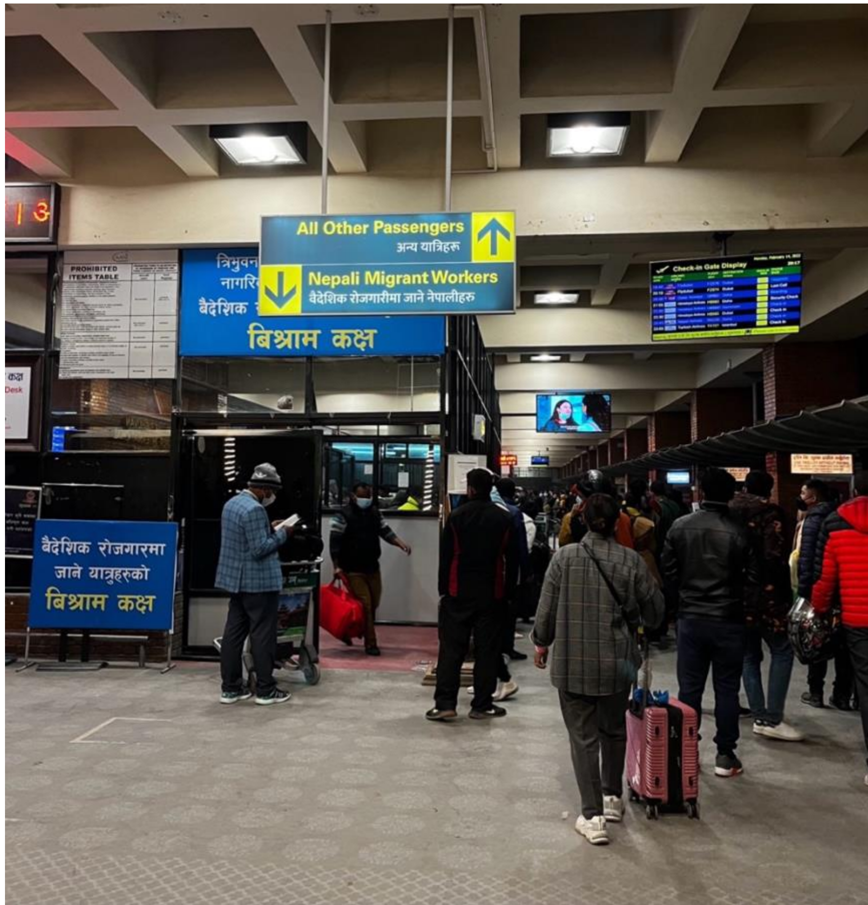
A COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE

Migration and the Everyday Experience of Hope, Waiting, and 'Bhagya' in Nepal

Bhokraj Gurung

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Social Anthropology
March 2024
78,857 words



Supervisors: Dr Daniela Peluso and Dr Mike Poltorak

University of Kent
School of Anthropology and Conservation

School of Anthropology and Conservation
Division of Human and Social Sciences
University of Kent
Canterbury, UK

COVID-19 Impact Statement

I would like to request my examiners to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the development and structure of this thesis.

I started my PhD studies in September 2018 and arrived in Nepal to conduct my doctoral fieldwork at the end of November 2019, preceded by an initial two-months fieldwork in Fiji prior to revising my research proposal.

As with much of the rest of the world, Nepal went into a strict lockdown from March 2020. The immediate impact of this was felt through the imposition of strict travel restrictions and social distancing measures, which made it challenging for me to access various field sites, communities, and resources critical to my PhD endeavours. While I was in Nepal for two years, a large part of my stay there was impacted by the travel restrictions and challenging health risks posed to own my personal health for which I was eventually hospitalised. At the same time, such challenges also enabled me with opportunities to mould and shape my PhD research in fruitful ways, which I hope is reflected in my final work.

Author signature:

Date: **26 March 2024**

Main supervisor signature:

Date: **26 March 2024**

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Nepali migration experiences at home and abroad. It describes, analyses and bears witness to how Nepali individuals and their families engage with the ideas and practicalities of migration and its ongoing ensuing trajectories. Based on over 15 months of multi-sited anthropological fieldwork in Nepal, Portugal, and the UK, I examine the imaginative aspects of migration among Nepalis, paying attention to their hopes and dreams as they are continually (re)shaped by the experience of leaving and returning to Nepal. I draw on Nepali migration experiences by focusing on related everyday activities, commitments, and pursuits within the conditions of hope, waiting and (mis)fortune that migration begets. In doing so, my thesis contributes to social and economic anthropology, and migration and Nepali studies as well as native anthropology and an anthropology of the future.

Throughout the dissertation, I consider debates and theoretical approaches to hope, waiting, dreams and (mis)fortune, and how they interact with ideas and practices related to migration among Nepalis. By examining how Nepali migrant workers (predominantly those working in the Gulf countries), and their families imagine, speak of, or act upon ideas of hope, waiting and dreams, I focus on the tangible, intangible and relational dynamics that transnational migratory individuals and groups experience. Engaging with theoretical approaches of hope, I espouse the concept of hope as both a social phenomenon and an analytical framework to understand migration in Nepal, which is also an attempt to build a space for anthropological engagement with philosophy. In examining the social and economic realities associated with migratory comings and goings by positioning everyday human experiences to discussions of migration, I claim hope as a relational and analytical tool for capturing migrants' lived experiences. Approaching hope as an analytical framework implies both potentiality and uncertainty; the former encompasses desires, dreams, and social imaginaries of the good life in the horizons of the future, while the latter examines unpredictable or precarious life contexts and how people confront them. As such, I probe hope alongside emic understandings of '*bhagya*' and its multiple meanings such as (mis)fortune, luck, destiny or auspiciousness, and how these are manifested in the everyday social, economic or political discourse of migration in Nepal to extend insights on concepts such as 'waiting', 'dreams', 'potential futures', 'rural-urban connections' or 'social capital', among others – all critical towards elucidating a multifaceted migration phenomenon in Nepal. The concept of waiting is also crucial in this thesis since waiting is an experience imbued with activities and actions projected towards hoped-for futures. The interdeterminate notions of hope, waiting, and *bhagya* examined through ethnographic engagements in this thesis also offer a critical dimension to a discourse of migration – ones that go beyond strict economic considerations and explanations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the late *Chandar Deo* – who I met as a stranger in Fiji in 2018 but now lives on in my memory and heart as family.

Undertaking this PhD has been a real journey in every sense of the word – fraught with challenge and new discoveries, it has taken me across several countries and places, and despite frequent setbacks, it has paved a pathway for fresh perspectives and new opportunities. I have many people to thank for the outcome of this thesis (some of whom I cannot name but will forever remain grateful towards). Over the past years, I have been fortunate enough to be surrounded by individuals whose support and influence have had an immense role in bringing this work into fruition.

First and foremost, I want to thank my two supervisors, Dr Daniela Peluso and Dr Mike Poltorak for their unwavering support, commitment, and patience throughout my study, amid a bolstering of friendship that goes back to my undergraduate years at Kent. Their wealth of knowledge, kindness and profound interest in my work guided me to explore my academic and creative pursuits. For this I owe you both my sincere gratitude. I would also like to thank Dr Miguel Alexiades, Dr Mahesh Poudel, Dr Ozlem Biner, Dr Natalie Morningstar, Dr Raj Puri and Dr Sarah Johns for their support during my time at Kent.

I hope that my thesis reveals and pays tribute to all those who helped produce it throughout, particularly those in Nepal, Portugal, UK and Fiji who offered me their time, knowledge, and friendship.

This research would not have been possible without the wonderful people of Pyarjung village, Lamjung and their connections in Kathmandu and beyond. I would like to especially thank Jonny, Pakku dai, Kalu, Tara Dai, Prem, Messi, Santa Bdr, Andre, Messi, Raj Kumar, Kancha, Yam and all their families. I am also indebted to Amit and his family in Gumi village, Surkhet for kindly hosting me during my stay, including the friendly people who willingly shared their interests and stories with me. To the new friends I made in Almograve, Portugal – Dawa, Pramila, Sushila and Manju Baini, Jonny, Adeep bhai and all those who provided critical contributions towards this thesis by sharing their stories and experiences, I remain grateful.

To my family for holding my world together while I spent these past few years in my never-ending quest of being a student (much to the chagrin of my mother), I cannot thank you enough! My wonderful parents Sen Bahadur and Naumaya for your overwhelming patience, sacrifice and enduring faith in me. I could not have completed this without my amazing sister, Chitra whose patience, love and courage remains unmatched, and for this I am truly blessed. Keiron, I am grateful for your kind support and providing a space for me to complete my work. To my dear brother Maila and bhauju, Mary Didi, Raju dai, Sanu and Maya didi, Dabin, Branda, little Royce and Esme, Prem, my dear Sushmita baini and all

my other family members in Nepal and the UK, for your immense love and support. Tara dai for your insights and guidance, which been valuable towards my work, I thank you.

I am grateful to my remarkable friends, both near and far – not only for your constant encouragement and support, but also remaining interested in my work, and helping me get throughout my PhD journey. Kusang, Norkhil, Dr. Charimsa Lepcha, Dr. Gyatso, Panu, Yojak bhai, Norkhil and all the rest of my DGH connections in India. I would also like to thank Dechen, Kesang, Aunty, Tenzing, Acha Nima and the rest of the family in Kalimpong for all their love and support. I am also thankful for the reconnections with Sir Lawrence, Miss Dalen, David, James, and Atol, and for their support during my visit to Sydney. In Nepal, Prateek, Pemba Rosy, Rajju, Bikhyat, Sewan and Sonam and all the rest who helped me stay afloat during the COVID-19 times and beyond – you guys will always have a part etched into this and future work. You made the challenges of conducting fieldwork more bearable. Also, thanks to TD for assisting me with numerous interviews for my research.

To all my Nepali friends and family in Fiji for showing me nothing but love and a warm welcome. My brief time in Fiji and every single person I was fortunate enough to meet there will always hold a special place in my heart. I will forever remain indebted to all of you, and I hope that someday in the future I can share your story to the world. I would like to especially thank Indra bajey and bajei, Bhim dai, Roshni didi and family, Sanjay and family, Sonu, Kanchu, Boso, Akniel, Navshiel, Nita aunty and uncle, for welcoming me into their homes.

Phuntsok, Jyambala, Renu, Pushpa, Milan, Rakesh and other fellow grahamites for their continued support. Tenzse in Canada, who I cannot thank enough for ensuring that I remained sane through these years. I am also thankful for strong and wonderful friendships in the UK over the years, my dear friends, Stefanie Korte and Caitlin Gulliford who have always stood beside me, and a special mention to my dear friends Milan, Sunil, and Omin, who with their boundless support through a blend of wisdom, knowledge and banter helped me get through all the difficult times. Also, to my incredible friends from Kent, particularly Sibani, Suprima, Jit, Nar, Saugat, Nissan, Nar, Sanju Dai and the rest of the crew, my sincere thanks to each one of you.

Finally, I thank my PhD cohort at the University of Kent for their support and solidarity over the years. My fellow researchers and friends at the department, Michaela, Holly, Marko, Kate, Will, Luis, Herman, Sushila, Kiera, Mayra, Rachel, Mick, Avi, Joe, Jess, Lindsey, and everyone else who I may have missed, I thank you all!

This thesis is about the human condition of dreaming, hoping, and waiting, but more importantly of being in a world with others. It is a testament that despite the difficulties and failures, a spark of hope always awaits at the horizons of the future. To the countless numbers of Nepalis who not only confront life's precarious challenges both at home and *bidesh* but also thrive in their circumstances – I salute you!!!

Table of Contents

Abstract 3
Acknowledgements 4
Contents 6
Maps 8
List of Figures 9
Glossary 10

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION: A COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE 12

1.1 A Familiar Story 13
1.2 *Bidesh* 14
1.3 Contextualizing Migration in Nepal 19
1.4 A Modern Nepal 20
1.5 Fiji Nepalis: Silenced in History 23
1.6 The Gurkha Influence 26
1.7 'Khadi ma Bhetaula' – See you in the Arab Gulf 29
1.8 Theoretical Framework 33
1.8.1 Pondering 'Hope' in Pandora's Jar 33
1.8.2 Locating Hope: Imagination, Potentiality and Uncertainty 35
1.9 Outline of Chapters 41

Chapter Two: FIELDWORK APPROACH, POSITIONALITY AND METHODS 45

2.1 Locating the Field in a Time of Precarity 45
2.2 Patchwork Ethnography, Situation and Critical Hermeneutics 47
2.3 The Native Anthropologist, Positionality and Reflexivity 50
2.4 Informal Conversations and Narratives 55
2.5 Participant Observation and Interviews 57
2.6 Objects that Move 59
2.7 Chapter Conclusion 61

Chapter Three: THE POTENTIAL OF HOPE 62

3.1 Hope in the Everyday 63
3.2 Acharya's Revolution 65
3.3 Should We Stay or Should We Go? 72
3.4 *Bhavishya:* Futural Momentum of Hope 77
3.5 *Bidesh*: Hope Outside Nepal 83
3.6 Chapter Conclusion 87

Chapter Four: WAITING 89

4.1 The Familiarity of Waiting 89
4.2 Beyond Suffering Subjects 95
4.3 Waiting in a Time of Waiting 100

4.3 1 A Korean Drama, 15th June 2020 101
4.4 The Vigour of Waiting 110
4.4.1 The Conundrum of Berojgaar 112
4.5 Chapter Conclusion 117

Chapter Five: IMAGINATION, DREAMS AND SPACES 119

5.1 Gurkha Dreams 120
5.1.1. A Failed Gurkha 122
5.2 Airport Stories: Departures and Connections 127
5.3 Dreams and Imagination of *bidesh* 136
5.4 Dreams for Sale 140
5.5 Migrant Dreams, Lived Realities 151
5.6 The Experience of Migration, Bikas and Space 154
5.6.1. Kathmandu is not a place one can belong to 155
5.6.2. Migration and Interconnected Spaces 159
5.6.3 Materiality of Bikas and Migration 161
5.7 Chapter Conclusion 165

Chapter Six: BHAGYA: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? 167

6.1 Witches, (Mis)fortune and Superstition 168
6.2 A *Bhagyamani* Individual 175
6.3 Bhagya as Luck or Auspiciousness or Destiny 178
6.4 Dasha: Bad Luck or Misfortune 183
6.5 The Predicament of *Bhagya* 187
6.5.1 Computer Bajey 190
6.6 Chapter Conclusion 196

Chapter Seven: CONCLUSION 197

'*Kata Janey Aba?'* – Where to Next? 197

List of References 205

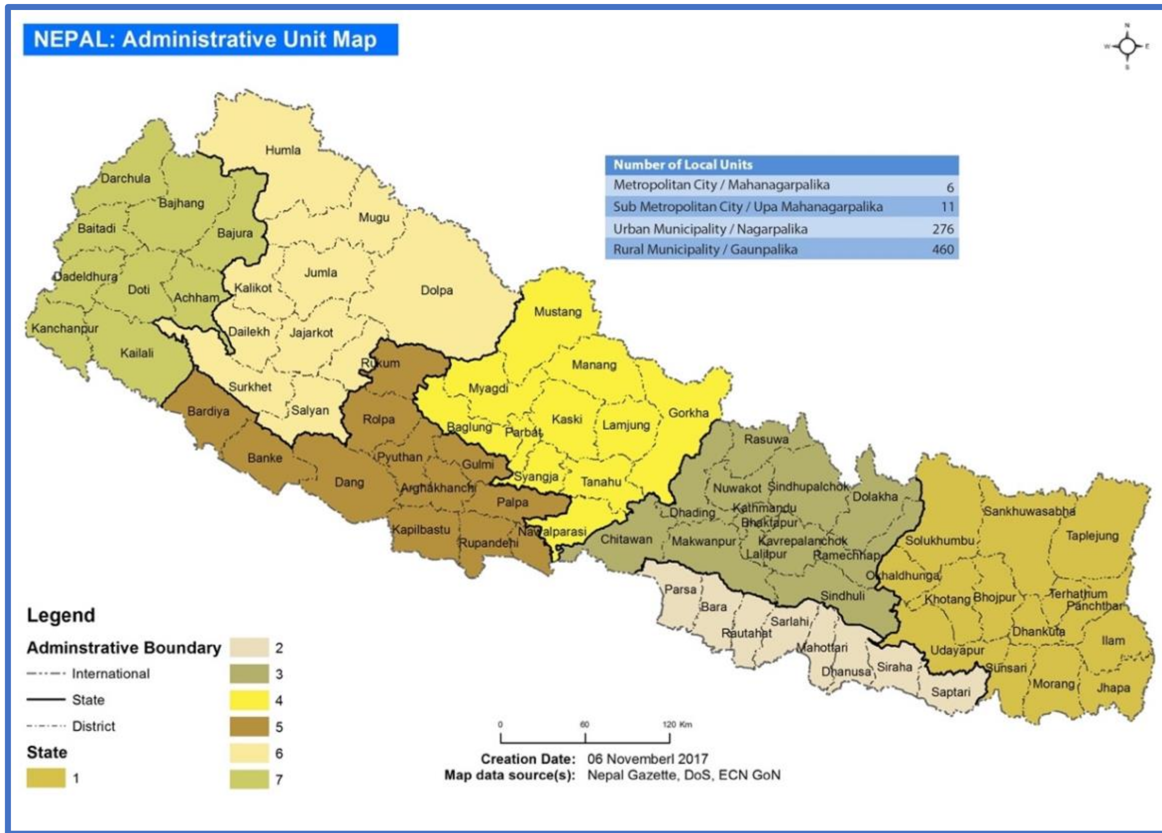


Figure 1. Map of the 7 Provinces & 77 Districts of Nepal. Source: United Nations

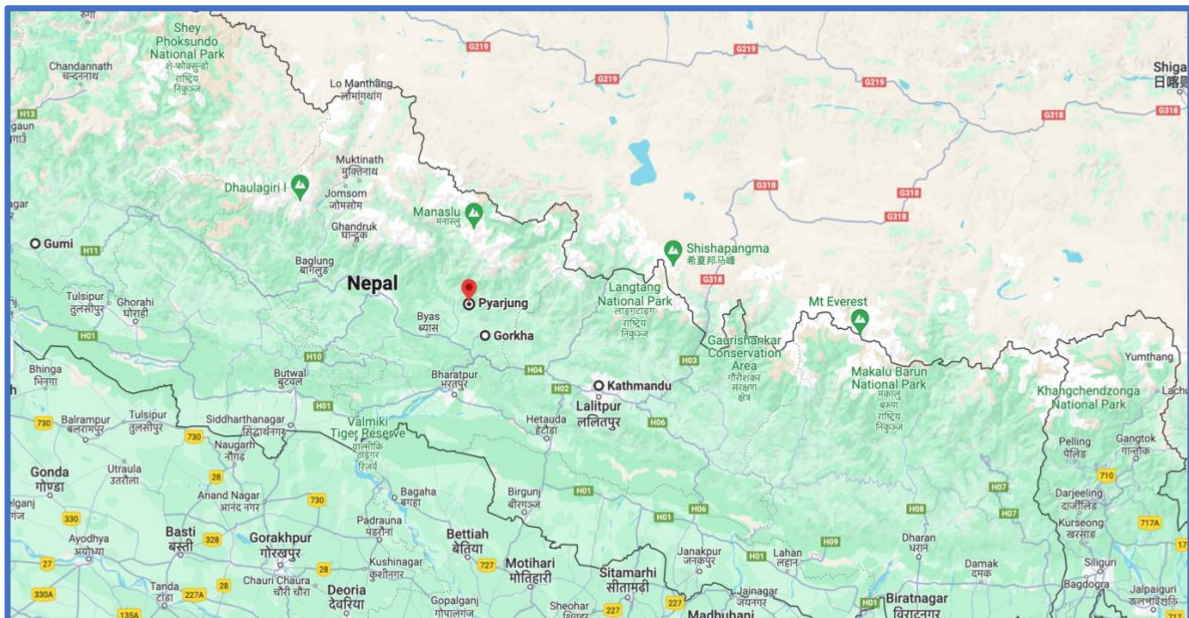


Figure 2. Map of Nepal showing my field sites (Kathmandu, Pyarjung Village & Gumi Village). Source: Google Maps

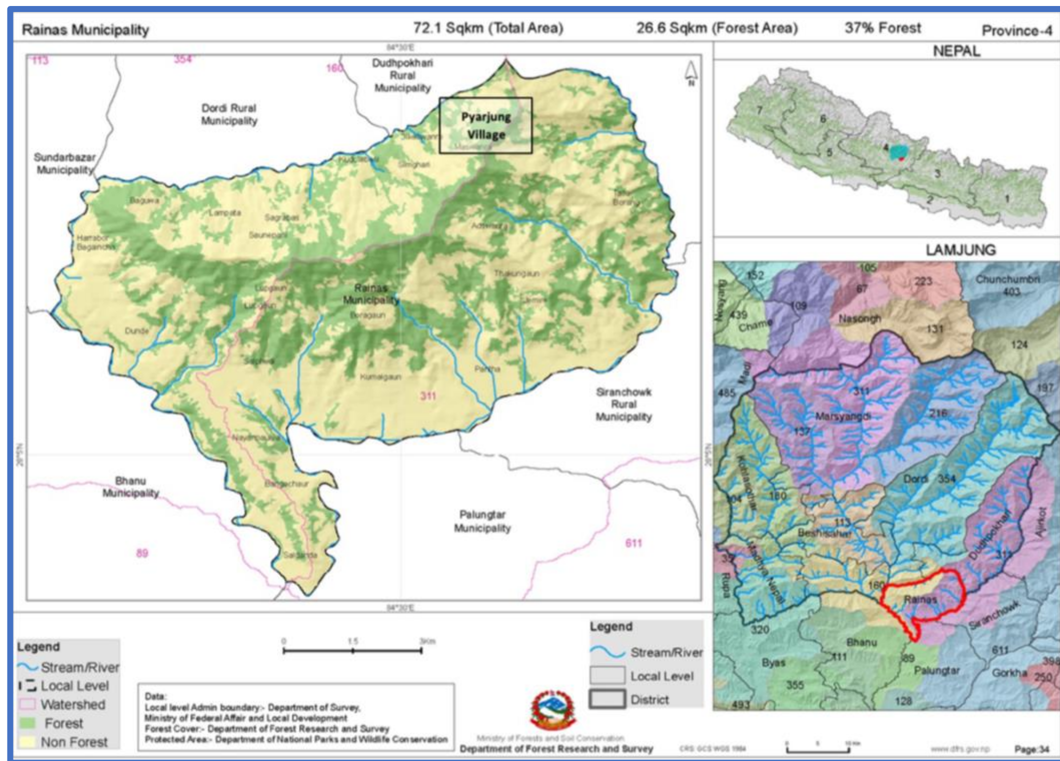


Figure 3. Map showing Pyarjung Village in Rainas Municipality, Lamjung District. Source: Nepal Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation

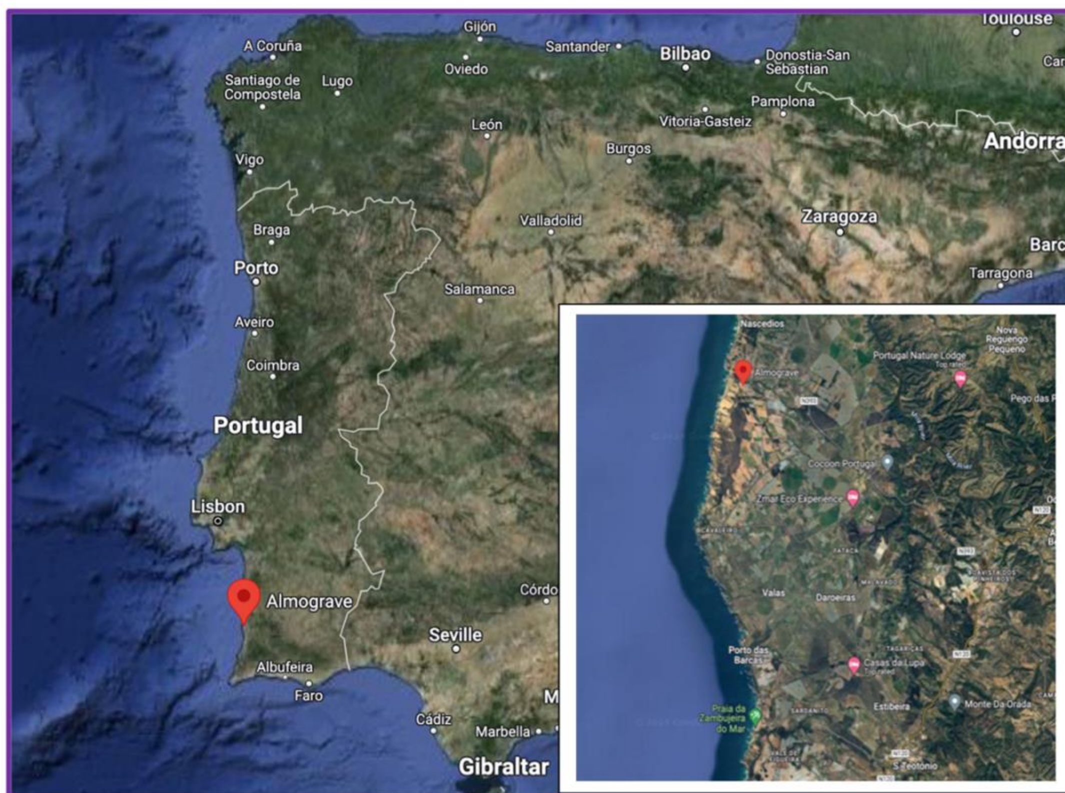


Figure 4. Map of Portugal showing my field site, Almograve. Source: Google Maps

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of the 7 Provinces & 77 Districts of Nepal. 8

Figure 2. Map of Nepal showing my field sites (Kathmandu, Pyarjung Village & Gumi Village. 8

Figure 3. Map showing Pyarjung Village in Rainas Municipality, Lamjung District. 9

Figure 4. Map of Portugal showing my field site, Almograve. 9

Figure 5. Applicants at the Department of Foreign Employment, Kathmandu. 32

Figure 6. A School Farewell. 'Khadi ma Bhetaula' – See you in the Arab Gulf. 32

Figure 7. *Pyarjung* village, Lamjung. 61

Figure 8. A normal day at the *Ekantakuna Yatayat* (Transport Management Office). 94

Figure 9. EPS applicants at the EPS Korea Office, Gwarko. 109

Figure 10. Queue at the EPS Korea Office, Gwarko. 109

Figure 11. Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu – Arrivals Area. 135

Figure 12. Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu – Departure Area. 135

Figure 13. Education Consultancies (i), Kathmandu. 148

Figure 14. Education Consultancies (ii), Kathmandu. 149

Figure 15. Online Applications and Visa forms, Kathmandu. 149

Figure 16. Passports (with permission from owners). 150

Figure 17. Paradise International. "Serving is our duty- Satisfaction, the destination" 150

Figure 18. The Primary school at *Pyarjung* village, Lamjung. 166

Figure 19. A House belonging to an interlocutor under construction in Kathmandu. 166

Figure 20. Auspicious Moments. At a Wedding (L); Before a Flight (R). 182

Figure 21. *Pyarjung* Village Lamjung. 182

Figure 22. Farewell. Kathmandu Airport 2023 (with permission from owner). 198

Figure 23. Lisbon, Portugal. Source: Author 2022 204

Figure 24. Almograve, Portugal. Source: Author 2022 204

Glossary

Aasha	Hope
Baadyata	Compulsion
Bahira	Out or Outside
Baidesik Rojgaar	Foreign Employment
Bidesh	Abroad, International or Foreign place
Bikas	Development
Berojgaar	Unemployment
Bhagya	(Mis)fortune, Destiny, Fate, Luck, Auspiciousness
Bhavishya	Future
Chutti	Holiday
Icchha (or Rahar)	Want, Desire, or Wish
Iijat	Honour or Pride
Gaun	Village
Ghar	Home or House
Jimmawari	Responsibility
Kartaavya	Duty
Khadi	The Arab Gulf
Lahure (Sainik)	Soldier, Army or Military
Maan (Samman)	Respect
Rojgaar	Employment
Sahar	City
Sapana	Dream
Samaj	Society or Community
Udeshyaa	Aim or Goal

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: A COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE

This thesis is a critical examination of the experience of Nepali outbound migration and the everyday activities and commitments it entails. It centres around quotidian endeavours, conditions, and enactments of hope and *bhagya*, as well as the disappointment and precarity that continuously shape the phenomenon of migration in Nepal. For such an undertaking, I have two main objectives. First, I aim to describe and examine the myriad contours, complexities and conditions intertwined within the culture of migration in Nepal, that transcends the parochial confines of economic explanations for migration. Second, I endeavour to engage with and analyse these forms and understandings of migration to pertinent ideas of hope as a method of analysis to open further arenas for discussions in social anthropology and beyond. Taken together, the main aim of this research is to address the following question: *How does every day lived experiences and manifestations of hope, waiting, and bhagya and negotiation of the everyday life inform the phenomenon of migration and its ensuing pursuits in Nepal?*

The relevance of hope and its constituents such as imaginative conceptions of potential futures or dreams played out alongside conditions of waiting, emerged during my fieldwork among Nepalis in multiple field sites, both in Nepal and abroad. While these concepts also demand an examination in their own terms, I conceptualise them in relation to migration as multiple facets that continually act on one another. Hence, ideas of hope alongside migration entail both potentiality and uncertainty – the former encompasses dreams, and social imaginaries of a desired life in the horizons of the future, while uncertainty enables the examination of unpredictable or precarious life contexts and how people confront them. I also probe on emic understandings of *bhagya* and how these unfold in the everyday social, economic, or political discourse of migration in Nepal to extend insights on concepts such as 'waiting', 'dreams and imagination', 'potential futures', 'responsibility and compulsion, 'rural-urban connections', among others – which, are all critical towards elucidating a multifaceted migration phenomenon in Nepal. This thesis, as such, deals with paradoxes, about ideas that contradict yet merge in interesting ways as they inform ideas about migration and its trajectories in Nepal.

This introductory chapter sketches out a brief historical overview of Nepali migration by considering the social, political, and economic complexities surrounding the myriad migratory trajectories undertaken by Nepalis in the past. This entails migratory endeavours both within and outside the country, thus giving prominence to the historical and present day understanding of the migration phenomenon in Nepal. I make use of relevant literatures on migration studies to elucidate discussions while drawing on the historical relationship between ideas of going abroad in relation to the figure of the Gurkha soldier. I then present the overall theoretical framework for this thesis and conclude by providing an outline of the chapters. I begin first with a short personal recollection to present a familiar facet of Nepali migration, relatable to many individuals and their families, while also emphasising my position within the context of my own research.

