cultural expression through dedicated spaces, festivals, and community centers.

Social integration is another crucial area for future study, particularly in understanding the role of social capital and networks in aiding the integration of migrant families into urban life. Researchers could investigate how various forms of social capital — whether familial, religious, or community-based — contribute to the economic stability, emotional support, and social inclusion of migrants. Furthermore, future research could explore the effectiveness of mentorship programs and other initiatives that help younger migrants bridge generational gaps and integrate into their new environments. Studies could also investigate the importance of migrant-led organizations and networks in advocating for policy changes and improving migrants' overall well-being.

On a policy level, future researchers could analyze migration policies that address not only the economic and legal aspects of migration but also the social and emotional dimensions. The development of integrated support systems that provide housing, healthcare, language education, and legal assistance could be a critical area for research, particularly in urban environments where migrants often experience disorientation and isolation. Researchers should also consider the role of migrant participation in policy-making processes, examining how inclusion in governance and decision-making can lead to more responsive policies that address the specific needs of migrant communities.

Finally, future studies shall continue to employ ethnographic and multi-theoretical approaches to better understand the intersection of migration, subjectivity, and education. The application of Bourdieu’s theories of capital, combined with frameworks of agency and habitus, can provide rich insights into how migration shapes identity, social structures, and educational opportunities. Longitudinal studies tracking the experiences of migrants over time can further illuminate the evolving nature of migration and its long-term impacts on family dynamics and social mobility. By focusing on these areas, future researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how migration intersects with education, identity, and agency, ultimately fostering more inclusive and supportive urban environments for migrant populations.

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ANNEX 1

Research Questions and Sub-questions

I. How did the migration from rural Okhaldhunga to urban Kathmandu transform the subjectivity and aspirations of different generations within my family?

Sub-questions:

1. What were the primary motivations and circumstances that led to my family's migration from Gamnangtar to Kathmandu?
2. How did the habitus of different family members adapt to the new urban environment?
3. What continuities and discontinuities in practices, values, and beliefs emerged through the migration process?
4. How did gender influence the experience of migration and adaptation among family members?
5. In what ways did intergenerational differences manifest in the adaptation to urban life?
6. How did migration affect family relationships and social hierarchies?
7. What narratives do different family members construct about the migration experience, and how do these narratives reflect their subjectivity?

II. In what ways did economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital evolve through my family's migration experience, and how did these capitals shape individual and collective identities?

Sub-questions:

1. What economic capital did my family possess before migration, and how was it transformed in the urban context?
2. How did my parents accumulate new forms of capital in Kathmandu, and what strategies did they employ?
3. What cultural capital (knowledge, skills, practices) proved most valuable or had to be reimagined in the urban setting?
4. How did social networks transform after migration, and what new social capital emerged?

5. What symbolic capital (recognition, prestige, honor) was lost and gained through migration?
6. How did different forms of capital interact to create new possibilities or constraints for family members?
7. How did capital acquisition and transformation differ between my parents' generation and my own?

III. How has my own subjectivity been constructed at the intersection of rural heritage, urban education, and theoretical frameworks of habitus and agency?

Sub-questions:

1. What specific childhood experiences most significantly shaped my sense of identity and possibility?
2. How did educational opportunities change my habitus compared to my older siblings?
3. In what ways do I embody both continuity with and departure from my family's rural origins?
4. How has my exposure to theoretical frameworks influenced my understanding of my own life trajectory?
5. What tensions exist between my academic subjectivity and my family identity?
6. How has my position as the youngest child influenced my agency within family dynamics?
7. In what ways does my interpretation of family migration differ from other family members, and what does this reveal about subjectivity formation?