1.1 A Familiar Story

It was early January in 1998 and I was back home in Nepal for my annual school winter vacation, far away from the hawkish eyes of our stern hostel superintendent and the frosty hills of Darjeeling in India. A couple of my relatives had come to Kathmandu from *gaun* (village) for their medical check-ups in the city and they had been staying over at our house. We were all watching TV after dinner one evening when that damned phone call arrived. I gazed at my mother with nervousness as I witnessed her grasping for air like a fish out of water, barely able to clutch the receiver after a few words – eventually breaking down into a flood of tears. With my father away in Angola, where he had been working for the past year, I immediately feared the worst as my little heart skipped a beat. While I exhaled a sigh of relief once my mother uttered the news from phone call, my selfish moment of joy was immediately pierced by a realisation that it was my *Mama* (maternal uncle) who had died in Malaysia. Attempting to conjure the roaring surge of emotions I felt that evening as a startled 10-year-old remains an elusive challenge beyond the simple act of remembering the past itself. Even so, the events that transpired during this incident, soars hauntingly close to both my heart and memory.

The following day, many of us had congregated outside the Tribhuvan international airport customs area in Kathmandu on a miserable afternoon. A stubborn drizzle accompanied by the seasonal chill had persistently plagued the early parts of the day. Along with numerous scattered motorbikes, taxis and another minibus, our vehicle was parked on the side of the main road, adjacent to the entrance of the cargo area. As my curious eyes attentively gazed outside at the gloomy red customs building from the warm comfort of the window seat, my random

thoughts were struggling to stay afloat amid the waves of agonising cries that echoed inside the bus. There were mainly women inside the bus, all extended kin or village folks, although I was only familiar with a handful of them, including one of my mother's younger sisters who was seated beside me, whimpering gently under her breath.

I was not too sure how long we had been waiting for – perhaps an hour or more, before I saw a cluster of men carrying a large rectangular wooden box making their way towards our bus from the main gate, as I recognised my mother and a few others walking behind them. The cries inside the bus only intensified as the group approached the other minibus in front of us, while the men secured the box accordingly inside the vehicle. My mother made her way back inside our bus and sat beside me in silence – she looked distraught, her dazzling eyes faded like an evening shadow and her childish smile engulfed by pain and grief, as she covered her face with a shawl.

We made our way towards *Bhotewodar* in the district of *Lamjung,* about 170 kms west of Kathmandu, while enduring a series of army check posts along our journey, which was a norm at the time, due to the ongoing civil war in Nepal. In the presence of his relatives and villagers, who had made the long trek down from their homes, my uncle's death rituals were eventually carried out on the banks of the *Marsyangdi* river after midnight to early hours close to sunrise. My uncle had been working in a garment factory in Malaysia for about two years, while his younger brother had already been working in Korea for over three years at the time of his death. Now both my cousins (my deceased uncle's sons) currently work in Dubai, with the elder of the two having already worked previously in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia for over a decade in total. Such stories are not unusual in Nepal. The desires for migratory undertakings outside of Nepal mainly for purposes pertaining to education, employment, or settlement among others, continue to remain a persistent one among many Nepalis – often put forward casually by many Nepalis as *"Aakhir ma hami Nepali haru ko tehi ta ho, bahira bidesh tira janey… aru key upayah cha ra?"* – In the end, we Nepalis always go abroad to another country… what other options do we have? or *"hamro tehi… bidesh ta ho…"* – ours is the usual… to go abroad.

1.2 Bidesh

Haath ko Maylo Suna ko Thailo
Kya Garu Dhana le
Sag ra Sisnu, Khayeko Besa
Anandai Maana Le…

Purses of gold

are like the dirt on your hands,

what can be done with wealth?

Better to eat only nettles and greens

with happiness in your heart…

- (Lakshmi Prasad Devkota)

These poignant words uttered by the newlywed *Muna* as she beseeches her husband *Madan* to stay behind as he is about to leave Nepal for the riches of Tibet in *Lakshmi Prasad Devkota's* magnum opus *'Muna Madan'* is considered one of the most treasured works in Nepali literature.[1] Celebrated widely as one of the country's greatest poets of all time and honoured with the title of '*Maha Kavi'* ('Great Poet') in Nepali literature, *Lakshmi Prasad Devkota* is often exalted to Shakespearean heights in Nepal while his fate is also lamented in the misfortune of having been born in Nepal and not elsewhere– where his words might have captured hearts across the globe. *Muna Madan* is a classic episodic poem/short play that depicts the tale of a young couple separated by the tragedies of their time – exemplified in *Madan's* struggles in a distant land, including his near encounter with death during his difficult journey back to Nepal from Tibet. However, his return home bearing bags of gold from Tibet comes at a profound loss, for his beloved *Muna* has long departed from this world.

Like *Madan*, many Nepalis have often looked beyond their homes to '*bidesh'* for better opportunities and have sacrificed at great personal costs to do so such as losing their own *Muna* – an embodiment of love, family, home and belonging, while also dealing with conditions of hope, disappointment, waiting, separation, or responsibility. It must also be noted that since there is no direct translation for the English term 'migration' in Nepali, in a general sense the word '*bidesh',* meaning 'abroad' or 'foreign land/country' (or 'overseas') alongside another Nepali word *'bahira'* meaning 'out/outside' are used interchangeably to refer to migration in Nepal. Hence, '*bidesh janu*' (*janu* = to go) or '*bahira janu'* are common expressions for going

[1] For an English translation of 'Muna-Madan' by Lakshmi Prasad Devkota (1909-59), See Michael Hutt's (1996) *Devkota's Muna-Madan: Translation and Analysis.*

abroad from Nepal.[2] In a local sense, the word *bidesh* – encompasses a physical movement or migratory undertaking outside of Nepal to another country.[3] Throughout the thesis, in keeping close to local understandings of the term, I employ it interchangeably with the English equivalent of the word migration to indicate one's moving out of Nepal. However, as I will attempt to illustrate during this thesis, *bidesh* is also a notion that is fraught with myriad complexities and strong social, economic, and political implications in Nepal.

While the pursuit to work or and migrate beyond (and indeed within) Nepal amongst Nepalis has persisted for centuries, which I elucidate further in this section, notable is an ongoing annual recruitment of Nepali youths who apply to join the renowned brigade of Gurkhas in the British army every year, rallied by the regiment's glorious and celebrated history of over 200 years (coupled with its appealing economic benefits in comparison to most job prospects in Nepal).[4] In addition, the open border with India remains a longstanding recourse for further opportunities, while the Indian army also offers another chance for those desiring a military career, which is a common undertaking among many Nepali men from military families.

More recently over the past few decades, increasing opportunities abroad, particularly in Malaysia and the Gulf countries – the former referred to commonly as *'Arab'* or the *'Khadi'* by Nepalis - has resulted in an exponential rise in the migration of Nepalis for foreign employment. According to the latest figures in the IOM UN (2022) migration data, the leading destination countries for Nepali nationals after India is followed by Malaysia, Saudi Arabia

---

[2] As Bruslé (2006; 2012; 2018) also notes there is no special word to talk about the state of being a migrant, which is normal in Nepali hence expressions such as *'bahira janu'* (go abroad or go out/side) give more weight or overplay over a direct translation of the English word 'migrant'.

[3] The local term '*baideshik rojgaar'* indicates foreign employment. The official government department for foreign employment (DOFE) in Nepal can be accessed online at: https://dofe.gov.np/

[4] The Gurkhas are soldiers recruited exclusively from Nepal to collectively form the 'Brigade of Gurkhas,' a highly distinguished regiment in the British Armed Forces and widely regarded as one of the finest military units in the world. Gurkhas are recruited and employed in both the British and Indian Armies under the terms of the 1947 Tri-Partite Agreement (TPA). They remain Nepali citizens whilst serving within the Brigade of Gurkhas but in all other respects are full members of HM Forces. Since 2008, Gurkhas are entitled to transfer to the UK Regular Forces after 5 years of service. On transfer, or on completion of their Service within the Brigade of Gurkhas, they are then eligible to apply for British citizenship. Further details can be found online on the British Army website.

Source: (https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/brigade-of-gurkhas/ (Accessed: 07/07/2023).

and Qatar respectively. While prospects abroad have certainly contributed immensely towards Nepal's GDP and the economic circumstances of many Nepalis through the inflow of remittances from these countries, they have also brought to light the related ensuing conditions of precarity and exploitation – from poor working and living conditions in host countries to corruption or manipulation of potential migrant workers in Nepal. The global attention towards Qatar during its preparation to host the 2022 football world cup exemplifies such a case with frequent reports of increasing deaths of migrant workers in construction sites coupled with Qatar's treatment of its migrant labour force.[5] On a more microscopic level, mobile phone videos highlighting the abuse and plight of Nepali migrant workers in *bidesh*, including the struggles and difficulties faced by their kin back home in Nepal are often also circulated widely on various online platforms and social media, thus offering a glimpse into some of the experiences of migrant workers and their families, both at home and abroad. Indeed, it would be naive to assume that all Nepali migrant workers are confronted with such anxieties or conditions abroad, nor are such issues exclusively symptomatic to Nepal or Nepali individuals/groups; yet such migratory undertakings and trajectories epitomise a small yet significant brushstroke in the canvas that conveys what many Nepalis often refer to as a *'bidesh janu chalan'* (trend of going abroad), which may then also be understood as a culture of migration in Nepal. [6]

---

[5] A few relevant articles in this regard can accessed online via the following websites:

https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/nov/21/family-of-world-cup-worker-waits-for-answers-over-death-at-qatar-stadium (Accessed: 22/04/2022).

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/qatar-world-cup-migrant-workers-unpaid-months (Accessed: 22/04/2022).

https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/16/sports/soccer/world-cup-migrant-workers.html (Accessed: 17/11/2022).

[6] My use of the term 'culture' here does not indicate a given static or fixed meaning but rather I espouse it as a concept that encompasses the dynamic and myriad ways through which meanings maybe discerned for a rich understanding of migration in Nepal. While my study is not a focus on the notion of diaspora in its strict sense, it is also worth noting that despite its relevance, Clifford (1994) proposes an important element in defining diasporas, emphasising the concept of travel/movement and identities forged in the transnational locality, wherein neither of these can be associated exclusively with home or host. The home-host duality is often used in descriptions of the Jewish and African diasporas. In both these cases, the diasporas were formed through violent forced removals, and in the case of the former, the notion of homeland is an ongoing tenet of identity (the idea of return and exile). In the case of the latter, the notion of Africa (broadly defined and more conceptual than actual) provides a source

My personal account from over two decades ago, which I recount at the start of this thesis, continues to echo strongly within the contours of migration and its pathways to and from Nepal, thus rendering a rich and complex understanding of migration in the country, which I endeavour to draw out in this study. I argue that such a culture of migration in Nepal, in myriad ways emanates its meaning from the vigour of everyday human experience, engagements of and with conditions of hopes, dreams, and imagination, precarity and being-in the world. Hence this study pays particular attention to understanding the conditions of hopes and dreams aimed towards future endeavours within migratory undertakings in Nepal – how do people pursue migratory dreams and how do these unfold within the socio-political conditions and economic fabric of Nepal? Or what does it mean to leave for *bidesh* and what is the experience of being a migrant, both at home and abroad – whether this entails cleaning public spaces or guarding office buildings in the *Khadi,* picking strawberries in the Portuguese countryside or working the assembly lines in the factories of Malaysia and Korea.

More significantly, my research focuses on the following key questions: *why is there such a persevering desire to go to 'bidesh' from Nepal, and how does this relate to one's hopeful dreams and the future?* It aims to tie together two crucial areas of scholarly enquiry: first, the study of migratory aspirations, projects, and trajectories; and second, in close relation to the first, the examination of hope, dreams, waiting and (mis)fortune, and how these relate to or inform ideas about the 'future'.

The empirical chapters presented in this thesis draw inspiration from a wide range of critical and valuable contributions, both within anthropology and philosophy, borrowing particularly from the works of Ernst Bloch, Ghassan Hage, Vincent Crapanzano, Hirokazu Miyazaki, Jarrett Zigon, Shahram Khosravi, Samuli Schielke, Tristen Bruslé, Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight, among several other notable scholars. In doing so, my undertaking throughout this study is a modest attempt to convey the reality and everyday experience of migration among Nepalis, by placing their narratives at the heart of my study, while also embracing them as the

---

of abiding identity, precisely when otherness is used to alienate and prevent full assimilation. Diasporic individuals and communities often live in a certain space of suspension, wherein ideas about identity, home and belonging are fraught with tensions, and the very notions of space and place (such as the nation, homeland or place of dwelling) are difficult to grasp. Clifford highlights a theme that resonates throughout most scholarships on diaspora – that these are cultures that 'mediate, in a lived tension, the experience of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place' (ibid.: 311).

very means of emanating knowledge coupled with my own positionality as a researcher. In many ways, my work aligns closely with Schielke's (2020) *migrant dreams*, which makes an effort to address such an ethnographic encounter while emphasising a significant task to an anthropology of migration – by recognising both, the requests of many of my interlocutors to elucidate their migratory journeys and conditions, while also conveying such a reality in concrete terms within a network of myriad relations, including power relations, that enable it.

While the everyday experiences of many aspiring and returning migrant workers and their families in Nepal are indeed entwined within conditions of exploitation, precarity or tragedy, these are also shaped by their hopes, dreams and imagination that, in turn, also shape both micro and broader processes of marriages, education, construction of houses or consolidation of kinship networks and family obligations that can constitute a 'good life' or a 'good future'. As such, this study also seeks to draw on and address some of the critical debates surrounding an anthropology of suffering that focuses on peoples in the margins or precarious conditions (Day et al, 1999; Fassin and Rechtman 2009) towards an anthropology of the good (Robbins, 2013; Ortner, 2016; Laidlaw, 2016) and indeed the future (Crapanzano, 2003; Moore, 2011; Appadurai, 2013; Kleist and Jansen, 2016; Bryant and Knight, 2019).

1.3 Contextualising Migration in Nepal

In this section, I will first sketch out a concise historical background of migration in Nepal to contextualise my research within the social, economic, and political landscapes of Nepal. I recognise that a brief historical picture may echo a hint of simplicity given the political complexities and richness of historical events that define Nepal today; for example, it would also be dangerous to regard over 200 years of the Shah and Rana rule in Nepal as a single historical period (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997). Nonetheless, the sketch of the historical conditions and significance of migration in Nepal that I present here highlights an overview of a critical timeline. For instance, the focus on the recruitment of the Nepali Gurkhas draws attention to the cultural implications and enduring allusions towards a common desire among many Nepalis for going to *bidesh* and how it relates to ideas about migration, which I will elaborate further in this thesis.

Although a continued flow of migration of people into and along the Himalayas has existed since pre-historic times, a tendency for movement in a north-west to south-east direction in the Himalayan foothills is exemplified in the citation of the Khas people inhabiting Kashmir (in textual sources including the Mahabharata), who now form the 'indigenous' and majority group

in western Nepal today (Gellner, 2018). The eastward movement is also favoured due to the geographic conditions of greater rainfall and availability of more fertile lands, as one goes further east (Whelpton, 2005:13). While there have been many varied population movements over different periods in Nepal, indeed, the country today is widely celebrated for its rich cultural heritage as a diverse mix of ethnic groups, religious practices, and languages.[7] Gellner (2018) identifies three distinct waves and types of migration may be discerned in the context of modern Nepali diaspora. First, movement overland mainly towards the east in search of work and land; second, again overland and focused on finding work in neighbouring Indian cities; and third, by air for work in the Arab Gulf, Southeast Asia and beyond, including work and education in Europe, North America, Australasia, and Japan. I will elaborate on these trajectories in the following sections.

1.4 A Modern Nepal

The formation of the modern state of what is presently known as Nepal, is attributed to Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of the Gorkha Kingdom, who in the eighteen century by means of conquests and consolidation, including the final victory over Kathmandu which he established as his capital, founded a unified kingdom of Nepal (Des Chene, 1991; Whelpton, 2005; Regmi, 2011; Acharya et al, 2015; Gellner, 2018).[8] Prior to this unification in the preceding centuries since the establishment of the *Chaubisi Rajya* (the twenty four kingdoms) in the fourteenth century, the region had been marked by years of continuous warfare among these principalities. The boundaries of this newly formed state were in constant flux; in the years marking the ascension of Prithvi Narayan Shah to the throne of Gorkha and his death between 1743-1775, the kingdom extended to Kangra valley in the western Himalayas, the entirety of east Nepal and also included large parts of Sikkim (Whelpton, 2005:35; Acharya et al 2015). Following the expansion efforts and conquests of Prithvi Narayan Shah's successors leading to the Anglo-Gorkha war (1814-1816) that resulted in the Treaty of Sugauli with the East India company,

[7] It is also worth noting that the 'quasi-ethic' category, 'Nepali' includes not only the different ethnic groups within Nepal but also those who migrated to various Eastern Himalayan parts of India, away from their *mul desa* (country of origin) thus making it a cross border phenomenon (Hutt, 1997: 102).

[8] Since Kathmandu was a fertile valley and a locus for the main trade routes from India to Tibet, it contributed greatly to the state economy as the capital, which was sustained through peasant surplus and taxation on trade.

the Gorkhali border stretched from the Tista River in the east to the Sutlej River in the west (Des Chene, 19991; Caplan, 1995; Gellner, 2018).

The *Muluki Ain* (The first Nepalese Legal code) implemented in 1854, partly inspired by a western emphasis on codification although based on Hindu or Indian texts and existing Nepalese practices, rendered caste hierarchy as a means of translating diversity into inequality while also ascribing positions to various ranks that related to caste and ethnic divisions (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997:425). The caste system is generally understood as a form of social stratification, characterised in its separation of caste groups, which also determines status, privileges, and limitations (Srinivas, 1965).[9] Dumont's (1980) study on the Hindu caste system in India elucidates such a case, wherein caste identifications and groups are defined by other castes, which are either higher or lower within the caste hierarchical structure.[10] For Dumont the caste system is a formal and logical system embedded with religious ideals and values, not as a form of stratification but rather a unique mode of inequality or 'hierarchy' underlined by the opposition of 'pure' and 'impure' – at one extreme stands the *Brahman* (pure) and at the other the *Untouchables* (most impure/polluting), ascertaining a hierarchical structure of purity and pollution for castes in between (ibid.). The caste system was also legitimated within Nepal's political identity to unify the country internally by replacing existing regional legal systems with a cohesive unitary one (Hofer, 1979, cited in Levine, 1987:40). Muller-Boker's study on the Newar caste system in Nepal also places a similar emphasis on social hierarchy and ascribed occupation, exemplified by a society structured into clearly defined groups, with their relations arranged in a strict hierarchy or 'a fine network of interrelationship and interdependencies' (1988:25). Such an organising social process of the civil code through absolute rule, ascribed status, central dominance over the periphery, and legitimacy patterns, not only compelled non-Hindu groups (mainly tribal groups from the hills) into the folds of caste hierarchy, but also normalised internal division and diversity (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997:425). The Shah and Rana rulers promoted and legitimised power in the hands of elite political players through a process of Hinduisation and centralisation (Rose, 2001). While the

[9] Interestingly, Srinivas (1965:30) notes that "the caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component is fixed for all the time. Movement has always been possible and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy."

[10] According to Dumont, a certain caste may be understood only in relation to the whole system of castes, thus emphasising on the relationships between castes rather than a focus on an individual caste.

Ranas also ensured that Nepal was isolated from foreign influences, they became more forceful in promoting and legitimising the state and their position through religion. Jung Bahadur Rana maintained a 'closed door' policy despite the presence of a British Resident Officer in Kathmandu following the Anglo-Gorkha war – a policy, in part due to the state implications of British interreference in local politics, ostensible in the case of a colonised neighbouring India (Chettri, 2017).

One of the most potent forces that contributed toward the gradual process of Hinduisation was the migration of Hindu groups from west and central Nepal to the eastern hills. While, centralisation of the state was triggering people to migrate, the settlement of Hindus in tribal areas, in turn was also facilitating this process (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997: 425). These groups themselves were likely migrating to escape the oppressive central elites, yet their movement eastward also had a great impact on the displacement and hence migration of various *Kiranti* groups from Nepal to British India, Sikkim and Bhutan (Hutt, 1998; Chhetri, 2017). In the case of the Limbus of the east, who were eventually merged into the Gorkha kingdom in 1772 after much resistance, had initially been granted concessions to continue the *kipat system* of communal rights over their land by Prithvi Narayan Shah (Chhetri, 2017). However, such privileges were disrupted over the years due to growing demands for land and resources by the Gorkhali rulers to endure the excesses of their military expeditions, coupled with the migration of upper caste *Bahuns* and *Chettris* into *Kirat* (hill tribes of the eastern hills) territory and settlement in their lands. Furthermore, legislations in accord with the Muluki Ain also enabled economic and political domination of the indigenous population by the *Parbatiya* migrants who could convert *kipat land* into *raikar* (state ownership), thus changing land ownership and practices, which resulted in the mass migration of populations eastwards towards Sikkim and Darjeeling in India and Bhutan (ibid.). Additionally, while taxes had been vital towards supporting the state's expansionary pursuits or consolidation of its annexed territories, the Rana rulers also raised taxes to support the unproductive elites and impose political power. Consequently, heavy taxation coupled with mass alienation from land in favour of the incoming Hindu migrants resulted in the first wave of migration from Nepal in the 18th century (ibid.).

Influences from outside Nepal in addition to problems at home were also driving factors toward the out-migration of people from eastern Nepal and other parts of the country. The presence and impact of the British colonisers in neighbouring India, through their military and commercial endeavours, offered opportunities for Nepalis seeking to evade oppressive social and economic conditions at home. The successful establishment of tea plantations in the hills

of Darjeeling and Assam by the British, further augmented by far reaching and romanticised rumours of the *'chiyako botma paisa phalcha'* (money grows on tea bushes), promoted the idea of eastward migration towards Darjeeling as a more viable option than participating in a futile uprising against a powerful state (ibid.). Hutt (2005:45) notes that although intermittent migration to Bhutan was already an occurrence in the 18th century, this intensified (particularly in the southern parts of Bhutan) after the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1865, with Nepalis engaging in clearing forests and agriculture, and becoming crucial in Bhutan's food production and cash income. Furthermore, after the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-25 which gave the British control over present day northeastern India (except Sikkim) the northeastern areas of British India also became another opening for Nepali migration (Rose, 2001; Chettri, 2017).

1.5. Fiji-Nepalis: Silenced in History

What follows is a brief description of a unique case of Nepali migration to Fiji with its roots in British colonialism, which offers valuable historical insights into the social, economic, and political implications on Nepal migration augmented through the lens of colonialism.[11] Although, Nepal was never colonised by the British, Nepali migration to Fiji is a unique circumstance which epitomises a 'paradox' of the British colonial legacy in Nepal. Interestingly, this resonates with another (and more eminent) Nepali collective in the form of Gurkhas, who have not only been serving in the British army since 1816 (see Des Chene, 1991) but Nepali youths continue to be recruited into the British army every year (I discuss this further in the next section).

Sidney Mintz's (1985) acclaimed work, '*Sugar and Power: the place of Sugar in Modern History'* seeks to capture the meaning and place of sugar in the modern world by tracing its historical developments alongside the drive for European colonialism, increasing industrialisation and the institution of slave labour, while Eric Wolf's (1982) imperative text *'Europe and the People without History'* offers further deliberations within a similar context. As with many British colonies in the past, mainly in the Caribbean region, the sugar industry was an imperative force that transformed the lives of thousands, and its remnants continue to shape the social, economic, and political landscape of present-day Fiji. As a relatively young colony then, Fiji was also one of the last to import indentured labourers or *girmitiyas* as they were

[11] Furthermore, this is significant since my initial PhD research proposed a study among the descendants of Nepalis (although exact figures are not known) who came to Fiji as Indian indentured labourers. I describe this in more detail in my methodology section.

known from India (Lal, 1992; 2012). 'Girmit' is derived from the root noun *agreement*, with a reference to the labour contract the Indian workers assented to (usually via the thumbprint signature) at the recruiting depot and then undertook to fulfil in the colony (Mayer, 1963).[12]

As Gillion (1962:1) notes '… Indian immigration did not come about simply because of that industry's need of labour; rather was it due to government initiative, and social and financial considerations.' When the British first arrived in Fiji, a strict rule was also implemented to ensure that land remained under indigenous ownership to prevent existing white planters from trying to grab large amounts of land during the colonial sugar enterprise. Amidst this issue regarding land, an economic decision to import contracted labourers from the Indian sub-continent was also administered by the first governor of colonial Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon, who had already witnessed fruitful endeavours in the British colonies of Trinidad and Mauritius (See Gillion, 1962; Mayer, 1963; Lal, 1992; Kelly, 2003). Furthermore, Emmer (1986) expounds that in the case Fiji (much like Hawaii) the local population was too limited in number to meet the demands of sufficient and cheap labour for the rapidly growing sugar industry.

The *girmitiyas* were a part of a significant episode in modern history, components in a grand but ultimately blemished experiment in the labour service dubbed by its critics as another form of slavery (Lal, 2012). More than 60,000 Indians were transported to Fiji under the indenture system during the colonial rule. On 14 May 1879, after almost three months at sea, 498 *girmitiyas* arrived at the Fijian shores of Levuka on-board the *'Leonidas'* from Calcutta (Gillion 1962: 59). In the events that unfolded after this between the years 1879 and 1916, labour transporting ships would make eighty-seven voyages from India to Fiji carrying 60,965 indentured emigrants (including indentured re-emigrants and children), 60,553 (including births and deaths at sea) of whom arrived in the colony (ibid.).

---

[12] *'Girmitiyas'* or indentured labourers is the name given the Indians who left India in the middle and late 19th Century to serve as labourers in the British colonies, where the majority eventually settled. GIRMIT is a corrupt form of the English word *'Agreement'*. A labour emigrating under the Agreement or Girmit was a *'Girmitiya'*.

Source: https://girmitiya.girmit.org/new/index.php/alphabetical-list-of-girmitiyas/ (Accessed:04/12/2018).

However, almost completely omitted from the pages of this colonial chapter are the relatively small number of Nepalis who boarded the transportation ships in India and eventually laboured and settled in Fiji. These Nepali labourers are concealed in this history of indenture since the *girmitiyas* are regarded as part of a homogenously Indian collective. Moreover, if hearing minor history is made possible by 'bending closer to the ground' (Guha, 1987: 138), then how might anthropology address the challenges of tracing the pathways of hidden histories, and engage with the ethnographic and historical instances of such traces? As Mishra (2012:6) argues, historical exceptions have the habit of throwing open unusual vistas into what we think we know of history – these exceptions violate the rule and this violation plays a part in constituting the rule in the first instance, without assuming its place. Hence, an attention on the Nepali descendants in Fiji calls for a revisiting of the complicated indenture experience through new approaches and perspectives via a detailed ethnographic study of the Nepali diaspora in Fiji today. In his study on 'Fiji's Indian migrants,' Gillion (1962) describes how Nepali nationals were an alternative source of labour recruitment, mainly in the district of Gorakhpur, North India where most Nepal migrants had come seeking better employment opportunities. However, he states "…from 1894 all recruiters had to sign a pledge not to recruit Nepalis; ostensible this was because the Nepal darbar did not wish its subjects to be sent to the colonies, but the real reason was the objection of the Indian Army to colonial competition with enlistment for its Gurkha units. The prohibition was not fully effective and the writer met several Nepalis in Fiji who had arrived after 1894 (there is a settlement of them near Sigatoka)" (ibid.:50). It is evident today that most Nepalis who departed for Fiji still obtained local documents and were therefore contracted as Indian labourers, which make it difficult to ascertain the exact number of Nepali nationals that arrived in Fiji through official records. However, it is believed that a small number of Nepalis came to Fiji as indentured labourers during the British rule.[13] Although, their descendants today are dispersed in various parts of Fiji, many have settled in Kavanagasau, also referred to as 'Nepali tola' (Nepali neighbourhood) by locals in the Sigatoka valley, where I had been undertaking my fieldwork. Moreover, many have now also moved abroad mainly to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US.

[13] Many labourers were even conned, forced or kidnapped in India (See Gillion, 1962; Mayer, 1963; Lal, 2012). Interestingly, Mintz (1985:52) also notes that the sugar production labour workforce in the Caribbean employed by the British and French colonialist included debt servants, petty criminals, political and religious nonconformists, labour organisers, Irish revolutionaries- political prisoners of sorts, whilst many were simply kidnapped. Hence, the term *'barbadoes'* even referred to a seventeenth-century verb for stealing humans.

Correspondingly, historical encounters between Gurkha soldiers and the Nepali diaspora in Fiji, (perhaps seemingly a fortuitous one) offer a critical opportunity for analysis at the intersection of diaspora, understanding ways of belonging, identity, and material culture. From my own research and time in Fiji (and Gurkha interlocutors in the UK) I came to learn that the Gurkhas made frequent stopovers to the Nepali neighbourhood in Kavanagasau during their military training visits to Fiji from Hong Kong enabling a cultural exchange of ideas (such as language, food, gifts, photographs etc.) with the Nepalis in Fiji in the past. Moreover, a sacred Hindu temple by the name of *'Pashupatinath'* in Kavanagasau, which was built with the assistance of visiting Gurkha soldiers during the late 80's (or early 90's is crucial to the community and still in use till this day) offers a reasonable scope for further and stimulating research.[14] Such historical events are of analytical interest since many of the Nepalis living in Fiji today have never been to Nepal, which raises interesting questions about how the Nepali identity is internalised, manifested or construed in Fiji today. Hence, a further ethnographic study on Fiji Nepalis is both unique and emblematic of such an examination since it evokes an enquiry of imperative concepts related to migration such as space, identity and belonging. Concomitantly, this bears strong implications for understanding not only how peoples are subjected to structures of history, power, discourse, epistemes, or language but also probing how these might be revisited and rephrased through traces of meanings in relation to land and belonging for descendants of Nepali labourers in Fiji.

1.6 The Gurkha Influence

The recruitment of Nepalis into the British army after the Anglo-Gorkha war of 1814-1816, was another vital impetus for Nepali migration to British-India. Hence, the history of the Gurkhas also evokes a great deal of Britain's own colonial and military history (See Northey and Morris, 1928; Des Chene, 1991; Caplan, 1995; Parker, 1999; Bullock, 2009). Victory at the battle of Plassey in 1757 paved the way for Britain through the British East India Company to extend its power throughout the Indian subcontinent, whilst Nepal, then an aggressive military state, represented a concern for the company since it was attacking and seizing large

[14] During my visit to Kavanagasau in 2019, it was proudly proclaimed as the only Nepali temple in Fiji by my interlocutors (and the only other 'Pashupatinath temple' anywhere in the world outside Nepal!)). Its namesake located on the banks of the Bagmati River in Kathmandu is the most sacred and important religious site for Hindu devotees. The various religious idols and paraphernalia for the temple were also brought all the way from Nepal by Gurkha soldiers, including a nugget of gold placed at the top of the temple roof.

tracts of territory that were under British protection (Bullock, 2009: 21). Parker (1999) notes that the founder of modern Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah's army of Gorkhas were feared throughout the country and were already renowned for their military prowess, courage and brutality. The conditions surrounding the emergence of the Gurkha amalgamation with the British Empire is one that is enmeshed amidst myriad complexities surrounding political negotiations and disputes between the desires of the British to develop further trade and the desires of Gorkha rulers to expand their territories.[15]

The long-standing territorial tensions along the Oudh (Awadh) region in North India and the bordering districts of Gorakhpur and Butwal had critical repercussions, since their differing concept of possessions between the British and the Gorkhalis regarding the dispute over Butwal was a 'final insult' for the latter and it eventually provoked war (Des Chene, 1991:30). Likewise, Michael (2010) illustrates the historical account of territorial disputes and political claims between the British and the Gorkha rulers of Nepal that led to the Anglo-Gorkha war between 1814-1816 which resulted in the colonial demarcation of modern Indo-Nepal boundaries in the 'Terai' region. It was also during this colonial endeavour that the British first encountered the Gurkhas of Nepal, noted by Des Chene (1991) as the 'invention of the Gurkhas.' Moreover, Caplan (1995:24) asserts that ironically it was here that the British made an astounding discovery, and for most Military writers the conspicuous feature of this war was the discovery of Nepali fighting qualities.

In his memoirs during the battle of Kalunga, John Shipp who was at the time an ensign in the 87th Foot, reported of the Gurkha enemy: "I never saw more steadiness or bravery exhibited in my life. Run they would not and of death they seemed to have no fear, though their comrades were falling thick around them…" (cited in Parker, 1999:34). Although the Gorkhali resistance was finally overcome, Britain's victory came with a heavy price. In the battle at the hill of Kalunga alone, the British lost 31 officers and 520 men, casualties that today would be regarded as a national calamity, but which were then taken as a matter of course (Bullock, 2009:20-27). The British were so impressed with the fighting spirit and prowess of these 'hill' men, that they

[15] The Gorkhalis had already signed a trade agreement with the British in 1792 in the hope of receiving military aid in their war against Tibet whilst the British held commercial interests with and through Nepal. Although the Gorkhali expansion to the North of Nepal was essentially put to an end during their defeat in 1792 by a combined Tibetan and Chinese army, they continued to annex small tracts of territory to the south until the war with the British (Des Chene, 1991).

even erected two monuments in Kalunga: one to the fallen British dead and other to the fallen Gurkhas. It read: '… their gallant adversaries … who fought in fair conflict like men and the intervals between actual conflicts showed us liberal courtesy' (ibid.: 22). In the light of such events, Nepal was obliged to accept the terms of the Sugauli treaty of 1815-16 (Purthi, 2001).[16] Although maintaining autonomy, Nepal was compelled to concede much of its previously annexed lands to the British (Caplan, 1995; Parker, 1999; Bullock, 2009; Michael 2010). More significantly, it was henceforth that the British also initiated their recruitment of Gorkhali troops to fight on their behalf. By the end of the war, the British had raised four battalions from the Gorkha forces, whom they called the Naisiri (two battalions), the Sirmoor and the Kumaon (Des Chene, 1991:49).[17]

While recruitment of soldiers from the kingdom of Gorkha by Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of Punjab had begun as early as 1824 and formed a special Gorkha unit in his army by 1830 (Hutt, 1997:113), Jung Bahadur and his successors had prohibited recruitment from the domain, which encouraged the British to set up recruitment centres in the Indian border towns of Gorakhpur in 1886 and Darjeeling town in 1902.[18] The labelling of certain ethnic groups as 'martial tribes' and therefore more suited to warfare and conditions similar to the 'hill lifestyle' back in Nepal was given much weight in the British criteria for recruitment (Caplan, 1995; Streets, 2004). As such, recruitment as well as settlement in the north-east India was actively encouraged by the British, since characteristic features of Gurkha courage and loyalty were exclusive only in certain ethnic groups, and the quality from those from the hills of Nepal was lacking in those born in the cantonment areas, referred to as the 'Gurkha syndrome' by Enloe

---

[16] Also see Des Chene (1991), Caplan (1995) and Adhikari (2012:104-7) for further details regarding the Tripartite Agreement (TPA) that was signed on 11 November 1947 by Britain, India and Nepal that facilitated the continued recruitment of Nepali citizens into the Indian (Indian Gorkhas) and British Armies (British Gurkhas).

[17] See Des Chene (1991: 46-56) for further details including various accounts of British military officers about their Gorkhali enemies and eventual circumstances for the British recruitment of Gurkhas. Also see Caplan (1995: 1-36) for further reference.

[18] While, the success of a thriving tea plantation industry in Darjeeling was another attraction for migrants from eastern parts of Nepal, the establishment of a Gurkha recruitment centre in Ghoom in 1902 also resulted in further migration and settlement of retired Gurkha soldiers in India after military service, with a figure of only about 1/3 of the 11,000 discharged Gurkhas opting to return back to Nepal after the first world war (Blaike et al, 1980:37 in Hutt, 1997:113).

(1980:27).[19] Furthermore, Subba (2003:61) notes that by the early 19th century, Nepalis migrated into the north-east not only through military service, but also as herders or workers in the tea and sugarcane plantations and assisting in the building of roads and railway lines. The British also hired Nepalis to assist in transport or as carriers in their expeditions (ibid.). These concurrences led to a large wave of out-migration of Nepalis from Nepal into the hills and plains of British India as agriculturists, labourers, and army recruits (also see Devi, 2007).

As such the recruitment of Nepalis into both the British and Indian armies – a practice that is still in place today exemplifies the regional and historical intricacies surrounding the first wave of Nepali migration occurring throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries towards destinations such as Darjeeling, Sikkim, Bhutan, and further to Assam and parts of northeast India and Burma. A second wave which overlapped with the first wave of migration, began around the 1950's with the majority of migrants seeking work in cities rather than via land or agricultural opportunities (Gellner, 2018); it began mainly from the far-west of Nepal, with people migrating in circular fashion to Indian cities to work as labourers in road and building construction and as *chowkidars* (security guards or watchmen) (See Subba, 2003; Bruslé, 2006, 2012; Sharma, 2018).

1.7 'Khadi ma Bhetaula' – See you in the Arab Gulf

A friend from Nepal recently shared a photo with me that had gained widespread attention over various social media platforms and news outlets in Nepal. The photo was taken during a school farewell programme for year 12 students where it was customary for students to scribble farewell messages on each other's school shirts as they looked ahead towards a life beyond the school classroom. The photo depicted the back of four students' shirts containing the following messages and signatures of students:

Baideshik yatra safal rahos!!! (May your journey abroad be successful!!! Good luck bro)

Korea ko yatra safal rahos (May your journey to Korea be successful)

Japan ko yatra safal rahos (May your journey to Japan be successful)

[19] Thus, 'line boys' – those born in Gurkha settled areas in the British provinces were viewed as lacking the traits necessary for the making of a good solider, contributing toward a British drive to actively pursue the recruitment of Nepali men from specific parts of Nepal (Caplan, 1995).

Khadi ma bhetaula (See you in the Gulf)

Baideshik Rojgaar (foreign employment) at various international destinations has become a common occurrence for Nepali nationals over the past few decades. A lack of employment options at home alongside increasing opportunities abroad, particularly in Malaysia and the Gulf, ('Arab' or the Khadi as commonly referred to by Nepalis) has contributed toward an exponential rise in the migration of Nepalis for employment abroad. According to the latest figures in the International organisation for migration, IOM UN (2022) migration data, the leading destination countries for Nepali nationals after India are Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Qatar respectively.[20] The 'Nepal Labour Migration Report, 2022' by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), also provides a fairly comprehensive and detailed analysis of the most recent Nepali labour migration information.[21] According to the report, more that 1.1 million labour approvals were issued between 2019/20 and 2021/22 (although the numbers were significantly lower during 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic).[22] While Nepali nationals proceeded abroad to 150 countries worldwide for employment during this period, Malaysia and the six GCC countries continued to remain as the main destinations for a majority of Nepali migrant workers.[23] Furthermore, European countries, including the UK, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Poland, Romania and Turkey, have also become preferred destinations for foreign employment in recent years. While most Nepali women sought employment in the GCC countries in the reported years, countries such as Croatia, Cyprus, Jordan, Malta, Romania, and Turkey were also seen as emerging destinations

[20] Source: https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/ (Accessed: 04/03/203)

[21] The report covers the fiscal years 2019/20 and 2020/21, 2021/22 presenting major trends and activities in the country by considering both, quantitative and qualitative data. It features an assessment of numerous detailed information sections, such as labour migration governance in Nepal, status of labour migration (this includes current trends, destination countries, provinces and districts of origin, skills profile, occupation, returnees, stock of migrant workers) and thematic exploration (fair and ethical recruitment, health and safety, access to justice, remittances, return and reintegration etc).

[22] Consistent with ongoing trend of men comprising a dominant ratio of migrant workers leaving Nepal, women accounted for less than 10% of labour approvals issued in 2021/22. It is worth noting that the actual numbers are likely to be higher, considering a large proportion of Nepali women migrant workers also seek alternative and irregular routes due to restrictive migration policies.

[23] According to the preceding 2020 report, the top destinations for Nepali migrant workers were Qatar, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait.

for women in comparison to men.[24] The open border with neighbouring India continues to attract Nepalis in large numbers, a majority of whom are engaged in the service sector. While there are no exact figures on the number of Nepalis in India, the Indian embassy in Nepal estimates nearly 8 million Nepalis to be residing or working in India (the Kathmandu Post, 2023).[25] However, this also underestimates the actual number of Nepali migrant workers in India due to the challenges in collecting accurate data since Nepali nationals do not require a visa or a work-permit to travel or work in India and therefore mostly remain hidden to such statistics.

In terms of the economy, overseas employment is highly significant in Nepal, both at the household and national level. According to the world bank (2022), personal remittances received in Nepal accounted to 8.23 billion in 2021, amounting to 22.7 % of the GDP, thus evidencing the economic value and contribution of labour migration and remittances to the Nepali economy.[26] At the domestic level, remittances in the form of financial support play a significant role in every day family endeavours, from economic maintenance, education and entrepreneurship to building houses, social life and community activities. Despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the global economy, Nepal maintained a remittance inflow of NPR 961.2 billion (ca. USD 7.5 billion) in 2020. Hence, such figures emphasise a great deal on the social and economic significance of labour migration in the country.

[24] Many of my own interlocutors had strong connections with other individuals or they themselves had experiences working in these countries.

[25] The article, titled 'Nepalis finding their fortune in Shimla', also sheds light on the various types of work undertaken by Nepalis in India. Source: https://kathmandupost.com/money/2023/04/22/nepalis-finding-their-fortune-in-shimla (Accessed: 23/04/2023).

[26] Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=NP (Accessed: 27/04/2023).

Figure 5. Applicants at the Department of Foreign Employment, Kathmandu. Credit: Author 2020

विद्यालयपछिको बिदाइ

'अब खाडीमा भेटौंला'

Figure 6. A School Farewell. 'Khadi ma Bhetaula' – See you in the Arab Gulf.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

In this section I discuss the work of theorists and themes which frame this thesis and how the various theories shape it. While the main idea that underpins this thesis is the notion of hope, I examine various approaches of understanding hope and its relevance towards anthropology to scope out pertinent themes of imagination, potentiality, and uncertainty, which I present in the various chapters in this thesis. I provide a brief overview for each of these broad concepts, and then discuss their anthropological relevance and approaches to my research. In particular, I will discuss the theoretical approaches to hope put forth by Bloch, Crapanzano, Miyazaki, Appadurai, Zigon, and others by engaging their scholarly debates around hope with ethnographic examples from Nepal to tease out arguments related to the aforementioned concepts of imagination as potentiality and uncertainty, in order to illustrate how many Nepalis deal with and experience the phenomenon of migration in Nepal and abroad.

1.8.1 Pondering 'Hope' in Pandora's Jar

A popular ancient version of hope can be found in Hesiod's renowned account of the tale of Pandora's box (actually a jar), which is a reflection on the ambivalence of hope. It states that while all the evils had escaped from Pandora's jar, notably, only hope *(elpis)* remained (Bloeser and Stahl, 2022).While one interpretation suggests that hope can sustain human agency in the face of widespread evil, other explanations as to why *elpis* remained in the jar have been much discussed throughout the history of philosophy, as noted by Verdenius: "Was it to keep hope available for humans or, rather, to keep hope from humankind? Is hope consequently to be regarded as good ("a comfort to man in his misery and a stimulus rousing his activity", Verdenius 1985: 66) or as evil ("idle hope in which the lazy man indulges when he should be working honestly for his living", Verdenius 1985: 66) (ibid.:3).

While the topic of hope has been discussed intensely throughout the history of philosophy and much of Western philosophical traditions, there is a lack of a systematic discussion of hope with important exceptions found in contributions from *Aquinas, Bloch* and *Marcel* – even amid a strong general acknowledgement that hope plays a crucial role in regard to human motivation, religious belief or politics (ibid.). Coupled with debates such as belief and desire, the phenomenon of hope is not only an attitude that has cognitive components, but it is also a conative component – the latter concerns a response to facts about possibilities of future events, while the former renders hopes as different from mere expectations insofar as they reflect and

draw upon desires (ibid.).[27] However, not all possible outcomes driven by belief or desire are objects of hope; to hope then, one has to consider not only an outcome possible but also engage affectively with this outcome in a distinctive way. While such an elaboration raises concerns about reducing hope to beliefs and desires, popular discourse has also tended to adopt hope as tantamount to optimism. However, many philosophers hold that unlike optimism, which can be examined as a desire for an outcome along with a belief that the outcome is more likely than not, stands in opposition to an understanding of hope, which is independent of assessments based on chance or probability.[28] Given such insights, questions regarding contribution of hope to human agency, whether as underlying desires or as a separate purpose to motivation or reasoning, remains open for discussion. While an assumption that hope motivates but does not make any independent contribution to practical reasoning raises scepticism that it distorts rational agency can be found across the history of philosophy, many contributions also analyse and explain why acting on one's hope is (sometimes) rational, thus adding further elements to the belief-desire analysis (ibid.).

While an analysis on the history and philosophy of hope is beyond the scope of this thesis, my intention here it provide a basis for a better understanding of hope in its various modalities and characteristics. Hence, without diving too deeply into philosophical discussions about hope yet maintaining an openness to debates regarding hope, I aim to engage with hope from anthropological perspectives. In this sense, I argue that hope in the context of Nepali migration presents a conundrum of its own – offering notions of both potentiality and uncertainty, imbuing ideas such as imaginative futures, waiting and misfortune, which I elaborate further in the following sections. Hence, my aim in this thesis is not just examining *what it might mean to hope but also probing the various kinds of hope and where hope comes from.*

[27] A classical analysis of hope or the 'standard account' considers hope to be a compound attitude, which involves a desire for an outcome and a belief in that outcome's possibility. The contemporary debate about hope in analytic philosophy is primarily concerned with providing a definition of hope, explicating standards of rationality and explaining the value of hope. The debate takes as its starting point what has been called the 'orthodox definition' (Martin 2013: 11) or the 'standard account' (Meirav 2009: 217), which analyses 'hope that p' in terms of a wish or desire for p and a belief concerning p's possibility (cited in Bloeser et al, 2022).

[28] For example, one can still hope for an outcome that one does not expect to materialise or is unlikely, such as a miraculous cure miraculous of an illness – a case where optimism is not apposite.

1.8.2 Locating Hope: Imagination, Potentiality and Uncertainty

"*Sab ko afno icchha ya aasha hunchha* – Everyone has a desire or hope for something … like earning lots of money and building a house… to travel the world… seeing happiness in our parents' eyes… marrying someone or providing a decent life for our family and children… *tara chaheyra pani sabai bhaneko jasto ta kaha huncha ra* – but we do not always get what we desire or wish for …"

– (Hari, Fieldnotes)

The concept of hope is a challenging one, and thus difficult to grasp easily – given its simultaneous vernacular and theoretical workings – from conditions of ordinary aspirations to eschatological and existential considerations (Kleist, 2017). Even early interpretations of hope –notably the tale of *Pandora's jar* mentioned earlier – have been understood from various differing positions, while further notions have also been much debated by various influential philosophers over centuries.

Alluding to a proliferation of literature of hope over the last 50 years, Webb notes that works of Lopez et al. (2003) and Benzein and Saveman (1998) alone identify twenty-six theories of hope and fifty-four definitions (Webb 2007: 66). Such an interest in hope is linked to an attention in human emotions as a form of 'emotional turn' within the human sciences. However, recent discussions on hope firmly centred within disciplines tend to lack an interdisciplinary engagement between other areas of scholarship such as anthropology, philosophy, politics, theology, or psychology (ibid.). Similarly, Agamben (1998) posits that for a large percentage of the world's population, which functions in conditions of 'bare life', we are yet to embrace ways to articulate how anticipation, imagination, and aspiration are intertwined in the possibilities of future-making – for even 'bare life' never lacks in moral shape and texture, while always operating inside a rich affective frame. In this regard, it is surprising that anthropology has little to offer about the future as a cultural fact or the ways in which humans construct their cultural futures. Appadurai (2013), in discussing cultural futures, emphasises the interaction between three notable human preoccupations that shape the future as a cultural fact, which may be gleaned as a form of difference, namely: *imagination, anticipation and aspiration*. He states: "The future is not just a technical or neutral space but is shot through with affect and with sensation. Thus, we need to examine not just the emotions that accompany the future as a cultural form, but sensations that it produces: awe, vertigo, excitement, disorientation. The many forms that the future takes are also shaped by these affects and

sensations, for they give to various configurations of aspiration, anticipation, and imagination their specific gravity, their traction, and their texture. Social science has never been good at catching these properties of human life, but it is never too late to improve" (ibid.: 286-287). Here, Appadurai clearly centres the affects of hope in any discussion of the future. More crucially, Ernst Bloch's widely recognised effort to 'bring philosophy to hope' (1986: 6) marks an important shift away from the utopian or revolutionary ideals of hope to the workings of hope in quotidian social life coupled with conditions for its cultivation. In his seminal work titled 'The Principle of Hope', Bloch confronts the limits of philosophy in its retrospective character by asserting: "contemplative knowledge [such as philosophy] can only refer by definition to what has become"; in other words, it "presuppose[s] a closed world that has already become…Future of the genuine, processively open kind is therefore sealed off from and alien to any mere contemplation" (1986:8). For Bloch, a philosophy towards the future or what has 'not-yet' become forms the basis for his understanding of hope. As such, the condition/s of hope within the realm of the 'not-yet' gives it its uncertain character, and it is this indeterminacy that forms a necessary precondition of hope.[29]

In following both Bloch and Appadurai closely, I draw inspiration by locating hope at the locus of the ideas regarding imagination and the future among Nepalis to inform discussions on everyday experience of migration and its undertakings in my thesis. Bloch's understanding of hope as 'the most human of all mental feelings' (Bloch, 1995: 75), while also examining it within a space of the future as espoused by Appadurai as one that is imbued with a potentiality for myriad affective and material human experiences, are crucial to my thesis to understand what it means to hope, but also examine what it is that people hope for. In this regard, Webb (2007) approaches the notion of hope, often taken as an undifferentiated experience – by regarding hope as a human universal but experienced in different modes. He identifies two primary *meta*-modes of hoping – the first directed towards a specific objective in the form of 'I hope that/for p', while the second is characterised by an open-ended orientation toward the future without any concrete objective. The ethnographic instances I present in my thesis to draw on hope echo such myriad complexities and experiences of hope within migratory undertakings in Nepal, and therefore encompasses both a 'goal-directed' hope in the former

[29] Bloch's idea of hope is that it is something that can be found within the locus of the future. Whereas for Walter Benjamin's temporal horizon, hope also focuses on the past espoused in his vision of a messianic historian who has the "gift of fanning the spark of *hope in the past*."

sense and as 'open-ended' hope considered in the latter, as proposed by Webb (2007) in the two meta-modes of hoping highlighted above. My engagement with both ideas of hope to glean understandings of what it might mean to hope as a Nepali in relation to migration to *bidesh,* is therefore grounded in the notion that hope as a human capacity can be experienced in various ways, which are crucial towards my thesis.

Concurrently, Moore (2011) contends that what has impeded hope from gaining wider attention as a serious subject of study in social theory pertains to the bond between two domains of hope – first, the relation of hope to what is proximate, as something realisable or just within reach; and second, the ties between aspiration and spirituality. Hence, this has limited us to a narrow understanding of hope that it is not practical or that it cannot be realised, whilst also restricting it to the realm of the other-worldly. Moore's call, therefore, epitomises a pressing need to examine connections between hope and the alterity of the future – to glean fruitful insights into how, why and when hope can provide models for social transformation. As such, my endeavour throughout this study, espouses notions of hope, dreams and the imagination towards desired futures within the folds of migration and its trajectories – to offer fresh forms of critical thinking that might open up new possibilities, in favour of the 'arts of possible' (Moore, 2011). In this regard, Pedersen and Liisberg (2015) also espouse an engagement between anthropology and philosophy in understanding hope as a phenomenon pertaining to the first-person perspective. This also entails the kind of humans/subjects/selves pursuing the changes or transformation and the capacities they possess to drive change. In doing so, my interrogations are placed within connections of human actions and ethical imagination, including forms of the political and social, as a way of 'enquiring into theories of the subject, and the manner in which hopes and desires are created by shifts in subjectification' (Moore, 2011: 18).

Following such a vein of query, numerous recent works have brought to light the lack of hope in social theory and sought to grasp hopefulness in progressive thought and politics (Hage, 2003; Miyazaki, 2004), dreams (Schielke, 2020), waiting (Procupez, 2015; Khosravi, 2017; Binner and Binner, 2021), or social imaginaries (Crapanzano, 2003; Moore, 2011; Appadurai, 2013). Hope also allows people to manage suffering and difficult life situations (Zigon, 2009; Khosravi, 2021) or may even lead to conditions of resignation and passivity (Crapanzano, 2003). David Harvey's (2000) deep engagement with Marxism and geography offers a panoramic idea on the spaces of hope, while Ghassan Hage's (2003) stimulating analysis draws on notions of an uneven distribution of hope in society, and its ties to the rise of paranoid

nationalism.[30] Similarly, Appadurai's 'capacity to aspire,' draws attention to "another way in which to make the case for aspiration as a critical piece of the future as a cultural fact is to say that hope is the political counterpart to the work of imagination" (2013: 293).[31]

Jarrett Zigon's (2018) work exemplifies hope in two ways; first, as the temporal structure that sustains an already accomplished life, and second, as the temporal orientation of intentional ethical action in certain moments of what he terms a moral breakdown, or the conscious reflection and questioning of one's way of being-in-the-world. As such, Zigon argues that hope is best understood as a constant slippage between the two aspects of the temporal structure of everyday life and the temporal orientation of intentional ethical action, similar to the anthropological theory of morality that views being-in-the-world as partly characterised by the constant shifting between morality and ethics.[32] Hope can also be viewed as a methodology for

[30] For Hage, the neo-liberal values defined through transcendental capitalism has resulted in a growing paranoid nationalism leaving little room for hope. His notion of a 'societal hope' echoes the work of Masahiro Yamada (2004), who argues that it is not wealth but hope that is unevenly distributed in Japan, through his idea of a "hope stratified society". Hage further argues that certain populations tend to be dissatisfied because they have lost a sense of the future, and in this context, they direct their anger towards another population of people who possess hope in an anticipation of the future. Similarly in Nepal, hope is also a conduit of disappointment or of a loss of the future directed towards the failure of the state, where I contend that this has led to a certain loss of a shared hope or collective hope.

[31] By drawing on issues of housing, slums and evictions in India, Appadurai argues that while the 'capacity to aspire' is unequally distributed, it also a navigational capacity, through which poor people can effectively change the 'terms of recognition' within which they are generally trapped. In this sense, the capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity due to its workings within local systems of value, meaning, communication and dissent. While its form is recognisably universal, its force is distinctly local and cannot be separated from language, social values, histories, and individual norms, which tend to be highly specific. According to Appadurai, the best way is to examine significance of ideas about the good life in different societies grounded to understand how cultural systems - as combinations of norms, dispositions, practices and histories - frame the good life as a landscape of discernible ends and of practical paths of achievement of these ends. This also alludes to a move away from anthropological emphasis of cultures as logics of reproduction to a fuller picture in which cultural systems also shape specific images of the good life as a map of everyday life. Hence, this capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity (Appadurai, 2013:293).

[32] These two aspects of hope, then, can be seen as the temporal aspects of the anthropological theory of morality, which makes an important distinction between morality as one's unreflective and non-conscious everyday way of being-in-the-world, and the reflective and conscious ethical action necessary in moments of moral breakdown or ethical dilemma.

the coping with the future. Miyazaki's (2004) contribution within the anthropology of hope draws on the relationship between two kinds of hope, namely 'hope in an end' and 'hope in the means', while further extending that hope in a predetermined end occludes hope in the means. More importantly, by embracing hope as a site of knowledge, Miyazaki approaches hope as a methodological problem for knowledge rather than another subject of ethnographic investigation – ultimately as a method of knowledge deployed across a wide spectrum of knowledge practices (ibid.: 2).

Building on anthropological research to engage with the concept of hope, my study espouses hope as both a social phenomenon and a problem within the framework of migration and its trajectories in Nepal. Hence, by embracing Bloch's idea of hope within the contours of the 'not-yet' towards an anthropological engagement with philosophy, while also closely following Miyazaki's (2004) focus on hope in the 'means', I attempt to draw on hope as a method/means within migratory desires, projects, and trajectories, as well as an end of anthropological analysis as elucidated by Crapanzano (2003). In sum, by approaching and understanding hope as relational, I have employed hope as an analytical lens for capturing the lived experiences of migratory undertakings and its ensuing activities in Nepal. Approaching hope as an analytical framework thus implies both potentiality and uncertainty; the former encompasses desires, dreams and social imaginaries of the good life in the horizons of the future (which I build through Nepali notions such as *bidesh, sapana, aasha, iccha or chahanna*), while uncertainty enables the examination of unpredictable or precarious life contexts and how people confront them, including conditions of waiting and the COVID-19 pandemic, and emic understandings of *bhagya* as fortune and misfortune. As such, the workings of hope within migratory trajectories are at the heart of my study in my endeavour to examine and elucidate meaning making practices within local conditions of dreaming, waiting and desires for the future, including how these are generated, dispersed, and related to various places and temporalities. Pertinently, in this regard, Kleist maintains that "hope constitutes a fruitful analytical framework in which to link questions of political economy and mobility regimes with analyses of the collective social imaginaries and aspirations which imbue migration projects – to examine the social effects of the mobility paradox, in other words" (2017:1).

Since Miyazaki's (2004) interpretation of hope places its relevance to problems of agency and temporality for anthropology, the ultimate exercise then is not to theorise hope but to construct an analytical framework for approaching concrete moments of hope within migratory projects and trajectories, along with its many spheres of knowledge. This hope in extending it as a

means is hope in the act of hoping.[33] It is with such a basis, that I attempt to locate and wrest manifestations of hope within the everyday conversations, actions and activities of migration in Nepal, while also adopting a framework which Crapanzano (2013) terms as *panoramic* – with an aim that is modest yet ethnographically reflexive, to outline some of the limitations of what we take to be hope and to reflect on its possible usage in ethnographic and other cultural and psychological descriptions. This entails a critical look (insofar as that is possible) at the discursive and meta-discursive range of 'hope,' not simply down to a single argument but offered through montages and the awkwardness formed through the juxtaposition of events, images, and theories that are not always organised. Furthermore, it is also an awareness of the temporal directionality of knowledge that enables its redirection, facilitated through reflexivity, since the theme of hope is meant to continuously open one's analytical horizon rather than close it (Miyazaki, 2004).[34] Amid such considerations, my discussions on migratory ideas of hope, dreams and the future in this thesis play out as 'imaginative horizons' (Crapanzano, 2013), which are between the betwixt or in between (such as Turner's (1987) description of liminality) thus emphasising process over topography, the temporal over spatial, and the transient over permanent.

Whilst my study focuses on the relational experience of hope as an anticipation of the 'not-yet' characterised by simultaneous potentially or confidence in the future or uncertainty (Bloch, 1986), it also pays careful attention to the passive aspect of hope – most closely associated with waiting and disappointment as the temporal structure of being-in-the-world (See Crapanzano, 2013; Zigon, 2018).[35] My study attempts to foster an understanding of migration in Nepal through its multivocality, in its meanings and method. An anthropological engagement with hope requires drawing on and probing emic perspectives of *bhagya* through notions such as fortune/luck/misfortune and how these are manifested in everyday migratory dreams and

---

[33] It is precisely such hope that evaporates when hope in an end dictates the means according to Miyazaki.

[34] The methodological implications, including questions of what hope is and what it means to know hope, are part of what Miyazaki calls the economy of hope. Miyazaki seeks to draw attention to the parallel ways in which hope is generated through his ethnographic accounts of Suvavou people in Fiji as much as academic works of philosophers such as Benjamin, Bloch and Rorty. Hence, his 'focus is not so much on the divergent *objects* of these hopes as on the idea of hope as a method that *unites* different forms of knowing' (2004: 4).

[35] While hope is not based on a condition of certainty towards something in the future, it does entail a more active modality of being, thus suggesting that something can be done. However, a passive form of hope remains in a condition that a hoped-for-end cannot be guaranteed as illustrated by Zigon (2018).

projects within the socio-economic, and political spheres in Nepal. This in turn is also an effort to extend insights on theoretical concepts such as ‘agency’, ‘dreams’, ‘waiting’, ‘place and space’, ‘development’, ‘obligation’, ‘gift-giving’, amongst others to explicate the migration phenomenon in Nepal. More importantly, I seek to locate these forms of knowledge within the locus of ‘situations’ – not as a closed and totalised occurrence that appears as if from nowhere, but rather as constituted by diverse phenomenon that become intertwined and emerge temporarily as localised manifestations (Zigon, 2018). Or in other words, this can be described as a singular multiplicity that permits diffused but shared conditions through a critical hermeneutic approach, since “to be in the world at all, and the situations that structure them, is always already to be so intertwined and as such always becoming that which situations make possible” (ibid.:39). This phenomenological approach to better understand migrant experiences is expanded upon in the methods section of this thesis.

1.9 Outline of Chapters

Chapter One is an introduction to the thesis. It sketches out a brief summary of the history of migration in Nepal and contextualises it as a set of significant endeavours among Nepalis, both in the past and present. The ongoing influence of the ‘Gurkhas’, is outlined as crucial in the everyday experience of migration in Nepal and becomes increasingly clearer in the chapters that follow. Central to everyday Nepalis’ experiences within a culture of migration are the meanings and implications surrounding the common notion of *bidesh*. The chapter discusses the work of theorists and themes surrounding the notion of hope, which is a main theme which underpins this thesis. The theoretical framework outlined here is further detailed throughout the ethnographic chapters in this thesis. **Chapter Two** focuses on methods, positionality, and my approach to conducting fieldwork. Here, I detail my methodological choices for data collection, including justifications for the various field sites and interlocutors, as well as the challenges of conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also draws on discussions surrounding notions of reflexivity and am own multiple positionalities so as to trace the characteristics, nuances, and obstacles for conducting ethnographic research. **Chapter Three** explores the notion of hope and how it takes shape in everyday life in Nepal. It discusses hope both in the individual and collective sense and examines how it underlines migratory undertakings in Nepal with a particular focus on the futural momentum of hope. The chapter draws on various ethnographic examples both at home and abroad and pays close attention to emic understandings of social and political conditions indicative of the conditions of hope in Nepal. Overall, this chapter deals with examining how hope finds form and momentum in the

everyday lives of peoples, and it what ways these relate to their future and migratory imaginings and journeys. **Chapter Four** examines the crucial act and concept of waiting in migrant and prospect migrant lives. It considers various theoretical approaches to waiting and draws on ethnographic analysis to provide analytic insights into the notion of waiting, its conditions and how it is experienced and dealt with by people in Nepal. This chapter also examines waiting within debates on the anthropology of suffering and the anthropology of the good. This chapter further aims to explain how hope and imagination alongside the conditions of waiting are interwoven within migratory aspirations and undertakings, as they ongoingly shape each other and mould people's everyday experience. This is illustrated through ethnographic examples on activities related to waiting and the ways in which waiting is experienced to argue that waiting is not simply a condition of precarity but also a phenomenon imbued with activities and actions for hopeful undertakings. **Chapter Five** considers understandings of hope that extend to migrant experiences of aspirational dreams and a myriad of migratory spaces as critical to much of Nepali migration. First, it engages with discussions pertaining to a common dream of becoming a Gurkha to explore aspirational dreams in terms migration to *bidesh* and how it relates to ideas about hope and the future. Second, in relation to the first, this chapter analyses migrants' experiences within multiple spaces at home and abroad (such as airports, marketplaces, villages, cities and indeed *bidesh*) to explore the vast possibilities and limitations, opportunities and challenges that form and are formed by migration phenomena. By analysing aspirational dreams as a critical facet of the imagination and everyday experience of migration within the interconnected spaces of home and *bidesh*, this chapter also elucidates a paradox of migration and movement of people, epitomised in the pervasive notion *that one cannot belong to a place like Kathmandu.* **Chapter Six** focuses on the notion of *bhagya* – a sophisticated commonplace polysemic term that refers to an everyday philosophy of life. Drawing on the multiple meanings associated *bhagya*, this chapter illustrates and expands on its role in everyday moralities, decisions, and the conditions of everyday living. The discussions extend on *bhagya* expressed through idioms such as luck, fortune, destiny, fate and auspiciousness, and misfortune through ethnographic examples to illustrate peoples' anticipated viewpoints on unlimited potential future outcomes, constituting imagined viewpoints on an almost-happening series of best and worst possible worlds. As such, *bhagya* and its meanings are contextualised within its local understandings to analyse how it affects everyday actions as ways of dealing with migratory desires and decisions towards hoped for futures within migration and its endeavours. Finally, **Chapter Seven,** the conclusion, revisits the concerns emphasised in the introduction, while also engaging with pertinent theoretical and ethnographic insights

presented in the chapters of my thesis. It also discusses the broader anthropological implications of studying notions such as hope, waiting, imagination and indeed the future, alongside its limitations and potential scope for the future.

Chapter Two

FIELDWORK APPROACH, POSITIONALITY AND METHODS

In this chapter I discuss my approach to conducting fieldwork, positionality, and methods. I focus on the methodological choices in my data collection methods, including justifications for my various field sites and interlocutors by tracing the characteristics, nuances, and obstacles of conducting ethnographic research, and the challenges I faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergence of a global pandemic necessitated a recognition of fieldwork as a concept of practice, one that renders social life as the result of the interaction of structure and agency through the practice of everyday life (O'Reilly, 2012), As a Nepali and British national, I engage with debates surrounding native anthropology, positionality and reflexivity in line with my methodological choices. I have drawn openly from my personal experiences, addressing critical notions of 'positionality,' and 'self-reflexivity,' within the context of my research. My position as a researcher within this reflexive practice espouses Jackson's (2000:119) assertion that "the possibility of anthropology is born when the other recognises my humanity, and on the strength of this recognition incorporates me into this world." This mutuality, whereby I do the same with any interlocutors formed the fruitful basis of all interactions.

Being a Nepali individual stimulated my recognition of many of the influences that I sought to examine in my study, in many ways I consider the migratory desires and trajectories in Nepal with my interlocutors to be a shared condition, while also allowing me to be an instrument in my research (Nash, 1976). Therefore, my approach is not directed towards proclaiming neutrality and invisibility in my fieldwork but is stirred by a self-reflexive practice at the core of my research as a way of negotiating the 'ethnographic encounter' (Crapanzano, 1980). Such an encounter, indeed, also queries the intricate relationships between anthropologists and their object(s) of study and I have sought to address this appositely throughout my study by engaging my position(s) with the individual and collective experiences, narratives, and life history accounts of my interlocutors at the intersections of their migratory undertakings. Furthermore, amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, I also sought to elucidate my efforts to foster a form of 'patchwork ethnography' to help trace the complexities and processes of the migration phenomenon in Nepal as a situation (Zigon, 2018) and "created new possibilities for connection and for conducting research" (Peluso 2022: 31). The discussions presented in this thesis are the results of an amalgamation of unstructured interviews, casual conversations,

participant observation in numerous private and public spaces and the diverse settings of my interlocutors in Nepal and Portugal over the course of my fieldwork.

2.1 Locating the Field in a Time of Precarity

This study is the outcome of a personal and professional journey and an ethnographic engagement with Nepal. My journey as the son of a Gurkha, a status earned as part of an elite military unit that supports the British and Indian army. 'Being' Gurkha is a position of immense prestige and privilege (while that of also being *bhagyamani* or (fortunate/of bearing good fortune or destiny) which I was frequently reminded of by my interlocutors and family members alike; enabled me to receive a boarding school education in Darjeeling, India and to also move to *bidesh* in a country like the United Kingdom. At the same time, this thread of *bhagya*, connecting me back to Nepal was only strengthened through my education and training as an anthropologist. While I visited Nepal frequently over the years since arriving in the UK in 2007, to undertake my BA degree in social anthropology followed by a Master's degree, my commitment to social anthropology fostered the opportunity to conduct valuable fieldwork in Nepal, learning from people who were (and are) still dealing with the socio-economic conditions driven by deeply entrenched notions of caste discrimination in Nepal. A further opportunity to teach social anthropology to students in Sikkim, India, before commencing my PhD journey only deepened my enthusiasm and dedication towards the discipline. My connection with the Gurkhas and the Nepali community in the UK has also provided valuable insights and reference points towards this research on Nepali migration and contributed toward my undergraduate dissertation thesis.[36]

This research is also a reflection of my own condition – that of being in *bidesh*, familiar to my Nepali interlocutors, friends or kin members, and the thousands of Nepalis scattered across various parts of the world or those about to embark on a journey of migration. This idea of being is *bidesh* and living outside one's country is fraught with conditions perhaps best summarised by Jackson's (2000:1) affirmation that "ours is an era of uprootedness, with fewer

[36] I had conducted numerous interviews with serving and retired Gurkha soldiers and their family members as part of my undergraduate research project focusing on issues of social and economic integration in the UK, coupled with emic understandings and narratives of what it meant to be a 'Gurkha'– much of which continue to provide value towards this research.

and fewer people living out their lives where they are born" – which grapples strongly with the tensions and dilemmas of family and separation, ambition and failure, the present and future, separation and belonging, intrinsic to the very enigma of departure amongst Nepalis who continue to seek employment abroad. This is also imperative for grasping notions such as hope, precarity and the future, along with its ensuing meanings, both in an individual and collective sense, since most of us now live in 'a generalised condition of homelessness,'- a world where identities are coming to be (Said, 1979 in Gupta and Ferguson, 2001:37). As I will argue throughout this thesis, such lifechanging undertakings – to leave one's home or a place of origin are saturated with hopes, dreams and desires, played out in conditions of precarity, separation, (mis)fortune, waiting, and hoped-for situations projected towards the future. Such affects and consequences are not simply experienced by those who move but also among those who stay behind. This research is therefore an accumulation of numerous encounters, journeys, and unexpected events and changes in diverse situations and locations, which I discuss in the following sections – all of which I contend are deposited as valuable layers towards a culture of migration in Nepal.

My PhD research journey initially began as an endeavour to examine the historical conditions of migration and ongoing forms of belonging amongst Fiji Nepalis or descendants of Nepali indentured labourers who had settled in Fiji since the late 19th century during the British colonial era. I had already commenced my fieldwork in the village of Kavanagasau in Sigatoka (in addition to my initial pre-fieldwork visit to Fiji in December 2018) and had been living with a Fiji Nepali family for over two months before unforeseen circumstances, both personal and situations in the field, obligated me to leave Fiji and return to Nepal in November 2019, where this current research took its shape. However, no sooner had I begun to engage with the fieldwork commitments of my remoulded research ideas in Nepal, the entire global population was cast into the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic. As with much of the rest of the world, Nepal went into a strict lockdown from March 2020 with strict travel restrictions, both within and outside the country, while its remnants in the form of various pandemic regulations continued to linger on over the next two years. Indeed, these were challenging times at an epic proportion, even more so given the restricted opportunities to undertake any form of travel and fieldwork and to move forward with my research particularly as I felt stranded and overwhelmed in Kathmandu with ever-growing concerns about my PhD stirred by feelings of doubt, frustration and uncertainty. Nonetheless, the pandemic created a unique context whereby people reflected upon their vulnerabilities and loosened their reservations around

sensitive topics. In this sense the pandemic provided an opportunity to gather and learn more about hardships and otherwise veiled accounts about such hardships because it sadly accentuated the economic challenges of workers' lives (Peluso, 2022: 12).

While *waiting* had become a normal aspect of my own life it was foremost and certainly an everyday experience for people everywhere during the pandemic. Furthermore, this had significant implications for the migration phenomenon in Nepal. Thus, *waiting*, occupies a crucial place in my research, offering rich insights into the migration experience of many Nepalis during the time of COVID-19 and more generally as a condition that shapes migration experiences at large. It is amid such trials and tribulations during a severely disrupted period, that the flesh and bones of this research were formed; and while it stretched over a period of almost two years, between 2020-22, it is defined by intermittent fieldwork in various field sites across Nepal, coupled with a shorter period of a particularly valuable fieldwork visit to *Almograve,* Portugal.[37]

2.2 Patchwork Ethnography, Situation and Critical Hermeneutics

Under such circumstances, my approach resonates intensely with *'patchwork ethnography,'* an approach espoused by Günel, Varma, and Watanabe (2020: 3) that entails 'ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations that resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process.' They address the impact of COVID-19 on traditional long-term fieldwork by considering a more accessible method grounded in feminist and decolonial approaches to ethnographic fieldwork, characterised by flexibility and shorter periods of fieldwork, with the ethnographer not always having to be in the field for long periods of time. This does not imply a lack of depth or immersiveness in ethnographic fieldwork but rather acknowledges that coalescence of 'home' and 'field' are now necessities from the onset, and even more so in the face of precarity during the pandemic. Hence, adopting a patchwork method enabled me to transform 'limitations' and 'constraints' into opportunities for new insights during my fieldwork. This is embodied in my rich interactions in the field with diverse individuals or groups, from business owners and cab drivers to people I sat next to on planes and public buses, individuals I stood alongside in the long queues at government offices in Kathmandu, the

[37] I also undertook over 2 weeks of fieldwork in Portugal (November 2022), with an additional visit to Nepal for 8 weeks (December 2022) made possible by a small fieldwork grant from the Kent Graduate Researcher College.

Nepalis who welcomed me into their home in Portugal, the retired Gurkha soldier and his kin running a poultry farm in Gumi village in Surkhet or the friendly villagers in Pyarjung looking to build houses or educate their kids in Kathmandu, supported largely through remittances pouring in from Qatar, Dubai and Malaysia etc – were all, in some way knotted to the thread of migration in Nepal. As Peluso (2021) noted, the pandemic often had the effect of creating circumstances for individuals to more deeply reflect their lives in ways that enhanced fieldwork. It is within such conditions of fragmentary features of conducting fieldwork in numerous locations across Nepal and beyond, that I have fully embraced patchwork ethnography to 'acknowledge and accommodate how researchers' lives in their full complexity shape knowledge production' (Günel, Varma and Watanabe, 2020: 5). Furthermore, a recognition that anthropologists are incorporated in their own study (Nash, 1976) also implicates my own position as a researcher in Nepal, since one's life is, and has never have been distant from the field. Patchwork ethnography as such accentuates this point further amid fieldwork conditions of precarity due to the pandemic.

Hence, a multi-sited approach toward my data collection alongside my decisions for choosing particular locations in Nepal have been largely influenced by local circumstances, including travel restrictions and relationships with my interlocutors to consolidate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although a majority of my data collection was focused on various parts of the capital city in Kathmandu and Pyarjung village in the district of Lamjung, I also gleaned fruitful insights from shorter visits to the districts of Surkhet and Gorkha and, as mentioned previously, from a shorter period of fieldwork in the town of Almograve, Portugal (November 2022) facilitated through connections with interlocutors from Nepal. In addition, I was able to return to Nepal in December 2022 to conduct eight weeks of supplementary fieldwork under more eased pandemic-restricted rules.

This study is not a traditional 'community' study with individuals and groups inhabiting fixed boundaries or spaces, such as in Kathmandu or Lamjung. My interlocutors, like most Nepalis, live their lives amidst multiple spaces – blurring the boundaries of the rural and the urban, centre and periphery, tradition and modern (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Ferguson, 1999; Peluso 2015). By employing, a mix of data collection methods in numerous places, this study on migration makes a sincere attempt to capture the migratory experiences and trajectories of Nepalis to include the intertwined in everyday moments of hopes and fears, dreams and reality, separation and longing, and indeed the verve and possibilities of the not-yet future (Bloch, 1986) within the folds of migration in Nepal. The latter direction towards an anthropology of

the future is also an effort to draw attention to the scotoma or blind spot within the anthropological gaze and is inspired by the critical contributions of Crapanzano, Hage, Appadurai and Miyazaki, Khosravi among others. Furthermore, I have also taken inspiration and drawn extensively from the works of Khosravi (2017; 2021) and Schielke (2020), who have approached an understanding of migration from a similar anthropological stance, by connecting it to emic notions of dreams within conditions of labour, waiting and precarity, etc.

The complexities of the migration phenomenon in Nepal as part of a series of larger political, economic and environmental phenomena has also enabled me to approach migration as a *'situation'*, what Zigon (2018) refers to as "a *nontotalizable* assemblage widely diffused across different global scales that allows us to conceptualize how persons and objects that are geographically, socioeconomically, and 'culturally' distributed get caught up in shared conditions that significantly affect their possible ways of being-in-the-world" (ibid.: 38). As such, a situation is not a closed and totalised occurrence that appears as if arises from nowhere, but rather it is constituted by diverse phenomena that become intertwined and emerge temporarily as localised manifestations. Following such a vein, migration and its trajectories in Nepal may be understood as a 'singular multiplicity that permits diffused but shared conditions', and this is only possible through a critical hermeneutic approach that begins with Heidegger's notion of 'phenomenon' ('what shows itself in itself') and through analysis discloses that humans are always already intertwined in various situations, and this intertwining both precedes and exceeds any possible humanist projection onto it (Zigon, 2018: 39). Therefore, in a bid to investigate emic understandings of migratory trajectories such as hope, dreams, waiting and misfortune, I adopted a critical hermeneutic approach in my study, while also locating these forms of knowledge within the interstices of the migration phenomenon.[38] The hermeneutic phenomenology of research is conducted through empirical (collection of experiences) and reflective (analysis of their meanings) activities, which is why my methods

[38] Stories, rumours and gossip, along with forms of popular culture also make up a big part of migratory dreams and imagination in Nepal. Easier accessibility to and influence of the internet, especially within social media platforms such as Facebook, Tik Tok and YouTube etc have also expanded the ways of migratory imagination and its trajectories towards technological advances. During the COVID-19 lockdown, this seemed more significant, especially where a lack of clarity or answers of the ongoing situation was normal, while gossip and rumours were always nearby. I bring in narratives and stories from various geographical spaces and diverse experiences of migration that eventually tie back to *bidesh* and migration in Nepal (for example, the numerous Nepalis I met during my travels in Australia, Fiji, and the UK).

have relied heavily on descriptions of personal experiences, conversational interviews, and close observations (Van Manen, 1997). Examining experience from a phenomenological perspective also entails recognising the necessary emplacement of modalities of human existence within ever-shifting horizons of temporality, since our existence as humans is temporally structured in such a way so that our past experience is always retained in the present moment that is feeding forward to anticipate future horizons of experience (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011: 88).

2.3 The Native Anthropologist, Positionality and Reflexivity

Although undertaking research amid a global pandemic posed myriad challenges, perhaps none was more critical than confronting the methodological and ethical implications of studying one's own culture and moving beyond the notion of a 'native' anthropologist – a concept although highly valuable, that is also fraught with difficulties (Narayan, 2013). The label of a native anthropologist with its essentialising burden, conjures the idea that a 'native' anthropologist can somehow represent an unproblematic and authentic insider's viewpoint, and as such demands careful attention to the personal and intellectual predicaments stirred by such an assumption, as in the case of my research. This necessitates a rejection of an emphasis on the dichotomy between 'native' and 'non-native' anthropologists, in favour of a more fruitful approach, which places a researcher in terms of altering identifications within a field of diffusing communities and power relations (Narayan, 2013). Furthermore, 'the field' is an increasingly flexible concept (see Marcus, 1995; Van Manen 1997; Marcus and Saka, 2006) and serves as an impetus for the careful reconsideration of these categories. Encompassing such a direction, while embracing my own positionality, I have also incorporated my personal narratives as a researcher into a broader discussion of anthropological scholarship during my fieldwork and writing.

Throughout my fieldwork, everyday interactions with my interlocutors entailed a world of relational positionalities or what Rosaldo refers to as 'multiplex subjectivity' with many overlapping identifications (1989: 168-195). While Narayan (1993) asserts this as a crucial facet exhibited by all anthropologists during fieldwork, I emphasise that aspects of subjectivity we choose or are compelled to admit as a defining identity are interchangeable, and dependent on the situation and prevailing trajectories of power (ibid.: 676). Consequently, as anthropologists, the spaces we occupy together or separately from our interlocutors are multifarious and fluid. The complexities of class, gender, sexual orientation, education, etc.

often prevail over the cultural identity we regard as insider or outsider positions. Hence, our efforts must focus on the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our writing by introspectively reflecting: "Are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalised Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas-people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise?" (ibid.: 672).

It is within such surrounding complexities during my fieldwork, that I often found myself continually negotiating my position as a son of a Gurkha soldier or an educated urbanite, while savouring the benefits of living abroad as a *'bideshi'* (foreigner), and indeed other facets of my identity which mostly blended in 'smoothly' with the 'natives' for me to qualify as a 'native anthropologist'. Throughout my fieldwork, aspects of my identity were often dismantled and scrutinised by my interlocutors and Nepalis alike. Many times, I felt like a young schoolboy all over again, when I used to return to Nepal for my annual winter break from a Christian boarding school in India only to succumb to my pious Hindu mother's incessant cajoling to visiting a local ritual healer (supposedly for my holistic well-being) while my relatives who came to visit us in Kathmandu would often comment:

"Aba dherai padera thulo manche hune hai. Timi ta 'bhagyamani,' raichha, Darjeeling ma padnu pako" (You must study a lot and become a prominent person. You are fortunate or lucky to study in Darjeeling).

Indeed, fortune was seen to be on my side according to many. *Bhagya* and its ensuing blessings, as many of my interlocutors understood it or alluded to in everyday discourse, was not merely a powerful entity, which had accompanied me in the past, but was also a perpetual force soaring above me along my every pathway in life. *Bhagya* as such, was summoned upon regularly by my interlocutors, as a constant reminder of my many good fortunes or privileges, and indeed difficulties, encompassing numerous aspects of my everyday life, from happenings in my personal love life to my untimely poor health that required me to undergo surgery during fieldwork, or about my UK citizenship and life abroad.

Oho! Dasha lageko tapailai. Alik hosiyar hunu parcha esto bela ma.

(Oh! You have a state of misfortune or bad luck. You need to be extra careful in this period)

Tapai ko ta Parivar nai 'bhagyamani,' raichha!

(Your entire family is fortunate!)

Tapai ko bhayga ta thulo raicha, UK jasto thau ma basnu hudo raicha!

(You have a very good fortune to be able to live in a country like the UK)

This was the very sort of *bhagya* that altered my father's life in 1973, when he was selected to join the British Gurkhas, from hundreds of hopeful young men across Nepal, eventually transporting him away from the adversities and struggles of *gaunle* (village) life, and the country altogether. In turn, this also enabled my family to settle down permanently in the UK. As such, my own migratory experience and positionality as a researcher amid an inter-subjective encounter with my interlocutors in Nepal are at the heart of my methodological approach and writing. Such multifaceted insinuations about *bhagya*, its meanings and ways through which it permeates into the fabric of social and economic life in Nepal, play out powerfully within the migratory hopes and trajectories of many Nepalis looking to go outside Nepal. This point was brought home by my interlocutors who considered my circumstances as someone who was very '*bhagyamani,'* – not so much of my own doing, but *bhagya* itself.

As a Nepali, I belong to the Gurung caste or indigenous group, one amongst numerous other groups in Nepal, with their language, beliefs, and practices. Yet, having not lived in Nepal for most of my life, bearing the 'baggage' of an NRN (non-resident Nepali) or *'bahira bata ako'* (literally meaning someone coming from 'outside', while also referring to abroad) due to the British affiliation of my *'kagaz patra'* (official paperwork/passport), was an enduring facet of my identity throughout my research. Such a position also generated certain expectations amongst my interlocutors or local people I interacted with in the field, while also placing me along the margins of an impenetrable plane of relationality, especially when confronted with the more uncomfortable settings of caste. This was epitomised during my previous fieldwork visit to Nepal for my MA degree when my host family questioned my acceptance to eat together with my lower caste interlocutors, which was construed openly as somewhat flirting with boundaries of caste-affiliated taboos. One evening, when I had informed my host lady, who was from a higher/different caste as opposed to my lower caste interlocutors about a dinner invitation from my interlocutors, she replied: *"We have never eaten food cooked by someone from a lower caste… maybe you shouldn't too. But of course, it is OK for you since you are from bahira (outside) in bidesh, so this does not really matter for you…"* Encountering such predicaments related to caste or ethnicity was, and has always been, an inevitable situation during my visits to Nepal. Additionally, since Pyarjung village in Lamjung is also the district where both my parents grew up, a pre-existing identity defined by kinship was already in place

since my birth and subsumed my presence as an ethnographer. Throughout my fieldwork, the paradox of my identity was continuously moulded and defined through such situations, at times as an outsider, guest or researcher but also kin, or a Nepali individual, but never quite with insights and experiences to be considered an insider – these multiple and overlapping strands of cultural identity could be tugged and placed out into the open or pushed back inside depending on the people, place and contexts of the interactions.

Hence, I would often feel confused when my interlocutors would advise me to not set out on a journey or return back on a certain day of the week (or within a certain number of days) as a proactive measure to avoid any misfortune from happening to me (this is especially common when undertaking a new endeavour such as starting up a business, a new job, or building a house etc.). Likewise, I could not explain the reasons as to why one would not eat from, or with certain individuals or groups based on caste to all those involved using the anthropological language of 'purity and danger' (Douglas, 1966) nor justify what I would typically refer to as 'exploitation' regarding migrant brokers when many of my interlocutors were willing paying 'agents' for their services when applying for work abroad in Dubai or Saudi Arabia despite this also being illegal according to Nepali law. They would simply exclaim *"Nepal ma estai ho"* (This is how it is in Nepal).

The intricacies of such fluid relationships with my interlocutors, necessitated a continuous shift in my positions, as fragments of a 'multiplex identity' alluded to previously, thus permitting certain aspects of my identity out into action or putting it forward for interrogation. This required me to actively participate in an array of activities and embrace roles, from that of a chaperon to a tourist, advisor, travel companion, teacher, or translator amongst others. Hence, what I present in this thesis as a form of analysis is espoused within the milieu of such 'situated knowledges' (Narayan, 2013), which are not simply the locus for anthropological knowledge but also a site for enacting out positionalities as an anthropologist. This aptly echoes Narayan's claim that the study of one's own society implicates a contrary process from the study of an alien one; "instead of learning conceptual categories and then, through fieldwork, finding the contexts in which to apply them, those of us who study societies in which we have pre-existing experience absorb analytic categories that rename and reframe what is already known. The reframing essentially involves locating vivid particulars within larger cultural patterns, sociological relations, and historical shifts" (ibid.: 678).

Hence, my own experiences as an ethnographer during my fieldwork were immersed in particular locations and positions in Nepal. What I seek to underline through my reflexive approach is, not a rigorous quest for the natives' points of view but to also recognise that "we" do not speak from a position outside "their" worlds, but rather are also implicated in them through fieldwork and other ways of global flows (ibid.:676). Indeed, the practice of conducting fieldwork entails an engagement and acquaintance with a wide range of people and listening intently to their voices, while its wide-ranging processes and interactions also bind anthropologists and their interlocutors in a shared space thus also making it difficult to distinguish easily between the experiences of those considered to be native with prior exposure and those who arrive as neophytes. My prior acquaintances also carried strong implications for my research but given the intense and continued engagements of fieldwork along with the pandemic, this also often resulted in the alteration of such relationships. In many ways, my experience in the field echoed vehemently with Rabinow's (1977:38-39) avowal that 'fieldwork' is itself a dialectic between reflection and immediacy wherein both are cultural constructs, since neither the subject nor the object remains static. My own position, as such, contends with the production of anthropological knowledge as a process wherein "objectivity" is replaced by an openly subjective interaction with and invitation of other subjectivities since knowledge is situated, negotiated and part of a continual process intertwined with the personal, professional and cultural realms (Narayan, 1993).

The reflexive practice I have embraced in my research – informed by a range of pursuits, circumstances, and limitations – engages in actions such as reflexive positioning, reflexive navigating, and reflexive interpreting or sense-making (Benson and O'Reilly, 2022). Acknowledging and confronting my own held assumptions, including the notion of power has been vital in appreciating the intricate, equivocal, and often tumultuous realities of my interlocutors within the spaces of migratory experiences and ethnographic research. In this way, I have advocated for a multiplicity of voices, beyond a single authoritative voice in my data collection and analysis, whilst also drawing on other layered accounts including popular culture in the form of films and music. This is driven by an effort to counter a certain purpose of self-authority as an anthropologist and to negate any preconceived assumptions about migration and its trajectories in Nepal. Since questions of power and authority coupled with ethical quandaries have always confronted anthropologists and the purpose of their work (as they continue to do so, and I consider my situation as no different), it seems necessary to approach both interpretation and writing as imperative constituents of the *ethnographic encounter* – as a

process that never ends (Crapanzano, 1980). Adopting a reflexive approach, both during fieldwork and in my writing process has served as a constant reminder about my positionality and its ensuing implications in my endeavours to grasp meanings of migration embodied in the everyday experiences of my interlocutors. In this sense, I have attempted to lay out the conditions of my research and shape my discussions through an approach that O'Reilly (2012) terms 'practice stories' – as narratives of how a subject advances over time as they shape and are acted upon in various ways. This has been helpful for probing how migratory ideas and processes unfold over time as norms, rules, and organisational arrangements and how they are acted on and adapted by people as part of their daily lives, and in the context of their social lives (their communities, groups, networks, and families etc). Practice stories have been particularly useful in helping me make sense of migration and its ongoing processes as both shaped by and shaping general patterns, norms, rules, and wider structural constraints that frame people's choices, while also tending to their opinions and feelings.[39]

2.4 Informal Conversations and Narratives

Informal conversations coupled with narratives are more than mere accounts or memories about migratory undertakings to *bidesh* they also convey a deep reservoir of *hopes and dreams*, often inspiring trajectories oriented towards the future. Such narratives, as a form of life histories has formed a crucial part of my study, since they underscore lived experiences of migration in its myriad forms, encompassing personal and communal life, family conditions and obligations, religious beliefs or notions of the good life, whilst also connecting the past to the emergence of new realities. Narayan (1993) asserts that narratives not only transform 'informants' from their role as mere providers of cultural data for the anthropologist into subjects with complex lives and multifarious opinions, rather more significantly, 'narratives are not transparent representations of what actually happened, but are told for particular purposes, from particular points of view: they are thus incipiently analytical, enacting theory' (ibid.: 681). Hence, the ideas and discussions, I present are outcomes of conversations with countless Nepalis – at the marketplace, airports, public buses, homes, government offices, restaurants or simply waiting together during the COVID-19 lockdown/s. Placing the

[39] Practice stories have also is useful in better understanding individual choices and feelings about wider social and economic structures, by embracing how these features of social life interact with and how structures get produced and reproduced (O'Reilly, 2012).

conversations with my interlocutors and their narratives at the heart of my methodological undertaking, has provided me with fertile grounds for my analysis in an iterative-inductive way. Indeed, as Herzfeld stresses "conversations create intimacy and intimacy is the key to successful ethnography" (2004: 221).

For many of my interlocutors, whether in Nepal, Portugal or the UK, an entanglement with migratory desires and its trajectories were never distant from their everyday lives; albeit in multifarious forms, locations or meanings, they nevertheless become the very means of emanating knowledge for my study when situated within the locus of their narratives and experiences – both as a mode of enquiry and a profound understanding of the migration phenomenon in Nepal. Hence, from my countless conversations with Nepali individuals or their families in my various field sites, I seek to purposefully position my anthropological queries within the interstices of migration narratives and stories, by constantly recalling, 'what the story of these events mean and to what uses may such a story be put? (Rubenstein, 2002: 23).

Since narratives also inform and allude to certain ways of 'being in the world,' (Jackson, 2000) I focus on examining how such ideas and meanings emerge (or/and transform) within milieus of changing socio-political and economic circumstances, both locally and beyond, through anthropological queries such as –

What does migration mean to the individual and group? (What kinds of ideas constitute the overall ideas of migration?)

How are migratory undertakings pursued and how does these unfold within the local socio-political conditions and economic fabric of Nepal (i.e. how are migratory undertakings and trajectories pursued within contexts of waiting, uncertainty or precarity?)

What are the kinds of hopes, dreams or aspirations entailed in migratory aspirations, project, and trajectories? (i.e. what is the role of hope, imagination in migratory undertakings and how they inform experiences of migration?)

How do these relate to one's horizons of the future? (i.e. how do individual/collective migratory narratives inform meanings and particular ways of imagining the future or the good life ('being in the world', including *bhagya*?)

Undertaking informal and casual conversations throughout my study, often amid quotidian participatory settings have been crucial towards probing and discerning the migratory pursuits

of my interlocutors. In my varied field sites, such casual conversations were never far away. Sometimes, I found myself drinking incessant cups of Nepali *chiya* (sweet milk tea) or *local rakshi (millet alcohol)* with my interlocutors, while lending ears to their stories about the joys and fears of boarding an aeroplane for the first time or toiling in the sweltering heat of Saudi and Qatar. At times I waited alongside others in consultation rooms during visits to astrologers or spiritual healers or found myself weathering the usual storm of emotions during conversations at Kathmandu airport or listening to eerie stories about people's experience of working in a factory in Malaysia while helping them in a poultry farm in Surkhet. Hence, informal conversations helped generate a firm scaffolding for my research, which I was then able to probe further in the form of semi-structured interviews. My conversations and interviews were neither simply limited to 'outgoing' or 'returning' individuals nor to a certain gender or age group although it was mostly men who engage in migration. This study encompassed a holistic approach extending itself to spending time with migrant's family members from spouses to children and parents, village or community folks, agents and individuals from diverse walks of life to gain a deeper understanding of their everyday experiences.

My data collection, therefore, entails a combination of informal conversations, semi-structured or unstructured interviews, participation and observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), all of which enable me to continually invoke, and remould pertinent questions related to a discourse of migration in Nepal. Most of my data collection was carried out in the local *Nepali* language, which also entailed the testing task of translating my findings from Nepali to English during the writing process. While I acknowledge that the translation process often also presents pitfalls of an ethnocentric bias and misrepresentation, even when researching and writing about one's own culture, I have sought my best to address this and negotiate any sort of linguistic confrontations by consulting Nepali elders, friends and family members for assistance and suggestions.

2.5 Participant Observation and Interviews

A great deal of my data collection for this research relied on participant observation at the heart of my ethnographic endeavours. As mentioned previously, informal conversations coupled with participant observation were crucial facets of my everyday fieldwork, which encompassed diverse activities, from private and communal to formal and informal settings. During my stay in Kathmandu, I shared a house with a Gurung family with strong ties to migratory endeavours,

who were also local to Pyarjung village in Lamjung district, one of my other field sites. This was particularly beneficial for developing strong ties with other community members also living in Kathmandu, thus allowing me to directly observe and participate in their everyday local activities in the city. Continuous 'hanging out' with my interlocutors and their connections through observing and recording (in both, writing or audio-visual means) their migratory undertakings or interactions offered me a solid framework to work with, which I was able to follow up with further telling discussions in the form of both structured and semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2006). These approaches were pertinent for examining myriad manifestations or expressions of migration and its meaning within local socio-economic and political landscape through narratives, actions and critiques of my interlocutors. In addition to my field notes, I also implemented the use of audio-visual methods extensively to document conversations, events, or interviews, where and when appropriate with prior consent from my interlocutors (Emerson et al, 2011). The inclusion of audio-visual medium helped me to open up further opportunities for examining social relations between people through an engagement and interpretation of such ideas shared amongst people (Grimshaw, 2001).

My participation in numerous social and religious gatherings or trips between Kathmandu, Lamjung and Surkhet also helped me gain crucial insights into the complexities of urban-rural connections, and how social networks are forged and maintained amongst individuals and families (or with other groups) since these have immediate and imperative implications on migratory projects in Nepal. Meanwhile, I was kindly welcomed and allowed to stay in a shared house among Nepalis during my fieldwork in Almograve, Portugal, which was particularly fruitful towards my study, since I was not only able to socialise with them regularly but also observe their everyday activities and interview them under more comfortable settings. At the same time this also enabled me to make my role overt in the construction of social life in the unfolding of ethnography.

Regardless of my field site, since a majority of my interlocutors were from diverse walks of life, who were actively seeking to migrate abroad for employment (or were returnees or kin members with connections abroad, particularly in the Gulf countries), it was essential for me to follow them keenly in their everyday activities; this included working in the fields to visiting kin members or employment agents, collecting parcels at the airport or arranging and handling finances, visiting sites for construction of new houses, or attending community feasts, amongst others. Such activities not only signified the microcosms of a culture of migration in Nepal but also enabled vital spaces for enacting and forging social relationships and migratory activities

saturated with hopes and desires. At the same time, they also presented me with opportunities to identify and establish further networks of interlocutors for my research.

Since examining the intricacies and connections between migratory undertakings and elements of hopes and dreams, and misfortunes form a key facet of my research project, I dedicated a great deal of interest to observing threads of migratory trajectories and pursuits, which I consider as 'hopeful activities' or something directed towards the future, or in other words what my interlocutors hoped to achieve as a forthcoming entity. Whilst these often-included quotidian conversations with my interlocutors, they also involved vigorous activities such as visiting religious healers or astrologers, and undertaking certain actions (such as refraining from particular activities or observing certain rituals and regulations when undertaking travel, building new houses, planning marriages or economic ventures, and exchanging objects, among others) This enabled me to locate certain patterns, trends, or variations in peoples' relationships with both tangible and intangible forms, whilst also allowing me to probe the motivations of their actions within migratory desires and trajectories. The method of participant observation was not only significant towards establishing a contextual framework to further develop my research questions, aims and objectives for my study, but also vital in helping me recognise social actions through which cultural forms of migration were articulated. [40]

2.6 Objects that Move

I also paid close attention to the significance of and exchange of objects (mainly in the form of gift giving), which was a familiar undertaking amongst many of my interlocutors, particularly during departure or upon returning from their journeys abroad. As part of methodology, I have scrutinised relevant objects (accessories and clothing, photographs, or religious items, etc.) seeking to understand the underpinning of concepts of material agency and their biographies as things as a way of imagining the past, present and future. This has been a useful approach in highlighting the nuances of the everyday experience of migration at a more microscopic level. In this vein, through espousing the social life of things, Appadurai (1986:5) asserts that:

"it is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculation that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human

[40] Geertz, notes that "good anthropological texts are plain texts, unpretending" (1988:2), and writing persuades readers that one has truly in some ways 'been there' (in the field). However, this shift from fieldwork to writing itself entails challenges (even if partially), which also enables one to read with a more percipient eye.

actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things in motion that illuminate their human and social context."

As such, I have approached objects in their diverse forms and contexts as embedded within an array of meanings, which not only invoke ways of imagining but themselves also become integral components of the migration trajectory. By including a material culture anthropological approach in my data collection, I have attempted to recognise the role of objects as a way of better understanding how dreams or ideas of a hopeful/desired future are revealed and experienced, including a making or representation of the *bidesh* migration in Nepal. This entailed a focus on the spheres of circulation and ways in which objects reveal stories of personal accounts, historical facts or memories while giving analysis and methodological emphasis to Hoskins' (1998) collection of narrative histories of objects, Abu-Lughod's (1991) concept of 'phenomena of connections', and Wolf's (1982) study of the circulation of commodities not as things but as pathways and processes.

Collecting forms of material data during fieldwork is a process of broadening valuable knowledge that can further initiate new ideas and direct the research itself (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Consequently, an analysis of objects and photographs also helps reveal the dynamic relationships between every experience and migratory aspirations of hope and the future. Photographs are particularly crucial in this process since they can occupy the void spaces of experiences between public representations and other experiences and (re) productions of them (Strassler, 2010).[41] Hence, recognition and appreciation of objects as valuable sources of meanings and knowledge were essential during my data collection, since numerous forms of gift-giving or exchange of objects amongst my interlocutors, during rituals, family and community gatherings formed a significant facet of the migratory trajectory. While indeed at times these objects represented status or affluence as valuable gifts, which were easily discernible through their high *bideshi* quality or (foreignness), they also imbued continuation or forthcoming notions of respect, and obligation, as they moved from more intimate spheres

[41] Strassler's (2010) analysis depicts the various ways through which everyday ambitions, preoccupations and sentiments of ordinary people are personalised in components of the nation via the medium of photography in Indonesia, through actions in a particular given space and time. Espousing such an understanding, photographs embody a complex form of knowledge and intentionality wherein they not only assume a vital role in a temporal and shared space of belonging but also serve as socio-politically charged vehicles of exchange, knowledge, and identity.

of the personal or family towards the collective or the community. Hence, focusing on objects as a data-gathering method to observe and examine an understanding of objects about past, present and future imaginaries as modes of lived experiences among my interlocutors.

2.7 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed my methods, positionality, and my approach to conducting fieldwork. I have also considered the crucial notions of reflexivity and positionality to draw on my various methodological choices for data collection, including justifications for the various field sites and interlocutors, as well as the challenges and opportunities of conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 7. *Pyarjung* Village, Lamjung. Credit: Author 2022

Chapter Three

THE POTENTIAL OF HOPE

This chapter examines how societal hope, through individuals and collectives, shapes and is shaped by migratory undertakings in Nepal with a particular focus on the future, while also paying close attention to emic understandings of social and political conditions. Here, I seek to explore questions such as – *What is hope and how does it take form in everyday life?* and *in what ways is/are hope/s related to future and migratory imaginings and journeys?*

My main points and arguments in this chapter are informed by various academic and theoretical discussions on hope and draw on the narratives and experiences of my interlocutors. I mostly draw on relevant philosophical and anthropological literatures on hope to espouse hope as a way of *futural momentum* – which appears in the spaces between the actual and the potential or between matter and its not-yet material form in Nepali migratory projects. Understanding hope's momentum and its intrinsical link to 'potential', is well-described by Bryant and Knight (2019): "Hope is about something that doesn't presently exist but potentially could; hope is based on more than a possibility and less than a probability. In that sense, hope is a way of virtually pushing potentiality into actuality. The potential is never actualized in all the ways that are possible; the remainder, we argue, always breeds (new) hope." (ibid.:134).

Following such a vein, I also draw inspiration from Bloch's understanding of hope, which he describes as the most important expectant emotion in the rejection of deprivation, while the Not-Yet-Conscious belongs completely to the Not-Yet-Become, Not-Yet-Brought-Out, Manifested-Out in the world (Bloch, 1986:13). I extend on notions of societal or collective hope, as a possibility of the imagination and potentiality, with its connections to the future – analysing how this is unfolds in the everyday collective experience of people in Nepal. In doing so I engage with experiences of my interlocutors in Nepal and Portugal to elucidate the workings of hope alongside its potentiality and indeterminacy to illustrate how desires to go to *bidesh* are woven into the socioeconomic and political fabric of hope and migration in Nepal. While also recognising that hopes and indeed imagined futures do not always unfold in desired or expected ways, I also further position my arguments on hope in relation to dreams, imagination, and the future, which I discuss more explicitly in the following chapter.

3.1 Hope in the Everyday

In the early hours of a humid summer morning in July 2001, the overnight bus that I was travelling in from *Kathmandu* to *Kakarvitta* came to a sudden halt. A commotion of people outside on the highway stirred me from my uncomfortable slumber upon the worn-out cushion of a stubbornly creaky seat that was as hard as a rock. My lethargic senses managed to pick up some diffused slogans about the royal family and the nation, while I noticed a few individuals also exchanging some serious words with the bus driver and his assistant. One eventually got onto the bus and shouted – "all buses are not going anywhere from here… *hamro Raja Rani, sab maryo* – our King and Queen, everyone is dead."

I surmised that for everyone on that bus, most of whom were still half asleep, this was not only a moment of shock, but also wild perplexment, given the insinuations of such sudden news. "I mean hang on…wait… what? How is this even possible? The King and Queen have been killed? But how?... We had only got on this bus from Kathmandu last evening and everything seemed normal…" – such were some of the feelings shared amongst many of us on that bus, or at least this was what me and my friends were discussing immediately upon hearing such news. With numerous other vehicles on the road also coming to a complete standstill, it was obvious that this was not some outrageous rumour or hoax but something extremely grave. While everyone still seemed baffled about the uncertain details of events that had transpired in Kathmandu, the immediate concerns for me and my friends were on reporting back to our boarding school on time after our summer break, lest we face some punitive actions from our strict hostel superintendent for failing to comply with school regulations. We were perhaps only about 8-10 kilometres away from the Nepali border town of Kakarvitta – our usual pitstop for changing vehicles to Kalimpong, a hill town in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal.[42] As confused passengers from other vehicles started to flock on the highway, echoes of chatter began to saturate the hot outside air. Numerous verbal sources coupled with the bus radio eventually put our doubts to rest – a shooting had occurred at the royal palace in Kathmandu last night, where a drunk crown prince had opened fire during a family gathering killing nine family members, including his own parents, the King and Queen, before turning the gun on himself.

The veracity of the events that occurred on the first evening of June 2001 are very much still shrouded in mystery and conspiracy till today – through public discussions and narratives

[42] Kalimpong has since been declared a district in West Bengal, India (as of 2017).

enmeshed in contradicting interpretations and descriptions of events akin to the '*Rashomon effect'* whereby an event is interpreted in contrasting ways by a variety of individuals. During my fieldwork, people often alluded back to this national event (among others) as a way of expressing a sort of collective hope about everyday conditions or future prospects for Nepal, within traces of its complex political history. Nonetheless, it was an extraordinary incident in Nepal's recent history that reverberated profoundly with a nation already caught up in a tumultuous and ongoing civil war. Describing Nepal's recent political situation as 'a country in transition' (Hutt and Onta, 2017) seems pertinent given the radical changes since 1990, when a 'People's movement' led by the Nepali congress party with an alliance of communist parties forced the king to abandon the party-less Panchayat system that was in place in the country since 1962; while a bloody Maoist insurgency between 1996-2006, including a 'royal coup' in 2005 by King Gyanendra, also sparked a popular movement for democracy in the spring of 2006 leading to the abolishment of monarchy in 2008 – all of which exemplify Nepal's recent unstable political landscape.[43]

I draw on this historical event of the royal massacre to anchor point my discussions here for two reasons. First, it maintains hope as an affect (of both positivity and disappointment) in its collective form, with a potential to thrust collective desires or emotions towards a better future, thus also directing us towards hope and its momentum, as I illustrate further through ethnographic instances. Second, such a collective form of hoping, as I argue are entwined in local nuances and discourse about politics in public discourse – which, in turn, also bear strong implications for understanding migratory experiences in Nepal. Following such a vein, I aim to make a case for hope, as both a social and collective phenomenon that captures the simultaneous potentialities and uncertainties of the future. Hence, my endeavour here is not to augment a generic idea towards establishing that hope exists or that there is hope but to examine *what it is that people hope for?* – to understand how such hopes unfold with everyday life and socio-political conditions in Nepal.

[43] After ascending to the throne upon the death of his brother King Birendra, Gyanendra imposed a direct rule in 2005. However, due to immense international (and local) pressure, the King was forced to reinstate the parliament in April 2006, leading to the election of Girija Prasad Koirala as the Prime Minister for the fourth time in his political career. Later that year, the United Nations mediated a peace accord between the Nepali government and the Maoists, which facilitated a representation in the parliament for the latter.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the discussions I present in this chapter are less a proposal or an argument for a set or fixed mode of hope than an embracing for particular modes of hope or future/s (See Webb, 2007). For example, Appadurai (2013) describes how unequal access to the future rests on the uneven distribution of a capacity to aspire. While some wishes take a form on their own as Hage's (2003) research shows how the state's inability to provide hope for its own citizens in contrast to migrants coming from outside produces forms of a paranoid nationalism. Precarity and uncertainty can also take many forms. Tsing's argument gives weight to the relational complexity of all forms of life and its ties to an ongoing state of indeterminacy – or vulnerability across difference (2015:29), while Bryant and Knight (2019) further contend that hope operates within conditions of indeterminacy and potentiality, as a momentum into a future or a navigation of the otherwise-than-actual – it is the affective result of pushing particular "otherwises" into actuality (ibid.:134).

3.2 Acharya's Revolution

On January 25, 2023, *Prem Prasad Acharya* succumbed to severe burn injuries at the ICU (intensive care unit) of Kirtipur hospital while undergoing treatment after attempting to self-immolate himself in front of the Federal Parliament building in *New Baneshwor* in the Capital a day earlier. The incident had not only attracted keen interest from the media throughout the country but also inspired people to surge out in a protest, against the government, bearing placards with messages such as "create an environment to work and live", "it's a murder, not suicide" and "is this country a slaughterhouse?" among others (Kathmandu post, 2023).[44]

Prior to his actions, 36-year-old Acharya, an entrepreneur from East Nepal had penned down a heart wrenching personal note of over 6000 words in the Nepali script and posted it on Facebook. In it he voiced his grievances and frustrations against a deep-rooted cronyism and powerplay at the very core of political and business affairs in the country. The note also included a 25-point demand directed towards the Nepali government, appealing for amendments in various public issues from housing, education, banking, and taxes to business and foreign affairs, which, in part read:

> "Before I set my body on fire, I would like to make following demands to the government of Nepal and appeal that those demands are fulfilled… My appeal to all.

[44] Source: https://kathmandupost.com/visual-stories/2023/01/25/youths-protest-demanding-justice-for-prem-prasad-acharya (Accessed: 18/02/2023).

> Let this country enable people to work and live, let those who work hard be rewarded, let there be good to all… This is my revolution; I challenge the concerned parties to prove what I have written above wrong. The problems I faced are the national problems. But why does nobody speak up?” [45]

His message epitomised his plight not merely as an entrepreneur but also as a Nepali citizen who had been let down by the Nepali system – rife with nepotism, corruption, and bureaucratic barriers among numerous other issues, all of which he had failed to overcome despite his sincere efforts. He shared his personal journey from trying to find a job and the bankruptcy of his travel agency to going abroad to work in Qatar, followed by his attempt to establish a small business upon his return, which only dragged him deeper into a quagmire of debt. He described a lack of support from the Nepali government and demands for bribes from government authorities by declaring that “they all loot in this country. The police and the government in the name of tax”, furthering his frustration about an unsuccessful grant application, on which he wrote “while I then realised that for one to be able to get the government grant, one either has to be a political representative, or a political cadre or be able to bribe the officials who provide such grants.”[46]

His message also included a section directed towards the Prime Minister *Pushpa Kumar Dahal*, stating:

> “You led the people’s war taking the lives of 17000 people and led the country to federal republic but could do nothing for the youths like us who want to do something on our own in the country…[47] If Europe, America, Canada, Australia, and Japan easily provide

[45] Source: https://www.nepallivetoday.com/2023/01/25/a-painful-case-prem-acharyas-suicide-exposes-ills-of-private-sector-business-corrupt-political-system-and-indifferent-state/ (Accessed: 22/02/2023).

[46] Ibid.

[47] Hope for peace, political stability and prospect for economic growth had captured the hearts and minds of many Nepalis after the end of a decade long civil war in 2006. The resultant peace process, which included an integration or demobilisation of thousands of Maoist soldiers from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has also led to a sense of disillusionment among many Maoist cadres who fought to bring change in the country, who were forgotten by everybody including the Maoist leadership (Aljazeera, 2012). This was also echoed by some of my interlocutors, where one alluded to the Maoist fighters by stating: “*Jungle ma gayo tara key payo? Neta haru ley*

visas to the Nepalis, there will be nobody in this country. The country will be empty. You become the PM of an empty country."

Acharya's case captures both the everyday conditions and burden of many Nepalis, accumulated in public frustrations and discontent in the actions of politicians and their failings in facilitating a strong and supportive state for its citizens. As a researcher, it is hardly surprising that finding a firm footing in the political terrain of Nepal is as challenging as walking the Himalayas in the country itself, particularly in consideration of the political changes and instability since the turn of the century. Furthermore, discussions on politics are rarely a straightforward task in Nepal. At least from my own personal (and fieldwork) experience as a Nepali from a very young age, I have always sensed a somewhat nonchalant tolerance towards the topic of politics in everyday exchanges with people or friends and family.

This observation was reminiscent in my interaction with a young chirpy taxi driver during a taxi journey in Kathmandu. On the back of the driver seat facing towards the passenger was a polite handwritten notice scribbled across the orange seat covering with a black marker in Nepali, which in hindsight, I felt fittingly captured his demeanour and persona. The message even included a small sketch of a cigarette followed by these words:

> "Please do not smoke inside this taxi. This is a communal means of transport and not your private vehicle. If you are unable to follow this request, you are not a human being but a domestic animal. Always stay far away from the habit of smoking."

When I spoke to him about the written message among other things, he had replied with a chuckle – "What to do brother? *Estai chha Nepal ma* – It is what it is in Nepal. Otherwise, people do whatever they feel like. *Netaharu* (Politicians) are too busy *'khane'* (eating) [48] or *'goji ma halne'* (filling their own pockets)."

In Nepal, it is quite normal for people to dismiss or joke about any dialogues related to politics or politicians, garnered largely by a view that it is nothing but simply a game of powerplay,

---

kurchi payo, tara tini haru ley ta key na kei na kei." (They went to the Jungle, but what did they receive? The leaders got their political chairs, but they got nothing).

Source: https://www.aljazeera.com/program/witness/2012/12/31/the-disillusioned-soldier (Accessed: 01/03/2023).

[48] "*Eating Money*" is a common metaphor in Nepal when referring to bribes or corruption.

corruption and personal gain, while threads of any enduring conversations on the topic are often knotted in criticisms or antagonism against the government along with its incapacities. This was certainly the case among many of my interactions with people in Nepal – who spoke bluntly about the shortcomings of the government and politicians alike in continually failing to address public concerns from transportation to education and employment, among others. While indeed some expressed optimism and rested their hopes on Nepal's potential for endless opportunities as a nation, including its recognition as a major player in the international stage, many of my interlocutors often spoke about local politicians with pessimism – making insinuations about the abuse of power and corruption or nepotism, manipulation, and incompetence. Some were even in agreement that most Nepali politicians deserve a public thrashing of sorts, while one epitomised similar feelings by asserting that it was impossible to understand politics in Nepal due to its volatility and continuous qualms, making it more akin to a game of 'musical chairs'– with the same old political players taking turns at the high chair to grasp power at every opportunity, only to benefit immensely on a personal level at the expense of the Nepali people.[49] A shop vendor in Kathmandu once blurted out that Nepal's messy politics was nothing short of a *'jatra'* (a festival, a carnival or a large spectacle)!.

Hage (2003) asserts that to think about hope as a social category is both an exceptionally exhilarating and an exceptionally frustrating exercise.[50] He describes how the language of hope can relate to aspirations as something simple as 'hoping for world peace' or 'hoping for sunshine', there is also a significant difference between "hope as a momentary feeling and hopefulness as an enduring state of being," or "hoping as an affective practice, something that one does, and hope as an affect, something that one has" (ibid.:10). In my own research I found

[49] Nepal's current Prime Minister, Pushpa Kumar Dahal (also known by his *nom de guerre* "Prachanda" meaning fierce or terrible, the former Maoist guerilla who led the decade long Maoist insurgency in Nepal), is currently serving his third term as the PM of Nepal.

Source: (https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nepals-ex-guerrilla-chief-set-become-new-prime-minister-2022-12-25/) (Accessed: 01/03/2023).

[50] For Hage, this exhilarating aspect pertains to understanding human subjects as 'hoping subjects,' coupled with thinking about societies as sources where hopefulness and social opportunities are generated and distributed offers fresh and inspiring ways of examining and grasping social life – through the rich engagements of feelings, discourses and practices articulated to hope, which seep into social life. However, examining hope also echoes a sense of frustration as something as vague as life, given the multitude of meanings and implications connected with it.

this tension and complementarity between momentary fleeting hope and its more long-term prospects to be an ongoing juggling act whereby in one moment interlocutors were wrapped up in either/or both. Following Farran et al. who regard hope as an elusive, mysterious, and "soft" concept due to its variable use as a verb, noun and an adjective and Averill et al. who emphasise the affective, cognitive and behavioural expressions of hope, Hage further contends that what complicate ideas about hope is that it is "associated with many other concepts that have approximately similar significations, and these both clarify and blur what it actually means. For instance, optimism, fear, desire, wishing, wanting, dreaming, waiting and confidence are among many other terms all associated with hope and hoping. Nevertheless, despite the plurality of meanings, attitudes and practices that constitute the discourse of hope, there is still something important that unifies them: all those terms express in one way or another modes in which human beings relate to their future" (ibid.: 10). It is precisely this future orientation that has a tremendous impact on migrant ideas and practices.

Hage's analysis of hope, however, raises a critical point – although societal hope allows people to invest themselves in social reality, hope itself is distributed unequally in society.[51] This is indeed the case in Nepal were social status and caste and their ensuing networks creates contexts in which some are in a position to be more or less hopeful than others. As Hage analyses how capitalist societies do not produce and distribute hope simply through the apparatus of national identification but also by inspiring the possibility of upward social mobility. He emphasises how capitalism's hegemony of the ideological concept of hope renders it as a universal making it tantamount to notions of better-paid jobs, access to commodities and improved lifestyles. Furthermore, Hage is concerned with capitalism's effect on inter-generational reproduction of class positions, which stimulate beliefs in possibilities of upward social mobility, through circulation of narratives and experiences of people themselves (ibid.:13-14). Hence, the power of societal hope enables people to live lives believing in the possibility of upward social mobility without actually experiencing it. Such an effectual presence of hope – which play out between the tensions of what is possible in migratory endeavours, and the reality of everyday experiences of migration is profoundly reminiscent

[51] Hage also refers to the work of Jules Michelet, whose analysis deals with the historical shift and rise of nationalism that began in the late 18th century through to the 19th century, thus capturing "… the birth of the ideal imaginary of the European nation-state proper: a state committed to distribute hope, to 'foster life' as Foucault has put it, within a society whose borders coincide with the borders of the nation itself' (Hage, 2003:15).

among many of my Nepali interlocutors. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly faced questions from individuals about life in *bidesh* in comparison to Nepal, including collective reflections on Nepali people's overwhelming attraction with *bidesh*, as one individual put it, *"aakhir bidesh ma testo key chaa? Sab Nepali haru bahira tira matra lagchha…"* – after all, what is so special in *bidesh*? Nepali people only seem to want to go out.

Although such questions may be viewed as a matter of curiosity, they are also imbued with imaginary ideas expressed through assumptions about conditions abroad – from better living standards and health facilities to government structures and also how happy or hardworking people were, and so forth.[52] For example, my interactions with Shiva, an individual in Nepal can illustrate these points. When I first I met Shiva in late 2020, he was still making a steady recovery from a serious health condition, which had compelled him to return to Nepal from Portugal prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. I got acquainted with Shiva through a mutual friend from Pyarjung, since he had married a Gurung girl from Pyarjung village. Shiva was a *Shrestha* from the Newar caste and had lived in Kathmandu all his life until he had decided to go to Portugal. My first memory of Shiva was that of a man who looked beyond his years, and I recall how his wife had cautioned me in jest: "*Dai* (elder brother) just ignore him if he keeps on yapping because he can keep on talking nonstop..." Although Shiva was only 28 years old, his meek eyes sank deep into his gaunt face between his protruding cheek bones, while his dishevelled facial hair and lines across his small forehead complemented his lanky frame, making him appear frail at first glance. However, Shiva was always eager to strike a conversation with people, although his speech was slow and slurred, and only partially discernible. Every time he uttered something, his words struggled to find form, as if they were entangled behind his tongue, eventually losing their potency.

During one of my more recent meetings with Shiva when I visited Nepal in 2023, he seemed to be in a much healthier condition, although he was still undergoing medical rehabilitation.

[52] Some Nepalis, I have met in the UK have also often expressed their surprise at the number of homeless people begging for money in the UK, which was beyond their thinking prior to arriving in the UK from Nepal. Similarly, one person in Gumi Vilage, Surkhet also described an anecdote about a tourist, who had once visited his village and was observing a few men constructing a stone wall on the road: "We thought that this foreigner man would be very rich and have lots of money… and then it turns out that he was just a brick layer, when we asked him about his job back in his country."

He was living with his mother, wife, and four-year-old son in a property in Kathmandu, which he had received as an inheritance from his father. While his family occupied the top floor, the bottom two floors were rented out to various tenants and small businesses, which generated a handsome income. We chatted over some tea and biscuits, while Shiva shared some of his experiences from his time in Portugal. Shiva had left for Portugal together with his younger brother in 2019, and both had managed to find work as fruit pickers in a fruit farm. However, after about 6 months in Portugal, he had suffered from a sudden stroke one day while at work and was in a critical condition in hospital for a while before eventually returning to Nepal, with the help of many Nepalis in Portugal.

As he showed me a few scars across his hands, he remarked: "I have picked apples… strawberries… tomatoes with these very hands… it is hard work, but one can earn about 600-700 Euros a month, but locals work only a day or two during the weekends and they easily earn about 200 Euros…imagine the difference…" When I also asked him what he thought about Portugal as a country, he replied "the country is nice and the people too… I even made some good friends there who still message me on Facebook, and tell me that they will visit Nepal one day… I have informed them that they can come and stay at my house… *Ma ta kasto chakka parey* – I was really surprised, when I saw the number of Nepali people in Portugal... all these various events and communities like Gurung society, Magar society, Tamang society… and people were wearing cultural attire, gold, and silver jewelleries, just like they would in Nepal… I would have never thought that…" As Shiva continued to share his other experiences, he informed me that his brother was still working in Portugal and in retrospect, he regretted that his father had to spend a lot of money for him and his brother. He further added: "I would rather stay here in Nepal and live with whatever satisfaction I can get from being with my family… there is no point going there… it is hard work… the farm owners offer jobs to the Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis but even they are not willing to do this sort of work, so they hire mainly Nepalis… we are hardworking but there is also not much else we can do…" Shiva also mentioned something peculiar regarding his own *bhagya*: *"Hami jasto paapi lai etai thik cha...uta baira gayera kehi kam chaina"* – For sinners like us, it is better to stay here in Nepal… there is no point in going out. While I discuss the notion of *bhagya* in Nepal as related strongly to local idioms of (mis)fortune, luck, destiny, or fate in the final chapter of my thesis, I wondered why Shiva felt that he was a *paapi* (sinner) However, I did not have the chance to probe this further at the time of our conversation. Nonetheless, I surmise that Shiva's contemplation is a reference to his unfortunate accident in Portugal alongside remorse for his

own past actions, and a realisation that his circumstances might just have been different, for the better, had he never gone to Portugal in the first place. I continue to probe such dilemmas in the following sections of this chapter.

3.3 Should We Stay or Should We Go?

I had requested a motorbike ride on the popular *Pathao* app to *Boudha*, a world heritage site near the airport in Kathmandu to meet a friend one gloomy evening. In a few seconds a notification popped up on my phone screen – "Jeevan has accepted your request". This was followed by an immediate phone call from my driver, who confirmed my pick up location and in a matter of minutes a blue motorbike was in front of my gate.[53] As we wheeled steadily along the ever busy ring road, I had been discussing various issues regarding the difficulties of public transportation in Kathmandu with *Jeevan*, including a recent violent altercation between a group of taxi drivers and *Pathao* drivers.[54]

However, midway through the journey, a sudden downpour left me shuffling strategically behind *Jeevan* at the back of the motorbike, while I lamented my lack of any protective gear. The relentless rain compelled us to seek cover under the shelter of a petrol station at the intersection just off *Tinkune park.* *Jeevan* adjusted the motorbike adeptly within the premises of the petrol station, avoiding the many crawling cars, motorbikes, and scooters, like an army of ants scurrying back to their nest to avoid the rain. *Jeevan* also retrieved a large two-person raincoat designed specifically for motorbikes from his side bag and covered himself with it,

---

[53] *Pathao*, a transportation service *app*, offering mainly two-wheeler vehicles – motorbikes and scooters is a popular go to option for getting around the city at relatively cheaper prices than regular taxis, or the hassle of frequently overcrowded and sluggish public buses and vans in the capital. *Pathao's* appeal is also facilitated via its precise pick up and drop off location options for customers coupled with its quicker journey time as a two-wheeler in comparison to taxis and buses in Kathmandu's congested and chaotic traffic.

[54] At the same time, *Pathao's* popularity has also led to abundant conflicts between *Pathao* riders and regular taxi drivers in the city, given the dissatisfaction of the latter collective about losing a large chunk of its potential customers to the former. Taxis have a notorious reputation for overcharging people in Kathmandu, since taxi drivers rarely agree to journey via meter determined rates, while also rejecting customers for any short-haul distances. As such, haggling is very common to establish an agreement between customers and taxi drivers prior to setting off on a journey to avoid any confrontations. On most occasions, a supplementary amount (of about 100 Nepali Rupees or more depending on the destination) on top of the meter rate is also deemed adequate for both parties.

while politely requesting me to adjust accordingly with a smile. He put his phone inside a small plastic to prevent it from the rain while also offering me the option to do the same, which I declined respectfully.

So what do you do *bhai?* – He asked me with interest as we waited for the rain to subside. I informed him that I was a PhD researcher looking to learn about the migratory experience of Nepalis, mainly of those seeking to go abroad or had experience of *'baidesik rojgaar'* (foreign employment).

"Oho! Ekdum ramro! – Wow! really good! You seem to have chosen the perfect topic for us Nepalis. Even I worked in Malaysia for 13 years", he replied with an eager chuckle. When I probed further about his experience, he explained that he had worked in liaison with the immigration department in Malaysia and that his work entailed dealing with Nepali workers in Malaysia. While he did not elaborate on details about his actual work or time in Malaysia, he identified deeply with the plight and struggles of many Nepalis, not only those working in *bidesh,* but also at home:

"I have had my fair share of working in *bidesh* and living in separation from my family. I thought why not come back and do something in my own country – *afnai desh ma kehi garum vanera*. This is why I returned… But then look at the state of our country. It is very difficult for us Nepalis – *dherai garo chha ni Nepali janta lai*. The Maoists came to power… monarchy was abolished and replaced by *loktantra* –democracy and *euta naya Sambidhan* – new constitution…yet everything is still the same… Just look at all the *sarkari* (government) schools in the country – the teachers are least concerned about education because regardless of whether students come to class or not, they will still receive their salary, and that is what matters for them. It is a government job after all with a fixed salary. I also work as a teacher in the private sector but when you consider our role and salary, and then compare it to that of *sarkari* schools it is just ridiculous. And how are we to take our nation forward?"

As we resumed our journey amid the mild drizzle, *Jeevan* continued to share his thoughts about the political normalcy in Nepal coupled with a serious lack of any real job opportunities for people in the country, much of which were familiar to me, since these were common issues touched upon frequently by people during my conversations in Nepal. Echoing the detrimental concerns of political corruption and nepotism in Nepal, he noted that securing a government job in Nepal was tantamount to winning a lottery, while without contacts or *'afno manche'* in

Nepal it would not only be difficult to find a job in Nepal but to survive altogether, especially in a place like Kathmandu:

"One must know someone or have contacts here otherwise it is very difficult – *ekum garo chha*. The politics is useless since all our taxes are pocketed by politicians. Imagine all the thousands of *berojgaar* Nepalis due to a lack of opportunities here in Nepal, which is why they are all flocking outside. But how are people going to places like Qatar and Dubai meant to manage on a salary of about 30-40 thousand Nepali rupees? Imagine how much one must save up after paying for their own living costs there, and then also manage the expenses for their families in Kathmandu – the rent or school fees for their children, and then *khanu launu* – food and clothes! And now with the whole *Coronavirus* situation, it has become even more difficult, which is why I do this *pathao* job on a part-time basis. Plus, it is easy, I can do it whenever I am free or feel like it on this old *pulsar* bike of mine."

Throughout my fieldwork in Nepal, similar conversations were rarely afar during my everyday interactions with people in numerous spaces, from cafés, shops or marketplaces and public buses to government offices and hotels, among others. *Jeevan's* narrative and outlook is by no means exceptional. More crucially, his reflections surpass his own individual position as a Nepali and extend outwards to the collective concerns of many Nepalis, while also capturing a sense of a recognised normalcy in political and socio-economic conditions in Nepal including people's engagements with them. Much like the tragic situation of *Prem Prasad Acharya* described earlier or the Royal massacre of 2003, my brief meeting with *Jeevan* in many ways echoes a collective or societal experience of hope in Nepal. Events often give rise to moments of hope or 'hopeful moments' as described by Hage (2003) where people's disappointments are trapped in stagnating conditions of local politics, ultimately seeping into social and economic life. Similarly, Bryant and Knight (2019) emphasise that the teleoaffect of hope delves into an anthropological understanding of mobilisation of virtuality at the collective level, since while anticipation and expectation gather force within the space of experience, hope arises at the moment when experience is frustrated.[55] Or in other words, hope is also predicated

[55] Drawing on Theodore Schatzki's practice theory on society as the 'site of the social' (Schatzki argues that social worlds emerge and social practices make spaces which are inherently temporal, interwoven into 'practice arrangement bundles'), Bryant and Knight propose a notion of 'teleoaffective structures' – timespaces enable people to work towards the future or towards specific goals. As such all future orientations are teleoaffects

upon one's experience as lagging behind something desired – this resonates strongly with Bloch's conception that hope is often the domain of daydreams – conjured through images, mass media, fiction, and technologies of the imagination, which I extend on in my later chapter on dreams. Narratives from my interlocutors were regularly weaved within Nepal's historical and political instances exemplify such hopeful moments – often saturated with optimism or yearnings for better change, while simultaneously also encumbered with disappointment and lament. These encompassed allusions to various past or ongoing national events, such as living in fear of the *Maubadis* (Maoists) during the troubled civil war years, the abolishment of Monarchy and hope for a "Naya Nepal" (New Nepal) in the post-war period when the Maoists secure an overwhelming victory during the 2008 democratic elections or the years of frustrating wait in the promulgation of the national constitution, or the devastating 2015 earthquake that crippled Nepal. While indeed, the COVID- 19 pandemic also contributed significantly to these lingering political and socioeconomic implications, recent events such as the (ongoing) situation surrounding Nepal's MCC (Millennium Corporation Challenge)[56] compact or the appointment of *Balen Shah*, a rapper/music artist turned politician as the Mayor of Kathmandu, bring forth pertinent understandings of collective hope, intertwined with public participation, national sentiments, and hope for change in Nepal. Oddly, I first gained attention about the MCC during my fieldwork from a Nepali comedy TV program, which parodied the MCC's ensuing concerns in Nepal's political and public discourse, coupled with public jokes regarding the matter. These were often in reference to puzzling debates regarding the costs and benefits of MCC in Nepal, amongst both the public and politicians in the country. Numerous public protests including rumours and concerns about the US simply taking over Nepal as an attempt to curtail the influence of neighbouring China (and India) in the region, raised questions about the MCC as a developmental programme or a geopolitical apparatus.[57] Similarly, the appointment of *Balen Shah* as the mayor of Kathmandu is particularly useful in situating societal hope in the collective sense, which resonates strongly with Obama's electoral campaigns and appointment to office in demonstrating the verve of hope to stimulate and unify

according to Bryant and Knight which brings together sets of practices that include various related actions and outcomes undertaken by people.

[56] Further details on the MCC can be found online at: https://www.mcc.gov/where-we-work/program/nepal-compact/ (Accessed: 22/06/2023).

[57]As of 2023, the MMC project has officially come into force following its ratification in the national parliament.

public opinion through optimistic rhetoric, promises of change, and the generation of a set of expectations with powerful affects.[58] After all, the poetics and politics of hope can be powerful aphrodisiacs (Battaglia, 2017: 273) and yet hope can also be cruel in that it hangs before one without its realistic possibility for successful fulfilment (Berlant, 2011), while also becoming a hindrance towards happiness and flourishing, and what Aristotle refers to as *'eudaimonia'* (Kraut, 2022). As Nietzsche so aptly put it "hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man" pointing toward an inevitable life-long quest toward something likely not achievable (1984:58). This notion of being misled by myths is also discussed by Ferguson (1999) in the context of migration to the Zambian Copperbelt whereby he describes how modernity is premised on the notion of myth and ideas of hope in its imaginary of the future alongside rural and urban life.

In many ways while hope has the potential to build momentum, it can also lose momentum, thus leaving one with a feeling of 'disenchantment' as described by Weber (Lehmann, 2008), confusion or 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2003), especially within the fabric of national politics as in the case of Nepal. While I draw on societal hope/s by within such ideas of hope within the locus of everyday migratory experience or a notion of "*bidesh jane chalan"*[59] (trend of going abroad) as commonly alluded to by many Nepalis, it is ostensible that sparks of societal or collective hope (or a lack of hope) are firmly situated vis-a-vis the political landscape in Nepal. This is critical, since the intensity of such collective hopes permeate vigorously into the everyday experience of individuals, which in turn also unfold with varying degrees in the migration trajectories of people. To extend such an understanding of hope, it is useful to both recognise hope as something that is unevenly distributed (Hage, 2003) that has a tremendous capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2013). In this way, hope provides a useful analytical lens to recognise hope within the migratory experiences of my interlocutors. Equally critical to this study is the idea that hope is a form of 'futural momentum' – directed into future(s) 'that attempts to pull certain potentialities into actuality' (Bryant and Knight, 2019:134). From the

[58] After the 2016 presidential elections, Obamatime was succeeded by the Trumposcene, with Donald Trump coming to power on his own hope-filled message for a different audience and promise to "Make America Great Again."

[59] This was a phrase used commonly in Nepal by many people to express the regularity or common undertaking of going abroad.

various ethnographic instances illustrated earlier, hope can be seen as an affective emotion, appearing to thrust individuals and collectives towards a future, including the personal, the political or collective change for something better. Moreover, future here is not simply that of dreams and desires but also about an unrealised potential or a future that *was* or *is* blocked. A case in point is when Barack Obama took over the U.S. Presidential Office in 2008 – driven by notions of *hope, progress, change*, amidst a sense that the nation was slipping away from its position of "leader of the Free world" (ibid.).[60] Similarly, another example is when Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his eminent "I have a dream" speech to those present at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC in 1963, where his words were directed towards a collective realisation of hope to the dream of "one day", that only by acting in present that this dream could be actualised and transformed through hope and unyielding belief.[61]

3.4 *Bhavishya:* Futural Momentum of Hope

In the *Principle of Hope* (1986), Ernst Bloch offers a critical examination of hope, which captures the Nepali migrant contexts in this study, by focusing on the possibilities of utopian futures through his notion of the 'not-yet', which he describes as a future potential toward an indeterminate something that is yet to happen. For Bloch, this idea of the not-yet and its connection to an anticipatory consciousness about the yet-to-come future is strongly entwined with continued ways of 'wishful images' often disseminated in fairy tales, fictions, theatre, and travel writing. According to Bryant and Knight (2019), such images play a part in the affective time space and are influential towards a project of future oriented actions – "the images are both part of a range of acceptable or known teleoaffects and readily accessible technologies of imagination that provide momentum toward an indeterminate *something*" (ibid.:135). Bloch's focus on the future is placed not on social relations in the present but rather what they might

---

[60] A sense of hope returning to politics in the past two decades - Obama's campaign presidential campaign and victory were saturated with messages of hope for change epitomised through "Yes we can" slogan, or the "pots and pans revolution" in Iceland in 2009, the rise of the Arab Spring in 2010, Occupy wall street 2011, Austerity crisis in Greece 2015 campaign brought a radical left-wing Syriza party to power through campaigns such as "hope is on its way" and "hope begins today" (Kleist and Jansen, 2016) – the reflection here in on 'change' however these should not be considered in modernist narratives of progress, but it is a better world understood in particular ways (example Graeber 2008- "ethics of revolutionary practice").

[61] Source: https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety (Accessed: 01/03/2023).

become, because unlike contemplative knowledge,[62] which only considers actuality without leaving space for potentiality, hope emerges from the unbecome, tendencies or latencies that are as-yet-unrealised potentials, which Bryant and Knight (2019) call the otherwise-than-actual. In other words, hope as a futural orientation enables a connection between potentiality and actuality. While a core aspect of potentiality is the potential not-to-be, to remain otherwise-than-actual, it is the immanence of as-yet-unrealised potential that becomes a resource for hope (ibid.). Given such an understanding, Bloch's argument seems highly pertinent in my own research in Nepal, in that there are opportunities in the everyday to identify and activate dormant potentialities relevant to both the individual and community. Hence, it is not only possible for hope to emerge, when a potential is not yet realised, or impeded, but also to activate its potentiality or provide a driving force for potential into the future actual, which can accelerate forms of movement toward an undefined but qualitatively different future (ibid.). Crucial here is Bloch's notion of hope as ongoing movement – as constantly in motion – with a propensity, a tendency, towards something. Bryant and Knight also view this potentiality as a demonstration of hope's movement rather than its positionality in a theory of becoming: "If potentiality emerges in the gap between rest and movement, the moment where there is still the possibility to not-be, the seeds of hope are planted where there is the emergence of indeterminate potential breaking forth into the realm of the actual… Hope drives us into the future at a speed, captured, for instance, when social movements or election campaigns are said to be "gathering momentum" or in the metaphor of "the snowball effect" where something initially insignificant builds into an unstoppable force. What might start out as collective wishful thinking gathers momentum to bring improbable desires from the realm of potentiality to actuation. In this sense, hope is the pursuit of materializing the otherwise-than-actual" (2019: 136-137).

In following Bloch, hope may be found in the everyday moments of emergent potentiality where potential "has not yet been defeated, but likewise has not yet won" (1986: 340–341), to understand *where hope comes from* and it what forms it thrives, is maintained, or diminishes. The ethnographic instances presented earlier involving both *Acharya* and *Jeevan* explicates such a case of Nepali people's everyday experiences of politics, furthered by an ineffectiveness

[62] "Contemplative knowledge is by definition solely knowledge of what can be contemplated, namely of the past, and it bends an arch of closed form-contents out of Becomeness over the Unbecome" (Bloch: 1986: 6)

of state representatives to generate conditions of social and economic sufficiency for its citizens – also generating reasons for many Nepalis to leave the country. However, in many ways it is also the potentiality of hope that many of my interlocutors refer to – as something that exists in abundance in Nepal yet remains (and continues to remain) unfulfilled and inaccessible for its citizens causing many Nepalis to seek hope elsewhere in *bidesh*. As such, societal hope indicates a sort of paradox in the context of Nepali migration –as a form of hope which exists readily in the everyday lives of people, but only as a something charged with potentiality awaiting its fulfilment. This relates closely to an understanding of hope in the everyday as unrealised potentialities "in flux" (Thompson, 2013:3), and that includes a temporalised sense of potential of having a future (Mar, 2005) thus elucidating hope's potentiality in time and space – to accommodate a belief in future's capacity to become future. Nonetheless, bringing something hoped-for one step closer to the actual also allows one to project into the future through dreams and the imagination – as potentialities, which according to Bloch (1986) and Taussig et al. (2013) are also political orientations.

Bloch's analysis on disappointment or the ways that potential is always only partially realised offers valuable insights. He notes: "The first underlying factor here is that the Here and Now stands too close to us. Raw experience transposes us from the drifting dream into another state: into that of immediate nearness. The moment just lived dims as such, it has too dark a warmth, and its nearness makes things formless. The Here and Now lacks the distance which does indeed alienate us but makes things distinct and surveyable. Thus, from the outset, the immediate dimension within which realization occurs seems darker than the dream-image, and occasionally barren and empty" (Bloch, 1986: 180–181). Nepal's own unrealised potential as a nation on the international stage is stressed upon regularly by many in Nepal yet not always with such optimistic referents as those employed by Obama and King. Many Nepali references are often woven within the fabric of political stagnation and corruption. For example, people often point out the lack of proper management and utilisation of natural resources, holding back Nepal from becoming a successful nation on the international stage, as mentioned by one individual: "We have such a rich religious and cultural diversity … we are the birthplace of Buddha, and possess so much natural beauty…rivers, lakes, and mountains in the world-famous Himalayas to attract tourists… We are not very different from Switzerland, even they are a small landlocked country but look at them, and where they stand…" Furthermore, allusions to Nepal's vast and rich hydropower potential are also common, but many are quick to mention the frequent and frustrating amounts of *loadshedding* or power outages faced by

Nepalis over the years, which has been a major source of public frustration. Ever since the political changes of 1990s, promises or sparks of hope towards Nepal reaching its full potential have been manifested through acts and ideas of waiting, disappointment and hoping, commonly gleaned through such collective public discernments. It is amid such similar concerns that Dor Bahadur Bista (1991) offers a critical stance on the notion of a fatalistic culture rooted in ideas and values defined by the caste system in Nepal (and normalised by the higher *brahamins* or priestly caste) which he argues has not only plagued but also held back the development of Nepal. His seminal work, *Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle for Modernization,* strongly resonates such a complex interweaving of inefficiency, uncertainty and chaos within Nepal's social and political structures, thus laying the conditions for a fatalistic attitude towards life in Nepal.[63] This is epitomised in the rhetoric use of general Nepali expressions such as '*Nepal ma estai ho'* – It is always like this in Nepal, or '*Nepal ma sab chalcha'* – Everything is acceptable in Nepal*, or 'bhai halcha'* – It is all ok, to convey sarcasm, lament, or the normality of things in the country, particularly with issues pertaining to development or public culture.

Disappointment, then, according to Bloch, is the recognition that actualisation never realises all potentials, and that the paradox that dreams appear "firmer or at any rate brighter than its realisation" (ibid.: 181). However, this is where hope takes its shape: "In each fulfilment, in so far and in as much as this is even possible totaliter, there remains a peculiar element of hope whose mode of being is not that of the existing or currently existing reality, and which is consequently left over together with its content" (ibid.: 186). Such a residual potentiality of hope as asserted by Bloch, is precisely what Bryant and Knight (2019) argue produces hope's futural orientation. Extending on what Miyazaki terms motion and what Massumi calls movement, Bryant and Knight use the term *temporal momentum* to indicate hope's residual potentiality. This subtle variation provided by Bryant and Knight in their use of the term *momentum* rather than motion or movement is that momentum is by definition teleological – it is always an impetus toward something. By espousing this understanding of momentum, Bryant and Knight seek to retain the indeterminacy of potentiality, or in other words the

---

[63] Dor Bahadaur Bista is widely considered as the Father of Nepali Anthropology, while his work expresses a strong polemic stance against the *brahamins* and other groups considered to be of higher castes in the hierarchy of the Hindu caste-system. Bista went missing under mysterious circumstances in 1995. More details about his personal life can be found online at: https://ecs.com.np/features/dor-bahadur-bista-the-father-of-nepalese-anthropology (Accessed: 11/10/2023).

possibility for it 'to be' and 'not to be,' while also entails the notion of an ends characterised by the sort of indeterminate teleology they posit as essential for any anthropology of the future (ibid). This is important when discussing hope in the context of migration in Nepal because it is such a momentum directed towards the future among many Nepalis in their migratory pursuits and experiences in *bidesh*, which are tied intensely to myriad potentialities and disappointments of hope. My discussions on notions of waiting and dreams in the forthcoming chapters of this thesis also capture such a sense of hope's futural momentum in relation to people's life accomplishments, dilemmas, and setbacks within the everyday fold of migration. Furthermore, understandings regarding the myriad potentialities of Nepal as a nation – as I have illustrated, when positioned within the tensions and realities that play out between people's hopes and disappointment of the state and its representatives also echoes Thompson and Zizek's (2013) *the Privatization of Hope*, which espouses Bloch's considerations of hope towards the future and illustrates a strong case for construing hope in its collective form, beyond realms of individual desires and aspirations towards a collective pursuit.

Miyazaki's work on the *Method of Hope* (2004) is predicated upon the combination of teleology and determinate futures, in which hope is considered as both an indeterminate future and also a method. Miyazaki's ethnographic focus on the indeterminacy of hope follows Bloch's critique of teleological understandings of truth as the essence of life in Greek philosophical traditions about humanity and history. For Miyazaki the future will not unfold in accordance with a plan or by way of realisation of an imminent teleology, but rather as Rorty (1999:18) put it, "the future will astonish and exhilarate" (as cited in Miyazaki 2004: 15). Indeterminacy, as such, is a crucial feature of Miyazaki's theory of hope as method, which he asserts through the actions of Suvavou people in Fiji in their claims for government compensations for displacement from their ancestral land in the 1880s. He notes that although Suvavou people's engagements with hope in forms of official or historical documents and evidences, rituals and oral stories etc., are met with continuous refutations by the Fijian government, the efforts of the Suvavou people remain persistent. While Miyazaki's analysis maintains an open-ended and flexible multiplicity of hope, Jansen (2016) offers a more nuanced understanding of hope by focusing on the particular sociohistorical timespaces within which hope emerges. Jansen's analysis alludes to hope as a distinct preference for particular futures beyond that of hope as an indeterminate attachment to a potential future as proposed by Miyazaki. According to Jansen, hope is attached to a specific object, with a particular temporal end – as imagined and desired among his Sarajevan informants for the Bosnian national team's

victory in a soccer match. Jansen also proposes an analytical distinction between two modalities of the term hope: *intransitive and transitive* – the former refers to an affect, or "hopefulness" (ibid.: 448) lacking a focus on any particular hope oriented at a specific object; while the second form is a modality with an object, or as *hopes*, to be understood as "hopes for/that" (ibid.: 449). Jansen makes a case for such a distinction of hope in his ethnographic exploration of sporting events (example of a soccer match), where one may experience both modalities of hope at the same time –one of being hopeful, and also hoping for a precise outcome through a win. Jansen's expands on his distinction between hope's intransitive modality (hopefulness) or in its transitive one (hopes), by further suggesting four dimensions towards an analytical operational notion of hope necessary for productive scholarly and ethnographic dialogue, which I discuss concisely below.

Jansen's first suggestion that hope refers to (sets of) dispositions that conditions practices, is also extended upon by Bryant and Knight (2019) who espouse Schatzki's notion of *teleoaffect,* which brings together a set of practices that also include various related actions and outcomes undertaken by people. As such, all future orientations are teleoaffects according to Bryant and Knight, in the sense that they also allow for epochal terms of vernacular timespaces with outcomes that are concurrently concrete and indeterminate, going beyond Jansen's analysis of a 90-minute soccer match with its own teleology organised by the "practice bundle". Second, in relation to the first concerns the future as encapsulated in the notion of dispositions, thus indicating a degree of linear temporal reasoning (not necessarily "unilinear" or "teleological") is necessary for hope to work: "Without *any* linearity in temporal reasoning, there can be no future-orientation, just as there can be no conception of a past. And with regard to such linearity, hope, then, concerns dispositions directed *forward* in time" (Jansen 2016: 454, italics original emphasis). While Jansen (2016) suggests that hope thrusts us towards the future, hence prevailing in linear time, Bryant and Knight (2019), in contrast, propose that hope is teleological, eschewing linearity in understandings of teleology, given the former's affiliation to notions of modernity and a simplistic rendering of time. For them, teleology is about "open and indeterminate ends. When we hope, we hope for something and in this sense, hope is about change. It is about wishing, believing, focusing on the possibility to actualize potentiality – although, as noted earlier, after undergoing the process of actuation the realized version of the hoped-for may only vaguely resemble its potential form" (ibid.:141). Processes of hope were surely taking place among Nepali migrants and their families in my study whereby future-oriented visions of hope were actualised through smaller scale everyday visions. Jansen's third

proposal focuses on the *positively charged* notion of hope, or "a degree, however hesitant, of expectant desire" (2016: 454) which distinguishes hopefulness as an affect alongside other co-existent concerns such as fear or avoidance. While the intensity in a belief that a desired outcome in the future may vary, I agree that it is crucial to assess the social formation of such positivity and understand its ensuing momentum towards the future(s) (Bryant and Knight, 2019).[64] Jansen's final analysis of hope concerns its indeterminacy and the associated degree of uncertainty of its outcome. As discussed earlier, in following Bryant and Knight, this may be framed as the knowledge that while many potentialities do not become actualities, *hope as futural momentum*, emerges collectively in myriad forms as teleoaffects (optimistic, pessimistic, filled with certainty, filled with yearning) during instances of mutual efforts to push potential into the future actual:

"Hope, alongside such associated orientations as faith and love, operates to produce change, bringing fragments of potential otherwises toward indeterminate ends. This is never more so the case than during election campaigns or soccer matches where there is collective investment in virtual futures, a dimension of potentiality where there is an "energy" that can be collectively sensed. Hope harnesses this hidden but profoundly felt energy – the "incorporeal materiality," the unseen capacities of other people and objects – shaping the course of collective action" (ibid.:142).

3.5 *Bidesh*: Hope Outside Nepal

Almograve, Portugal: One house, Multiple hopes

"What can people like us do in Nepal?" Dawa, a 35-year-old Nepali man told me, during a conversation along with his other Nepali housemates in their shared house in Almograve, a charming but sleepy coastal town in the Southern region of Portugal about 150 kms away from Lisbon. The town is home to a couple of cafes/restaurants (including a Nepali restaurant, where I would often hang out with the jolly young Nepali owner) and a convenience store. While there are also a couple of hotels in the area, it is a place of tranquillity and ease – lacking the

[64] Jansen recognises that understandings of hope beyond Bloch's Marxist conceptualisation of hope offer insightful contributions towards a scholarship of hope in anthropology (he also points out that Miyazaki leaves Bloch's Marxism undiscussed, while replicating his notion of hope). In a similar vein, Bryant and Knight (2019), also raise further questions, such as – What does a neo-Nazi hope and if this can be viewed as positive?

noise and activities reminiscent of Lisbon, with its stretch of picturesque coastline. I had been in Almograve for almost 2 weeks and was sharing Jonny's room during my stay there.[65]

The rest of the Nepali individuals in the house had also shown me a generous hospitality and shared their migratory experiences openly during my stay. On most days, we would chat over coffee and food, or go out on walks along the beautiful coastline when the weather was favourable, while occasionally I would join Jonny to play football in the evenings in a nearby field with other Nepalis in the area, after he finished work. The house itself is shared between seven individuals. Three girls share one large bedroom on the ground floor, while Dawa and his wife Promita, and Jonny occupy the other two bedrooms on the upper floor respectively. Their final housemate is Appisha and her two-year-old daughter, who occupy a separate detached block located at the back garden area of the house. The monthly utility bills, including food costs are also divided equally between everyone, while meal preparations and cleaning duties are also undertaken on an alternative basis.

Jonny and Dawa work together as fruit pickers in a strawberry farm, while Promita is employed as a part-time housekeeper in a nearby hotel. Two girls, Sushila and Manju, who are 26 and 22 years old respectively have only been in Portugal for about two months. They are currently unemployed but actively seeking work. Both arrived in Portugal from Cyprus by undertaking a risky and arduous journey like many other Nepalis who had arrived successfully in Portugal. They tell me that they are like sisters, since they both belong to the (Tamang) caste and are also from the same place in Nepal. The two had connected with each other in Cyprus, where they both had been working as domestic helpers (Sushila had also worked as a housekeeper prior to this) for the past three and a half years. I came to learn that their journey to reach Portugal was not straightforward, since it also involved walking in various places from Cyprus to Greece, followed by other countries like Bosnia, Macedonia, and France before entering Portugal.[66] Dawa, who himself had undertaken a similar journey and was well aware about the perils along the route added: "this is how most Nepalis come into Portugal… the most dangerous and challenging part is walking through the forest in Croatia. Luckily these two girls did not have

[65] I first met Jonny through a mutual family friend in 2013, when I had visited Nepal after the completion of my undergraduate degree. Jonny is from Pyarjung village in Nepal. As my main contact in Portugal, he had invited me to visit Almograve and stay in their shared house.

[66] According to my interlocutors these routes may vary depending on various agents, who facilitate border crossings or also what has been paid for by individuals.

to undergo that experience, since they had a slightly easier journey in comparison to ours… but still the journey is an uncertain one – one also needs luck and of course, money…"

Sushila informed me that she had spent approximately around 7-8 thousand Euros to get to Portugal in agent fees, most of which she had managed to save up from her time in Cyprus, while she borrowed the rest from her family back in Nepal. She was anxious about not being able to find any work since her arrival, partly also because her funds were running out and had jokingly asked me to take her to the UK in my luggage on several occasions. Regarding her angst about not finding any work, she said: "…even here in Portugal everything is dependent on *chineko manche* – knowing someone or having contacts, otherwise it is really difficult to find any job… Dawa and Jonny have also enquired on our behalf at the farm where they work but since it is off-season at the moment, we have been told to wait for a few months… and even in Lisbon there are hardly any hotel or restaurants jobs because there are so many Nepalis there now and the living costs are higher there…". Manju further added, "We Nepalis, we keep saying Portugal Portugal… I do not know why people come here… just look at us! we have heard that some people have not even found work for 5-6 months… *Esto para ley hunna* – this condition is not right… I might just sit with a bowl (to beg) in Rossio square in Lisbon (with a laugh) …" During a previous conversation, Sushila had also mentioned something very profound in regard with her situation, "I will not recommend of my friends and family or anyone to come here to Portugal… *Portugal ta pidhai pidhai ko desh… key pauchha bhanera ako… Kattinai* – Portugal is a country filled with agony… I came here hoping to find something… but as if…", further alluding to a common Nepali expression regarding hope, *"bhanchan ni aasha gaara tara bhaara naapara* – As they say, it is ok to hope but do not depend on it.

Dawa's views also resonates a similar sort of feeling – a common conundrum expressed among many Nepalis about lived experiences in *bidesh* and expectations prior to departure, as Dawa mentioned: "*Key sochera aucha… euta aasha huncha ni…key huncha key portugal ma manche haru* – People come to Portugal with a lot of hope… but then so many other things happen…" Having lived in Portugal longer than any of his housemates, and perhaps also coupled with his past struggles and extensive experience of working in countries like India, South Korea, Dubai, and Turkey, Dawa expressed that Portugal is not a place to work and earn a lot of money, but rather it has more to do with an opportunity to gain a Portuguese passport. He tells me that the kinds of jobs or salaries available for Nepalis or outsiders are not that great, and only enough for sustaining everyday expenses, while a flight price back to Nepal itself would require saving

up to two months of wages on its own. He adds, "it is better for one to work elsewhere, rather than going through a lot of difficult physical work in the fields in the winter." Dawa's wife added in jest that they have been buying the EuroMillions lottery ticket regularly for over a year now but are yet to win anything. Furthermore, Appisha's case also augments towards the Nepali experience of hope within the fold of migration and *bidesh*. I came to understand that Appisha had initially come to Europe on a Schengen visa as a tourist with her husband and had visited a few places before coming to Portugal.[67] However, instead of returning to Nepal after her holiday, she remained in Portugal with her daughter (illegally by overstaying her visa), while her husband, who is a Nepali army officer returned to Nepal on his own. She was not working due to her childcare responsibilities and was receiving financial support from her husband and family back in Nepal. During our numerous interactions, she openly expressed her reasons for opting to remain behind in Portugal, much like the others in the house – to eventually obtain a Portuguese citizenship, which would ensure a better future with better opportunities for her daughter, which was impossible in Nepal.[68] In a similar way, another friend, who holds a postgraduate degree from an Australian university, and is currently working for a semi-government and internationally funded organisation in Nepal's conservation sector, had once expressed similar concerns for the future of his kids in Nepal: "I will not hesitate to join this exodus should a decent opportunity arrive in *bidesh*…just look at the where the country is heading…"

While such experiences of Nepalis both at home and *bidesh* resonate profoundly with various ideas as hope and its futural momentum, as discussed throughout this chapter, such understandings of hope nonetheless co-exist in state of flux and in paradoxical ways. For instance, although Jansen's analytical distinction between the two modalities of hope as *intransitive and transitive* or being hopeful and hoping for something are certainly discernible in everyday experiences among many of my interlocutors, the indeterminacy of hope is also

---

[67] A Schengen visa is an entry permit for a short, temporary visit of up to 90 days in any 180-day period. A Schengen visa can be obtained in the form of a single-entry visa, allowing the holder to enter the Schengen area once, or a multiple-entry visa, which is granted for several visits to the Schengen area for as long as it is valid.

Source: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/visa-policy/applying-schengen-visa_en) (Accessed:10/01/2024).

[68] Jonny expressed that he hopes to eventually move to the UK after attaining a Portuguese passport in the near future.

played out incessantly in migratory undertakings. This is captured strongly through a notion that 'one can hope but one must not depend on hope' as expressed by Sushila. In this sense migratory endeavours to go to *bidesh* among Nepalis are driven by the potentialities of hope towards future but also constantly played out in conditions of indeterminacy, since many potentialities do not always become actualities. Resonating an equal significance to the continual efforts of the Suvavou people in Fiji, migratory efforts among Nepalis too, exemplify a similar sort of indeterminacy, that is played out between the not-yet and possibly not-yet-ever of potentiality (Bryant and Knight, 2019). The point I make here also pertains to my earlier discussions regarding the normality and desires among Nepalis for opting to move abroad to *bidesh*, since such desires are not simply among those who lack job opportunities or options in Nepal but also those who seemingly have a reasonable life or hold a decent socio-economic or political standing in Nepal. These unfold in the collective spaces and everyday experience of Nepalis and the state in I have discussed as societal hope. As Bryant and Knight (2019) elucidate, vernacular timespaces of hope are frequently defined, (sometimes with precise beginnings and ends) as collective endeavours, bearing momentum towards a potential that is not yet realised, as in the case of my ethnographic examples from Nepal. While indeed, hope embraces optimism in its movement towards the future, inspiring drive, energy and emotions, in the pursuit of actualising potentiality, reflections on the lives of my interlocutors in Nepal (and elsewhere), it is apparent that the sometimes the experience of hope (and its momentum) is slow and unsteady, often playing out within the fringes of an uncertain future, where migration undertakings also lead to failure, disappointment and tragedy. However, when hope is considered through the metaphor of a snowball (Bryant and Knight, 2019), the unstoppable force of hope can also thrust towards a future intensely different from one that was imagined (much like my own research that started out as a hopeful action, filled with potential that was to be carried out in Fiji, but swerved towards an unintended pathway, in a similar way to migratory journeys of many of my interlocutors who remain yet still hopeful).

3.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explored various approaches to hope within the anthropological literature while drawing closely on societal or collective hope and engaging these modes with ethnographic instances from my fieldwork by examining their interactions with more personal hopes in the experience of my interlocutors in Nepal. I have described how hope finds form and momentum among people's everyday lives by carefully analysing the role of the Nepali state and actors who generate, amplify, limit, distribute and broker hope through individual or

collective visions of the future and life away from Nepal. While these different repositories of hope are entwined amid often contrasting experiences of the potential of hope alongside not-yet futures between Nepal and *bidesh,* they offer useful ways of understanding the widely normalised conditions of going to *bidesh.* The discussions presented make a significant contribution towards an anthropological analysis of hope's futural orientation.

Chapter Four

WAITING

This chapter focuses on the notion of waiting as a critical concept and activity for Nepali migrants. I first discuss activities of waiting and the ways in which waiting is experienced – not simply as a condition of precarity but also as phenomena imbued with inspiration for actions and hopeful undertakings. By drawing on various theoretical approaches to waiting and engaging with numerous ethnographic examples, I aim to examine local understandings and experiences of 'waiting' within the social and political landscape in Nepal. In doing so, my analysis also seeks to explain how hope and imagination alongside the conditions of waiting are interwoven within migratory aspirations and undertakings, as they ongoingly shape each other and mould people's everyday experience. I first start with a brief vignette to underscore the experience of waiting among people in Nepal and how they understand or relate to it within local conditions. This is followed by discussions pertaining to waiting within anthropological debates on the anthropology of suffering and the anthropology of the good.

4.1 The Familiarity of Waiting

With a beaming smile across his face, *Hari* gestured towards the people ahead of him in the long queue with nod of his head followed by a frown, as if to express, "*estai ho eta* – this is how it is here". Only a short while ago, no sooner had we arrived at the main entrance gate of the *Yatayat* or Transport Management Office in *Ekantakuna* than a couple of men approached us with fervent eagerness. *"Dai! license renewal ho? car ko lagi ho? Eta eta...* – Brother! license renewal? or car related? Here here…", they muttered, hovering around us and fighting off each other like a prize, as one attempted to usher me towards his direction. As we persisted on our way with polite replies of "*thikai cha bhai... – it is ok brother..."* they quickly turned their gaze on the new arrivals making their entrance behind us. Such advances from individuals, who are generally referred to as *dalaals* (agents, brokers or intermediaries) in local jargon are a common occurrence in many of the government offices throughout the city pertaining to civic services from obtaining licenses, passports, citizenship cards, or official documentation related to taxes, visas and immigration, among others. *Dalaals* hold a unique position in the public sphere, since they are neither registered officials, nor are they employed by the government. However, these individuals through their inside connections to working officials manage to

bypass the normal and often tedious procedures that are rampant and expected in most public offices. It is also common knowledge, that with their service or assistance, one may avoid the inconveniences and irritations of long winding queues and bureaucratic processes in many of Nepal's government offices, hence in exchange for a (negotiable) fee, such *dalaals* offer their public patrons an informal and convenient channel that is hassle free and quick(er) when dealing with most official work. Concurrently, this echoes a local awareness and understanding of the conditions amid which public sentiments and perceptions are placed, encompassing the excessive bureaucratic processes and forms of waiting that are normalised in government offices. In this way they are part of the informal economy that surrounds migration. As Such informal brokers or mediators offer an important service to marginal peoples by "offering services to those who struggle with …hard-to-understand bureaucratic processes" that are often "imposed upon them by laws, regulations and governance that do not take their social and economic realities into consideration" (Peluso 2018: 410). Peluso (ibid.: 221) further argues that such solutions help to rehumanize participants from what Herzfeld (1993) has described as a dehumanising process. *Dalaals*, as such thrive in the informal economy at the intersection of the public and political spheres in Nepal, not simply as conduits of convenience against bureaucratic processes in the public eye, but also as representations and reminders of the Nepali state – its inadequacies and failures to deliver efficiently for its citizens.

While coerced conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic rendered waiting a normal activity, both as an individual and collective experience, my interests in its examination as a concept were equally robustly driven by my interlocutors' frequent and expressive allusions towards the acts of waiting, its conditions, and relations within an array of multifarious complexities (and actors) in Nepal. Once, during my fieldwork, while waiting for an update on a delayed flight in Kathmandu domestic airport during one of my travels in Nepal, a fellow passenger had avidly expressed that, *"We Nepalis have always been used to the act of waiting…",* and I could not help but think about the many instances of my interlocutors' dismay about the regulated electricity power cuts or loadshedding that was rampant throughout the country for years (which only subsided until very recently) when waiting had become a normalised activity when dealing with intermittent doses of electric power. The notion of 'Nepali time' that people often alluded to during my fieldwork as a sarcasm or satire on 'Nepali punctuality', especially when referring to most public responsibilities undertaken by the government – from construction of roads and buildings to organisation of public transportation or completion of official certifications etc. – drives this point home. Furthermore, after the end of the civil war

in 2006, followed by the declaration of democracy in 2008, the constitution of Nepal was promulgated only in 2015 replacing the interim constitution of 2007. During this period, the deadline for the constitution was extended four times amid ongoing disagreements over the document's details between rival political parties coupled with the devastating 2015 earthquake in the country. [69]

As such, waiting and its concomitant activities are all too familiar in Nepal. Another pivotal point of reference, often highlighted during conversations was the continuing political stagnation in the country vis-a-vis the decade long violent civil war from 1996-2006, which not only witnessed atrocities but also a *suspension* of everyday life in Nepal in the form of *bandhs.*[70] It was a period that was scarred by regular *bandhs* in the form of strikes or curfews, restricted movement of people, and controlled public activities amid a fierce violent struggle between the Maoists and the state (Monarchy and government).[71] Such frequent and erratic *bandhs* became a common facet of public life, regularly disrupting everyday activities from businesses to education and travel, among others. Often, *bandhs* were also announced overnight and haphazardly by various political factions, who restricted public travel or business operations, while defiance often resulted in violent skirmishes between individuals and or groups (including political party supporters). Meanwhile, people traveling beyond Kathmandu to other districts were required to disembark from vehicles along with their luggage and undergo security checks at regular army checkpoints dotted across the country.[72] These *bandhs* entailed ongoing disruptions which, in turned, entailed waiting.

As one elderly woman in *Surkhet* had fervently expressed, this was also a period of *daar* (fear) for most Nepalis throughout the country, lingering around as an omnipresent reminder of the precarious times, fuelled by the turn of events across the country. While much of this was

---

[69] Source: https://time.com/4037788/nepal-constitution-sushil-koirala-protests-madhesi-tharu/ (Accessed: 07/07/2023).

[70] *Bandh (or Bandha)*, which means 'close(d)', is a term used in Nepal to describe a strike or curfew.

[71] Even today, abrupt *bandhs* are still an ongoing feature of the socio-political landscape in Nepal. Also see Hutt and Onta (2017).

[72] I experienced these very conditions when travelling to and from India on long haul night or day bus services during my schooling years (which usually took between 15-18 hours of travel). In the latter years of the civil war, although more expensive it was safer and convenient to travel by air instead, which became a preferred mode of travel for most people.

conjured by the bloody violence between the Maoist rebels and the army, it was also fostered by instances of bomb threats in public spaces or extortion of money by the Maoists from the affluent or well-off public strata, including businesses and private education institutions, which became common gossip mainly in the cities. In the rural areas of the country, where the Maoists had more sway, the situation was more perilous for there was a constant fear of being coerced to join the Maoists in their cause (especially youths or children).[73] "They would often turn up uninvited and ask us to cook food for the whole lot of them…and they could eat a lot!!... Sometimes, I would tell them I have nothing to cook… just go elsewhere…" the lady had remarked with a hint of irritation. Moreover, *daar* (fear) and indeed *dukkha* (suffering) were gravely concentrated among those who were caught up in alleged suspicions regarding their allegiances from both, the Maoists and the army or police, and were subject to accusations, harassments, and arrests, or worse, taken away by either group to never return. Human rights commissions of missing and pending cases with atrocities from both sides are still pending in the international court. This is poignantly captured in numerous literary works and popular culture, epitomising everyday experiences such as death, separation, fear, and suffering, among others.[74]

In many ways *bandhs* and their paralysing effects on everyday social and political life in Nepal exemplify a familiar sense of waiting among Nepalis throughout the country that became normalised by their frequency and peoples' endurance and acceptance of them. While *bandhs* are still an occasional feature in Nepal's socio-political landscape, conditions of waiting as experienced and narrated by Nepalis do not simply emphasise on an exercise of power from the state in the Foucauldian (1988) sense; in fact *bandhs* also generate a sense of the very lack of state engagement to provide effectively for its citizen, thus demonstrating collective frustration within stagnant social and political conditions, often marred by corruption and

[73] According to Human Rights Watch (2007), Nepali and international observers estimate up to 4,500 Maoist soldiers were under 18 when they were recruited to fight during Nepal's civil war that claimed more than 13,000 lives. Source: https://www.hrw.org/news/2007/02/01/nepal-maoists-should-release-child-soldiers (Accessed: 20/03/2023).

[74] An Aljazeera Witness documentary (2012) *'the disillusioned soldier'* draws on such experiences through the eyes of a former Maoist rebel. Source: https://www.aljazeera.com/program/witness/2012/12/31/the-disillusioned-soldier (Accessed: 18/03/2023).

profiteering by those in positions of power. Like many, who openly expressed their disdain at the workings of the *sarkar* (government) for repeatedly failing its *janta* (citizens) by providing nothing but a sense of delusional hope, waiting and suffering through the years of the civil war and beyond is aptly captured in the words to a Nepali song, as referred to by an interlocutor:

"Na Paune ley key payo?? Yee thula thalo bhannele Nepali lai satayo…"

Those that never got anything, what did they get? Only suffering from these so-called important people (politicians)…

According to Khosravi (2021) waiting involves all the senses, since there is no waiting in the absence of the senses; it generates myriad effects and affects, which, may be sensed and experienced in various trajectories, from despair or boredom to uneasiness, and also from hope or anticipation to resentment. Such myriad trajectories of waiting experienced by Nepalis as discussed above also suggests that waiting is not a neutral condition but also a political one (ibid.), entwined in issues of citizenship, corruption, power struggles, economic and political stagnation in Nepal. Furthermore, the conditions of waiting in Nepal not only gives weight on temporal aspects of waiting given its engagement in, and with, time, but also implicates conditions of societal or collective hope as discussed in my previous chapter. In this regard, Khosravi asserts:

"The future is not a section of a linear timeline, which will come after the present, but is rather in a constant dialectical relationship with the present. All struggles, strategies and tactics, navigations and wakefulness of waiting are animated through the constant interplay between the now and the not-yet. Waiting (the now) is not suspended time oriented through a temporal progression towards a future (end of waiting); but rather, the now and the not-yet constantly make and remake each other. Dialectical wakefulness between the now and the not-yet generates hopeful visions and practices. Even in the form of daydreaming, these practices are agentive. Daydreaming, orienting oneself toward not-yet fulfilled promises, is pre-eminently a political act by which people claim their right to potentialities that make prospects for a better future possible" (ibid.: 17-18). In this way, waiting becomes a generator and a regenerator of hope.

As such, probing the conditions that position an individual or collective into waiting - alongside notions of hope, doubt or uncertainty - bears visible implications towards a richer and broader understanding of waiting as a concept. In following Khosravi, I argue waiting is not an inert condition but also a process and a practice that focuses on ways to withstand waiting and

demand change in the not-yet trajectories of the future. I will elucidate this through an ethnographic section in Nepal followed by a discussion pertaining to the notion of *‘berojgaar’* (unemployed) and migration within conditions of hope, waiting and the future. I first provide a brief discussion on debates surrounding the anthropology of suffering and the anthropology of good, to emphasise notions of waiting and indeed hope in my research.

Figure 8. A normal day at the *Ekantakuna Yatayat* (Transport Management Office). Credit: Author 2020

4.2 Beyond Suffering Subjects

A focus on waiting within the conditions of everyday life in Nepal reverberates with critical debates regarding the kind of work undertaken by anthropologists more recently within the discipline that capture experiences of difficult hardship among the people with whom we work. Drawing on various disparate trends in anthropology, Joel Robbins (2013) points toward a waning attention pertaining to the cultural point and critical potential of the idea of difference, which once enabled anthropologists to realise their work. For Robbins, such an endeavour necessitates a sort of anthropology that goes beyond that of the "suffering subject… living in pain, in poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression now very often stands at the centre of anthropological work", and towards what he calls an anthropology of the good, "focused on such topics as value, morality, well-being, imagination, empathy, care, the gift, hope, time, and change" (2013: 448).[75] Similarly, Ortner (2016) argues that anthropology's attention since the 1980s was focused on harsh dimensions of social life encompassing issues of power, inequality, domination and oppression, including subjective experiences of hopelessness. Such an emergence of what Ortner calls "dark anthropology", emphasised the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them (ibid.: 49). For Ortner, this was also inextricably related to the problematic intricacies of neoliberalism, which have led to a dialectical emergence of "anthropologies of the good" and a re-emergence of the study of "resistance". In Edward F. Fischer's, '*The good life: Aspiration, dignity, and the anthropology of wellbeing'* (2014), he examines notions of "well-being" among middle-class Germans and Guatemalan coffee growers, to contribute toward what he calls "a positive anthropology" (ibid.: 17) reflecting a shift toward how people live their everyday lives with hope and positive goals regardless of their conditions rather than over-focusing on all the hardships but rather instead on what Al-Mohammad and Peluso (2012: 42) refer to as 'the rough ground' where peoples efforts are actually spent in the mundane activities that maintain their lives.

[75] In following Weber, Robbins (2013) maintains that a choice of study coupled with its objectives in an ever-changing experience of social life are always driven by the values that social scientists themselves hold as imperative. However, as a researcher, one is often oblivious to the roles of such values within one's study, simply focusing on collection and analysis of data, while occasional moments of change according to Weber render the 'significance of the unreflective utilised viewpoints' (ibid.: 448) as blurry that science too prepares to change its standpoint and its analytical apparatus.

Furthermore, Robbins notes that since the 1990s the suffering subject came to occupy the position of the 'other' as a privileged object of anthropological attention. Robbins builds on the work of Fassin and Rechtman (2009) who highlight how the notion of trauma suffered by humans came to embody a sort of shared humanity.[76] In this regard, he states:

"But I want to add one key observation that Fassin and Rechtman's analysis allows us to make explicit in a way that was not possible before. Recall that the West lost interest in the savage because it lost a role for difference and the radically other in its intellectual life and its self-understanding. Anthropological critics of othering felt the force of this loss early and pressed the point home. But it was only when trauma became universal, when it came to define a humanity without borders, that anthropologists found a foundation for their science that allowed them to dispense with the notion of the other completely. Because of its universalistic quality, the suffering subject appeared to anthropologists not just as something new to study, but as a solution to a problem that had in the 1980s appeared ready to condemn their discipline to irrelevance." (ibid.: 454)

Robbins' arguments are less a critique of an anthropology of suffering and more of a call for contributions to complement its literature with an anthropology of the good. While his own study and analysis about Urapmin Christianity occupies a place within the suffering slot, it espouses trauma as a bridge between cultural understandings in a bid towards that new direction. Ideas about migration, hope and waiting in the case of my Nepali interlocutors in this respect render the good as something that is not simply perceived but also imaginatively conceived. Hence, for anthropologists a study of the good necessitates an attention, "to the way people orientate to and act in a world that outstrips the one most concretely present to them, and to avoid dismissing their ideals as unimportant or worse, as bad-faith alibis for the worlds they actually create." (ibid.: 457). It is in such a vein that the imagination, as a locus of analysis emits a sense that both as analysts and the people we study, recognises the good as something

[76] For Fassin and Rechtman, over the last two decades "trauma had become an essential human value, a mark of the humanity of those who suffered it and of those who cared for them" (2009: 140) (in Robbins, 2016: 453).

that surpasses the given or the already there and taken for granted in life amidst the conditions in which social life unfolds (also see Crapanzano, 2003; Sneath et al., 2009).[77]

While at first glance, given the complex local and global workings of Nepali migratory undertakings, to find a sympathetic response is valid toward these semi-nomadic "suffering subjects", yet my research and observations show that migratory undertakings are far more sophisticated and move well beyond suffering, a point that I argue throughout this thesis. My study reflects a multi-faceted understanding of migration and its complexities amid understandings of hope, imagination, and the future and therefore also a project of moving beyond an anthropology of suffering as described by Robbins. Indeed, conditions or structures of power, exploitation, politics, and aspects of global connections are irrefutably difficult to disregard, and I follow this closely in my research as an inquiry into understanding how people strive to build a life, which they consider as good or adequate for themselves despite an array of constraints and challenges. While my study does not claim to define or portray a universal notion of what may be considered good, it is evident that aspects of what may be considered an anthropology of good are layered as crucial deposits within the fold of migration in Nepal. Hence everyday engagements and experience of hoping, waiting and indeed imaginative notions of the future demonstrate vital ways within the phenomenon of migration in Nepal, which not only enable people organise their individual and collective lives, but also scaffold 'hoped-for lives' or what they consider to be good.

It is critical to position my research within discussions surrounding what Ortner describes as 'dark anthropology' and its emphasis on the harsh aspects of human suffering and troubles, since they are also implicated in human experiences connected to lived possibilities and relations, from living in a shared world (Moore, 2011). Following this, Laidlaw (2016) expands on Ortner's view on recent anthropological discourse, while also alluding to eschewing capitalism as a monolithic category as well as the offshoots of 'neoliberalism'. Laidlaw highlights Ortner's observations on neoliberalism (which Ortner herself acknowledges are viewed particularly in the American context) by indicating instances of "the systematic failure and collapse of Soviet communism, and, with the almost complete abandonment of Marxist

[77] Robbins places the study of time, change and hope as an important cohort for anthropological exploration of the good (see Guyer, 2007 for works on time; and Crapanzano, 2003, Miyazaki, 2004 and Pine, 2014 on issues of change and hope).

economics by the most significant remaining communist polities (China and Vietnam), the effective exit from the historical stage of Marxist socialism." (ibid.:19). Laidlaw notes that a widespread scepticism towards an anthropology of the good entailing ethics, morality, well-being, and imagination is that it must be 'apolitical,' or exclude the analysis of power. While Ortner's discussions also bring forth this caveat, she urges (2016:65) scholarly efforts not to ignore "larger contexts" of power and inequality or place one's work in opposition to those concerns, but rather view them as being "in active interaction" to move away from the premise of the dark anthropology that she describes. Ong's (1987; 2006) examines the ways in which governmentality is enacted by states and other agencies in monitoring, both voluntary and involuntary movement of 'mobile subjects' from Chinese businessmen to 'virtual slaves' like Southeast Asian domestic workers. Similarly, Gupta (2012) has also observed the role of 'structural violence' enacted against the poor through governmental mechanisms of bureaucracy in India. Hence, it is imperative that migrants' lives are portrayed more fully - to appreciate migration in its mundanity, richness, intensity, and permeating trajectories that seep into human experiences. Such a move is akin to having moved away from a notion of cultures as given, static and unchanging whereby cultures are multi-dimensional, shifting and fluid.

In Nepal, people grapple with moral dilemmas to make choices that, in turn, direct us towards themes like responsibility, care, notions of a better life in the future, which also emphasises on the crucial interlocutory dimensions of hope –that draws on deeper moral roots connecting both to individual agency and collective notions of the good life (Crapanzano, 2003:16). Espousing such themes, not as separate or in opposition to one another, but rather as an integration of relationships provide fruitful ways of moving forward. Veena Das' valuable essay 'Engaging the life of the other: Love and everyday life' (2010), which draws on a marriage between a Hindu man and a Muslim woman in India, presents a pertinent point. By examining how everyday social relationships are shaped within the ongoing and historical understandings of Hindu-Muslim enmity and violence, within conditions of cross-religion/caste marriages amid larger political implications, Das's analysis espouses ways in which "moral striving shows up in everyday labours of caring for the other, even in contexts where mutual antagonism defines the relation" (ibid.: 398–99). Meanwhile, Teresa Kuan's (2015) study deals with a cohesive analysis of politics and ethics of child rearing in contemporary China, elucidating the tensions between the predicaments faced by middle-class mothers amid various official discourses, which render ambitious parents as a risk to their children's psychological health, on one hand, and the fierce challenges in the harsh job market and educational system on the other. For Kuan,

facets of 'traditional' Chinese thought in understanding the intricacies of power enables a good parent to be an active subject of ethics in myriad situations, which are enacted in ways of governing and improving oneself. Kuan's argument places such ideas, not as a straightforward case of 'neoliberal responsibilization', or a manipulation of people by the state into working on its behalf. Instead, Kuan asserts that the mothers she worked with were well aware and recognised much more about the situation they were in, and about themselves.[78] Her analysis deals with the ways in which people confront conflicting moral values and ethical demands, and the kinds of judgments and negotiations of responsibility this involves, without reducing human action to supposedly larger scale historical processes (Laidlaw, 2016).

Similarly, Pine's (2014) analysis of migration draws on three different Polish economic periods (crisis during the late socialist era, the period of structural adjustment following the end of socialism, and the period following accession to the European Union) to elucidate how the possibilities of migration are tied to workings of kinship and households, networks of care and reciprocity. By focusing on notions of hope, value and future in different political and economic contexts, times, and places, Pine posits migration as a symbol and an enactment of hope – of faith in the future and an act of or a reaction to hopelessness, despair, and acute loss in the present. In this case, ideas of hope in trust for a better future in milieu of socialism and post-socialism was very much tied to changing social, economic, and political conditions in the process of migration. Hence, understanding hope within migratory pursuits indicates both, a future orientation, and a backward-looking process of migration, including movement between different temporalities, spaces, and regimes of value (ibid.). Furthermore, what is of value in Pine's analysis is that migration is also a strategy oriented towards the future while embodying hope, since socialist ideology with its strong ties to nation building and modernity, offered ideas of a socialist nation state in the future to be built through dedicated labour. The collapse of the socialist states coupled with concurrent forces of globalism and fragmented capitalism rendered migration a common alternative strategy – offering families an opportunity for a better future and quality of life (mainly accumulating goods and earning money).

Ortner (2016) notes that while studies on notions of the good life within conditions of power and inequality constitute only a fragment of anthropology, she recognises that the caring and

[78] For Kuan, such theories not only neglect a good deal about human experience but also miss substantively the effort involved in dealing with the irregularities, multiplicities, ironies, and tragedies involved in living a life (Laidlaw, 2016).

ethical dimensions of human life alongside imagination for better ways of living and futures are critical – also as a way of challenging neo-liberalism.[79] Appadurai's (2013) notions of the ethics of probability and ethics of possibility is also highly relevant here, since his argument carries strong implications for both anthropologists and the people involved in their work. While the ethics of probability, which relates to "ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that flow out of what Ian Hacking called 'the avalanche of numbers' or what Foucault saw as the capillary dangers of modern regimes of diagnosis, counting and accounting." (ibid.: 295), informs in some ways what Ortner has alluded to as dark anthropology. The ethics of possibility are grounded in "those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope, that expand the field of imagination…" (ibid.). As such, Appadurai urges anthropologists "to be mediators, facilitators, and promoters of the ethics of possibility . . . which can offer a more inclusive platform for improving the planetary quality of life and can accommodate a plurality of visions of the good life" (ibid.: 299). What is key here in Appadurai's call is that an ethics of possibility embraces understandings of people's engagement with an array of human aspects such as imagination, hope, aspiration, and the good life, towards an anthropology of the future. Indeed, this is what captures the experiences of many Nepalis as they participate in waiting as a form of moving forward with their lives and their ideals.

4.3 Waiting in a Time of Waiting

The annual blessings of downpour had already graced parts of Nepal with its presence in the past week, announcing the arrival of the monsoon season. Only this time, the entire country was coming to terms with the (un)familiar grounds of restricted movement due to the COVID-19 lockdown protocols imposed by the government. By early 2020, as global attention towards an increasingly deteriorating pandemic situation in countries like China, Italy, South Korea and the UK and others had started to gather force, the deadly virus had already taken its grip upon Nepal. We had become engulfed into a space saturated with a lexicon of terms like 'quarantine', 'vaccination', 'social distancing', 'masks', 'sanitiser', 'home', 'remote working' etc, which slipped comfortably into everyday discourse and activities from the social to economic and political. In Nepal, the dawning of the lockdown was as much an enigma as the Coronavirus disease itself. When daily life was thrust abruptly into uncertainty, shadowed by an absence of

[79] Also see Jamie Cross' *Dream zones: Anticipating capitalism and development in India* (2014).

any clear insights, I recall a conversation with Maya, who lived in the flat upstairs sharing some of her worries with me:

"Kasto acchamma ko jamana ayo hai?" – what a bizarre situation we have come to, right? ... they say that this *Corona jaat* (entity) was made in America … How long will all this last? ... Will we be able to travel freely? ... What about things like *chamal* (rice)… *sabji* (vegetables) … or … *tel* (oil)? ...[80]

Along with the rest of the world, *waiting* (including fear and uncertainty) had rapidly become an accepted condition of everyday life in Nepal. People were waiting to go back to their office desks, the elderly were waiting for their vaccinations, itinerant vegetable vendors were waiting to hover the streets again and so forth, while some were simply waiting to return home to their loved ones – waiting and hoping for a resumption and continuation of *normal* life (or atlease how it was prior to the pandemic) was ongoing. These were precarious times and waiting became an even greater activity than it usually is.

4.3.1 A Korean Drama, 15th June 2020 [81]

It had poured down heavily the previous night. A slight drizzle coupled with gloomy grey clouds welcomed me as I stepped out onto the balcony. I gazed at the faded shutter of the small eatery just across the lane that was usually crammed with boisterous college kids revelling in their insouciant bursts of laughter and clamour; its entrance now usurped by Kaley, the spirited neighbourhood stray mongrel as I watched him lay contentedly on the steps, yawning lazily without a concern about the pattering rain. I pondered over the current situation, juggling imaginary scenarios of ifs and buts in my head – wondering how much longer I would need to wait before I could get on a bus out of Kathmandu to Lamjung, my other research field site in Nepal.

---

[80] When I had asked Maya about how she had come to such an understanding about the Coronavirus, she simply replied: "Facebook and YouTube. One of my friends also told me the same." Maya's husband works as security guard in Kuwait. They video call or speak almost every day via messenger or Viber.

[81] I use the title, 'A Korean Drama', for this section because of the popularity of 'Korean Dramas' (television films or series) among many people in Nepal. A few days after this event at the EPS Korea section office, a young interlocutor had jokingly asked me: "*Dai* (elder brother)! How did the gathering go at the EPS office? Was it like a Korean drama?"

I decided to give Prem a quick call on his mobile, but I was greeted by an automated voice message in Nepali, which had now replaced the usual calling ringtone:

The Coronavirus responsible for the COVID-19 disease can be transferred to and from anyone…

Please wash your hands thoroughly…

Avoid crowed areas…

Maintain a 2-metre distance…

Corona virus bata afu bachu ra aru lai pani bachau

[Stay safe and also keep others safe from Coronavirus]

Janchetena ko lagi

[For public awareness]

Nepal Telecom

It was already past 09:30 am. I was waiting for Prem to pick me up on his motorbike, since the *julus* (demonstration or gathering) was scheduled for 10:00 am. The other day, he had even joked about hurling stones at the office should his visa application process not result in a positive conclusion. However, the threat of an imminent downpour had now raised strong doubts about the furtherance of our plans. Prem eventually messaged me expressing that we should wait for a little while, in hope that the rain might subside in our favour. After much deliberation and about an hour later, with the stubborn rain still clattering down, we found ourselves on the circular ring road for the first time in about three months since the lockdown.

Still uncertain about the exact rules for the movement of people and vehicles set by the government in this supposedly relaxed version of lockdown, I felt a bit nervous being a pillion passenger on a motorbike.

“You sure this is fine from today?” – I asked Prem who had his eyes peeled ahead of him.

“Of course, brother… the odd-even system is permitted from today. The *sarkar* (government) has already declared it” – Prem replied with a quick nod, with beads of water trickling down his helmet.

Yet, my uneasiness only intensified as we approached *Satdobato,* a busy intersection, regularly monitored strictly by local traffic authorities. No sooner had I glanced around for assurances amongst other motorbikes or scooters on the road than I found myself swerving from one side to another as Prem skilfully manoeuvred the bike and sprinted across towards the smaller inner lane.

"*Nepal ma sab chalcha Dai* – Everything is acceptable in Nepal brother" – Prem yelped out in laughter as he revved his bike ahead.

When we arrived at *Gwarko*, people were already flocking along the adjacent road leading to the EPS Korea section office.[82] Some were nestled inside a couple of the small shops on the street with conspicuous displays of machines or signs offering printing and photocopying services coupled with application assistance. Prem secured his motorbike carefully beside a concrete pole amidst a row of other motorbikes that were parked erratically on one side of the road, and I noticed a swarm of people canopied by colourful umbrellas at the main gate, reverberating a wave of commotion, chatter, and laughter. Many people were also standing on the side of the road and looking over the brick wall into the office compound, as the sunshine struggled to emerge from the gloomy skies and battle the ongoing drizzle.

Prem and I managed to meander our way through the buzzing crowd, as we sought to take refuge from the shower under the tinned roof extension immediately after the entrance gate. We managed to find a suitable spot to stand next to some people, and waited, without knowing what to do next much like everybody around us. As I gazed around, I noticed many people were also inside the compound, albeit at a distance – scattered along the periphery of the open field, with some still donning their helmets, while draped in their raincoats or clutching their umbrellas. While all the chattering continued to echo like a never-ending chorus, the rain orchestrated its own symphony by beating down repeatedly on the tinned roof from above, including the cluster of umbrellas in front of us. On overhearing the verbal exchanges between people, it was apparent that many had made quite an effort to ensure their presence from all over the city. While there was no hint of any aggression in the air, a certain sense of uncertainty

[82] The Republic of Korea EPS (Employment Permit System) is an ongoing government scheme that was introduced in 2004 to help local Korean companies deal with labour shortages by permitting them to hire foreign workers from numerous South Asian countries in the following industries – *manufacturing, construction, service, fishing and, agriculture and stockbreeding.* More details can be found on their official website on: https://www.hrdkorea.or.kr/ENG (Accessed: 23/05/2023).

and confusion was palpable amongst those present, due to a lack of – *first,* how they were going to address their concerns, and *second*, who was going to shoulder this responsibility, since this gathering was initiated through discussions on a Facebook group. The focus, nonetheless, seemed to be on the dense crowd at the entrance gate, while people continued to mingle and share their own application related *samasyas* (problems) amongst each other. A few individuals appeared to be more animated and vociferous in their dialogues, with one man in the heart of the crowd even letting out a rallying cry of sorts: "All our *pidah* (pain) must be understood by, both the Nepali and Korean government", which was reciprocated with a few cheers.

"Are your visas cancelled as well then?" – Prem struck a conversation with two men who were standing behind us. *"Hoina* (No), we are both stranded due to the lockdown. We had come for our *chutti* (holiday) and now we have been unable to fly back to Korea to resume work", the shorter man, who was clasping a yellow helmet in his arm replied with a warm smile. "*Tehi tah hai. Salah, yo corono ley ni garnu garyo. Tara key garnu?* – Exactly. This bloody Corona has really done everything. But what can we do?" – Prem spurted out with a tone of exasperation, as he further explained that his EPS application date was nearing its expiration period, and he was not sure if they would consider any extension with the ongoing COVID situation. While we continued our conversation with the two men, we came to learn that people had been gradually gathering here since the morning but there was no *hakim* (an executive official) in the office to attend to their predicaments other than a handful of staff who had informed the crowd that someone would be with them shortly. The two men explained that they were both employed in the manufacturing sector in Korea, where they worked in a factory that assembled electronic parts. When I probed further, they expressed that their jobs were *thikai* (satisfactory), but certainly much *ramro* (better) than most jobs in Nepal or even the Gulf countries, since both of them had also *chakeko* (tasted) the challenging *garmi* (heat) of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.[83] Later in the day, I would also have a brief meeting with an acquaintance of their's– a young jovial man from *Jhapa* district in East Nepal, clad in a matching pair of grey Nike tracksuit, who would share some of his experiences of working at a pig farm in Korea. "*Sungur ko gu tipnu ni, yeti garo cha hai* – It is so difficult to pick up pig faeces you know. Ours is a third-class labour job if we are to be honest… May be this is written in my

[83] *'Chaknu'* (to taste, usually food or drinks) – This word was used quite frequently by many of my interlocutors as a way of describing their 'experience' of working in other countries.

bhagya (destiny/fortune) … We are literally going to clean shit in *bidesh*, and here we have to go through all of this *jhamela* (trouble)" – he had told us, as we all erupted into a laughter. "Everybody present here has their own *pidah* (pain) – many have had their CCVI (Certificate of Confirmation of Visa Issuance) cancelled, or flights cancelled, while some like us are unable to return back to work" – the other man added. I expressed that, given the current circumstances with COVID-19, I thought this was an impressive turn out of people. Prem immediately reiterated that the people in attendance was only a small percentage of the potential numbers who might have been able to make it to the gathering. He added, *"jhan ajhai kati manche haru ta Kathmandu bahira gaun tira chha hola* – In fact, imagine the amount of people outside Kathmandu, in their villages."

We had been waiting for about 45 minutes, during which Prem and I managed to interact with a few more people, chatting mostly about their EPS application concerns in this dire situation or their experience of working in *bidesh*. Two young girls had expressed their concerns about the stagnant status of their application, while a frustrated man told us that the Korean government had actually given its OK but rather it was actually the Nepali *sarkar* that was not doing anything: "the *hakims* are all hiding… somebody needs to get beaten." When two officials eventually came out to address the gathering, they were greeted by sarcastic applauses, and people started shuffling towards the main entrance of the office building, while one man roared, "let us separate into groups… those who have had their CCVI cancelled, come to this side." Finally, one of the officials started addressing the crowd, but his gentle tone was reduced to a mere whisper by the combined forces of the beating rain, mumbling voices, and occasional vehicles on the street. "A little louder please!" – a man erupted from the crowd, as the official continued boosting up his voice:

"…We can understand your situation and we will relay your concerns to higher authorities… flights might resume soon but we will have to wait and see… we have even requested 6 months extension on the CCVI for applicants, we proposed that from here in Nepal... when we requested arrangements for chartered flights, they said it was not possible … chartered flights should be allowed but I cannot offer you any confirmation of this unless they … so people who have been stranded during their holidays are a priority… we will try our best and fly the maximum amount of people within our capabilities… and once everything resumes then we will strive to send people straight away in maximum numbers… in this EPS branch we are trying our best, in fact we are working even harder given the conditions are as such…"

A man, dressed in a loose black coat with a side bag strung around his shoulder was quick to articulate his discontentment:

"Sir, we need strong reassurances from the *hakim*… '*hamro chitta bujheko chaina'* – our minds are not at ease… our *prakriya* (process) only gets prolonged if you assume that whatever happens will be addressed by the Korean government… but what is the point of having an EPS office branch here if it cannot do anything? Is this not *gair jimmawari?* (neglect of responsibility) … can the EPS not liaise effectively with Korean authorities and come up with actual solutions? … what is the point of *sewa* (help) or *subida* (convenience), for us then?"

This was acknowledged by some clapping and shouting amongst the crowd, while someone shouted, "We totally agree! we are with you!", as the man continued to speak:

"And I will put forward another *sano kura* (small concern) regarding the status of our CCVI on our online application profile… if it is really cancelled it should be confirmed as such… it needs to be made clear, because we are really confused, since it has changed for many of us, even when it was approved previously… and so what is the *niti* (policy) during this Covid lockdown… we want clear answers, either from you, or some other appropriate source."

Offering some support to his colleague, the second official reiterated that they were doing the best they could at this time, and a six-month extension was already in place, since the final visa authorisation usually requires about 2 months after the CCVI approval in the application procedure, but a *suchana* (announcement) would be made for all EPS applicants very soon, to which the man immediately countered:

"Sir, you still haven't answered my question here. What we want to know is, how are we to understand this on our online application? … so, if it was previously approved then does this already imply an automatic extension?... we need *prasta* (clear) answers… and regarding the forthcoming *suchana* (announcement), you must also clarify how and when this will happen, because we too need to find ways to manage the situation… Sir if this does not happen, *hami* (we), are also looking at ways to move forward, even if this means an *andolan* (agitation), which people have already been discussing… although only about 50 or 60 of us are here present here today, there are around 1300-1400 people who have had their CCVI's cancelled… so please ensure that the notice is communicated to us within a suitable time…"

Many more disgruntled voices now began to fly across the premises. "Firstly, there is no information anywhere. When we call at the office, our calls are never answered, and even if

someone picks up, they say we do not know since it has been cancelled from Korea or told to go to the Department of Foreign Employment…" – a woman complained, while another added, "They are in a bigger hurry to end the call and shout at us instead – they say OK, keep the phone down…", which was met with a burst of laughter. The previous woman asserted that the EPS office should issue a clear notice so that people could visit the office accordingly without having to wait aimlessly or run around in circles, and not waste their time: "We don't even wish to be here during a pandemic. *'Kaslai rahar cha ra niskinu esto bela ma'* – who wishes to come out at such a time?" Some people were also discussing about the uncertainty of flights and the possibility of another forthcoming lockdown lurking around since Nepal was already nearing towards 10,000 positive COVID-19 cases. "This is only going to increase now. They should have just allowed us to go before the lockdown… *Hamro* (Ours) was all set. We were due to fly out within a week and people had already bought new clothes and everything", one man spoke out, while his acquaintance suggested, "They should just test people for Covid and then send them according to their results, let them stay in quarantine… that is how it should be done…who can wait for 6-7 months just like that? …this is all *hawa ko chal fal* (useless talk) from here."

While the two officials continued their attempts to bear the weight of the stern comments being hurled towards them, some people demanded for the absent *hakim.* Eventually, the two officials went back inside the office, only to come back after a while, and simply state that all the issues had been duly communicated to and acknowledged by the *hakim* and the management. One official further added that they could also express their situation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was received with amusement by most. "Sir, what we want to know is why our applications have been cancelled all of a sudden... how do you expect us to tell this to a minister? So, what is the job of the EPS then?" – one man fired back sarcastically to his proposal.

As the disgruntled groaning continued and people persisted with their frustrations, I heard one man behind me uttering, "They did not even let us speak with the *hakim*… everybody keeps saying: what can we do? just wait… or go to the Ministry… this Coronavirus is not the issue, it is actually these guys, they are bloody cunning…" Meanwhile, the two officials continued to echo their own helplessness by asserting that they had put forward the gathering's *maan ko kura* (heartfelt apprehensions) with the management, and that was all they could do for now.

"This is not going to get anywhere bro. I think we should make a move" – Prem told me with a half-hearted chuckle, as I noticed some people already beginning to disperse towards the gate,

while the shrieking motorbikes began to make themselves heard. As we retreated sluggishly, we interacted briefly with two men, who we met on fringes of the now scattered crowd. They seemed to have only arrived a little while ago and shared their predicaments with us. One of them stated, “My visa math is about to finish, and my application status has no updates. I am not sure if they will extend this or if it is now cancelled or not.” The other man offered him some comfort by telling him that he had a friend who was in the exact situation, and some of his friends had even called the company *sau* (boss or employer) back in Korea to find out, further adding – “but they (the boss) can be a bit *chucho* (rude). In any case, this situation here has nothing to do with things back in Korea. It must be something here – after all, it is all politics...”

Prem shared some of his understandings about the ongoing situation to ease some of their concerns, and as we made our way towards the gate, I noticed the man in the black coat, accompanied by a small cluster of people, still chatting and gesturing to one of the officials, outside the office door.

“I think it is going rain all day today” – Prem grumbled, as I felt the rain droplets start to tap on my jacket once again.

Figure 9. EPS applicants at the EPS Korea Office, Gwarko. Credit: Author 2020

Figure 10. Queue at the EPS Korea Office, Gwarko. Credit: Author 2020

4.4 The Vigour of Waiting

For Nepali migrants, the project of hope entails a peculiar rendezvous with waiting as the preceding vignette about waiting at the Korean section office conveys. Furthermore, as I argue throughout this thesis, waiting and its repercussions affect not only individuals but, by extension, entire communities of people. Waiting in many ways is an erratic phenomenon due to its presence, not merely within conditions that lack actions but also in conditions of uncertainty, where what is hoped for may or may not play out (Janeja and Bandak, 2018). I extend this further by arguing that waiting in Nepal is often packed with constant actions or efforts from individuals in their desires to go abroad – from actively consulting astrology readers or spiritual healers (I discuss this in more detail in a later chapter on *bhagya* in my thesis), to attending community events and gatherings, making phone calls and arrangements of all sorts. Hence, one does not simply resign to inactivity, even during conditions of waiting, as apparent in the ethnographic vignette discussed earlier.

What is of critical concern is the examination of how and when waiting is experienced, either as a form of *passive* or *active* waiting for something (Marcel, 1967; Crapanzano, 1985; Hage, 2009). According to Hage (2009), waiting creates *'stuckedness'* in the forms of invisibility, inactivity, and uncertainty.[84] Hage's work also examines the entwining of hope, struggle and movement in the experience and well-being of individuals and collectives (Hage, 2003). Hence, waiting as a concept is useful in investigating ethnographically how actions, ideas and social ties are produced in diverse engagements in, and with, time. To examine various modalities of waiting, it must be approached, both as an entity in its own accord as well as a force for generating various forms of social energies (Janeja and Bandak, 2018).

As such, examining everyday understandings of and engagements with waiting in Nepal, also offer useful ways of drawing on migration within and its connection to ideas of hope, uncertainty and the future. Waiting and hope are entangled together, since one cannot hope without waiting. Inspired by Christian theology, Marcel (1967) proposes waiting as a condition of hope; it is distinct from desire, which is inherently insatiable, impatient and rejects any forms of delay. He further asserts a difference between inert waiting and active waiting. For Marcel, *inert or passive waiting* entails a certain confidence about the outcome, even evoking

[84] While extended waiting is like insomnia—a state of wakefulness, a kind of mood, an emotional state (Khosravi, 2021). It surfaces in the gaps between trust and betrayed promises, between expectations and coloniality.

indifference to it, thus enabling one to bide time without any particular apprehension towards an anticipated outcome. However, once this certitude is lost, it provokes an inner dispute or tension that is characteristic of *active waiting,* and it is the moment when such an internal debate dies that one may surrender to despair, as the inescapable outcome of a situation.[85] Active waiting, thus, remains open to what is anticipated, while espousing hope understood as generative of action (ibid.: 282).[86]

It is within such complex sets of interactions amid ways in which individual or collective forms of waiting, and between modalities of waiting, enables a space for what Janeja and Bandak (2018:3) refer to as '*the politics and poetics of waiting'* (cf. Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

"By the politics of waiting, we refer to engagements with the structural and institutional conditions that compel people to wait. Waiting has been, and is increasingly used as, an instrument to elicit particular forms of subjectivities, or as a weapon to make existence intolerable for certain groups such as refugees and asylum seekers trying to obtain the right papers… By the poetics of waiting, we refer to the existential affordances of being placed in temporal relations, gaps, and intervals where the outcome is uncertain. Following Herzfeld's use of social poetics, we do not see this move as a matter of aestheticizing social life but rather one of situating semiotic qualities, the active use and reading of signs, social performances as well ambiguities and undecidedness in the midst of human endeavours crossing individual and collective forms of action…" (ibid.: 3)

To invite diverse subjective experiences within the fold of waiting as a vital scope for anthropological research and examine how people in comparable situations still experience yet deal with them differently, requires an appreciation of both the politics of waiting and poetics

[85] Similarly, espousing a hermeneutic of hope, Zigon (2018) describes two forms of hope among his Muscovite interlocutors. The *first* is a *passive* form of hope, which locally is conceived as close to a mere waiting for things to happen, while the *second*, by contrast, is an *active* form of hope where one must work to arrive at what is hoped for. In other words, one may live in a situation where the objective conditions do not leave much hope but, to live ethically, according to Zigon's interlocutors, hope can never be surrendered, wherein risk and courage are inherent features of such forms of hoping. This interplay between the passive and active modalities is found in the way waiting allows for hope to fashion a way of living amidst precarious conditions.

[86] Postulating such an interaction between various forms of waiting, or 'a range of waiting' according to Marcel, bears a vital significance and demands further consideration (1967:280).

of waiting. Waiting involves fluctuating between iridescent human positionalities, which in turn, moulds its own form of becoming, while shifting between hoping and doubting, or a suspending of both (Janeja and Bandak, 2018). Examining the politics and poetics of waiting can offer insightful ways of comprehending hoping and doubting, while also facilitating critical approaches about the precariousness of existence. Following such a vein, I espouse waiting illustrated through the notion of *'berojgaar'* as a concept that can aptly capture people's doubts and uncertainties (Khosravi, 2017, 2021) and coexist alongside potentials of hope (Crapanzano, 2003; Hage, 2003; Miyazaki, 2004; Zigon, 2018) regard to migration in Nepal.

4.4.1 The Conundrum of Berojgaar

"Nepal ma berojgaar hunu bhanda bidesh tira gako nai thik ho ni…" – It is better to go to *bidesh* than to be a *berojgaar* in Nepal…

(Manu Gurung, 26)

The local term *'berojgaar'* which means 'unemployed' or 'jobless' is the opposite of '*rojgaar'* which indicates an occupation, profession, employment, business, or trade.[87] However, *berojgaar* is used more widely to refer to an unemployed individual. As such *berojgaar* refers to both –a person and a condition of being – and therefore imbued with various stereotype and meanings in the everyday discourse and experience of waiting and migration in Nepal. Hence, examining ways in which people recognise and talk about *berojgaar* and the conditions in which it emanates in Nepal offers valuable ways of grasping notions such as 'waiting' and '*kaam'* ('work') among Nepalis. According to the World Bank (2021), the total unemployment rate in Nepal was 12.2 % for the year 2021.[88] The lack of job opportunities in Nepal coupled with more nuanced challenges are undeniably significant factors driving outward migration among many Nepalis. The notion that one is better off in *bidesh* than being a *berojgaar* in Nepal expressed through Manu in the quote above drives this point home.

In many ways, the notion of *berojgaar* resonates strongly with the state of 'stuckedness' as described by Hage (2009:7) – a situation faced by many of my interlocutors as they find themselves in conditions of invisibility, immobility, and uncertainty. Oftentimes, whenever I

---

[87] As stated in the introduction, the local term '*baideshik rojgaar'* which means 'foreign employment' or working abroad features heavily within the discourse of migration in Nepal and in relation to the notion of *bidesh*.

[88] Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=NP (Accessed: 07/07/23).

asked people what they did or if they had a job, many would often reply (sometimes in jest) with a counter question – "*key ko jagir khanu?* – what job?" or a reply with a sense of resignation "*hami ta tehi berojgaar – the usual, we are just berojgaar."* – to indicate such a condition of uncertainty. However, being a *berojgaar* in Nepal also bears strong social connotations, since the notion is closely related to individuals who are deemed as being *alchi* (lazy), *'kaam na lagne'* (good for nothing), or *hawa-lafanga* (loiterer). In relation to the latter, the expression *'hawa khane'* (which translates to 'eating air') is often used by family members to describe kin, who not only lack an ambition to do something in life but are also viewed as shunning family *jimmawari* (responsibilities).[89]

Hence, one way of contextualising *berogjgaar* within conditions of social and structural ambiguousness relates to Turner's (1969) notions of liminality. Khosravi's (2017) work is particularly useful here, who also builds on Turner's ideas to elucidate the condition of *'belataklifi'* as closely related to the absence of rules and order. 'Waithood' as described by Khosravi expresses an absence of youthfulness and filled instead with agony, hopelessness, and dependence, amongst young people. In the temporal sense, this entails time as a broken experience, and is reflected in the emic term *belataklifi*, which protracts liminality. In his study, Khosravi states that *belataklifi* (or *to be belataklif*) is a common term used by Iranian youths to describe their situation, expressing a feeling of uncertainty and purposelessness, or even boredom (ibid).[90] *Belataklifi* is also similar to the local term *buryoung,* experienced by marginalized young people in the Philippines, expressing, a predicament of uncertainty, boredom, and waiting for nothing, or the symptom of a present projected hopelessly into the future (Jensen, 2014). *Belataklifi's* liminal state reduces the status of individuals to socially and structurally ambiguous, thereby rendering individuals as invisible and vulnerable, while normalising the acts of loitering and killing time (Khosravi, 2017). As such, given their invisible position, liminal individuals are not only regarded as unmanageable but also considered to be inauspicious, dangerous, and polluting (Turner 1969: 108). Khosravi (2017) also notes that young people in Iran, mainly those who are able to afford it, often enrolled in various education or training courses to manage their boredom as a way of killing time, which echoes the voices of some of the youths I befriended in Kathmandu, who viewed their college

[89] Similarly, Khosravi (2017) also notes the term *'allaf'* related to *belataklifi* as a contemptuous term that refers to a person who does nothing or a loiterer.

[90] The prefix *bela* means without and *taklif* means purpose or function (ibid.).

course as a ‘time pass’ – since going to *bidesh* was something they not only envisioned of but also regarded as genuine condition for their future. This also reiterates my discussions regarding migration in Nepal in my introductory section *‘Khadi ma Bhetaula* – See you in the Arab Gulf,’ as described by school students during their school farewell. [91]

While *berojgaar,* follows closely with conditions of ‘*stuckedness’* (Hage, 2009) and that of *belataklifi* as described by Khosravi (2017) and its lack of any sort of forward movement alongside the common stereotypes and social stigma it assumes, in the context of Nepal, migratory endeavours to *bidesh* also pushes one beyond the threshold of liminality – towards a futural momentum within conditions of hope. A common axiom, "*afno khutta ma afai ubhinu* – to stand up on one's own feet" is frequently used in everyday discourse to emphasise financial independence or achievement of a stable job or career, in relation to undertaking commitments such as marriages or starting a family. Many of interlocutors in Nepal emphasised that going to *bidesh* commonly in places like Saudi, Qatar, Dubai or Malaysia is embedded in undertaking such family and kin responsibilities. In consideration of the limited economic opportunities and political conditions in Nepal, going to *bidesh* as such, offers a way of freeing oneself from the clutches of the social stigma and pressures generated by feelings of guilt or shame associated with being a *berojgaar.* In this regard Graw (2012) also notes that migration is a path out of nothingness into productive beings.

Hence, I argue that *berojgaar* is not only a condition of waiting characterised by liminality and its associate social connotations but also something that generates and regenerate hope – through processes of waiting experienced as an absence of activity. In contrast to many migration endeavours and activities, waiting offers an alternative condition that can be experienced as a state of nothingness or emptiness. The conundrum of *berojgaar* implicated in *bidesh* is further captured in the absence of individuals (mostly men) in *gaun.* As an elderly person in *Pyarjung* expressed: "there are hardly any young men in the village to plough the fields…everybody is in *bidesh* or Kathmandu…"

[91] In some ways, this also relates to Paul Willis' (1997) insightful analysis, which details the conditions about how working-class kids end up in working class jobs, due to the strategies they to manage the structural constraints, coerced the school system they were educated at. What is important to note is that the lads identified more strongly with manual labour as more suitable for real men as real work as opposed to the strong values of academic work which that school was attempting to inculcate amongst its students.

In this regard, among many of my interlocutors from *Pyarjung*, dealing with the conditions of waiting, and of being a *berojgaar* is something that is actively reflected and acted upon. This is evident through their active engagement in community-based activities and social functions in *gaun* – from working together in farming related activities throughout the year, such as helping each other in planting and harvesting crops or undertaking other forms of everyday physical work in the village. Moreover, it is during the winter months that such efforts are more prominent, when there are increased village events and activities – *community feasts, weddings, various rituals and dances,* due to reduced agriculture related activities and physical burdens during this time of the year.

Hence, many individuals from *Pyarjung* or other places outside Kathmandu, who often stayed with their kin when visiting Kathmandu to sort out their official documents or applications for going to *bidesh*, were reluctant to stay for too long in Kathmandu. [92] In this regard Rudra had once stated: “There is always something to do back in our home in *gaun* unlike here in Kathmandu, where there is nothing to do… just eat and watch tv… and how many times should I visit the same old *bazaar (market or town)…* and all that dust and crowd?” While such efforts to minimise visits to Kathmandu among many of my interlocutors from *Pyarjung* are perhaps also motivated by notions of respect and efforts to reduce their burdens on their hosts or kin by not prolonging their stay, it is also indicative of one’s feelings of not belonging to a place like Kathmandu (which I also discuss further in the next chapter). Hence, while going to *bidesh* altogether is a favoured condition over that of being a *berojgaar*, yet, amid conditions of waiting one is also able to shrug off (even if partially) the undesired social connotations embedded in the term *berojgaar* by keeping themselves engaged in the daily activities in one’s *gaun.* While such actions inform ideas of and experience of waiting in the intersections of *berojgaar* and migration in Nepal, conditions of ambiguity also a gives rise to hope as much as anxiety.

Echoing a similar sort of experience among young Iranians stuck in *belataklifi* who suffer from modern boredom as described by Khosravi (2017), Jeffrey’s (2010) ethnographic account among unemployed lower middle-class young men in India provides another insightful analysis of waiting not only as a form of social experience but also a source of action for political mobilisation. Likewise, Auyero’s (2012) approach to waiting as a technology of governance among the poor seeking state social and administrative welfare services in Buenos

[92] Kathmandu airport is also the main point for leaving or returning to and from *bidesh*.

Aires, exemplifies the bureaucratic appropriation of everyday life that can lead to subordination. Both these contributions underscore interactions between agency and social structures building on Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on waiting as a means of experiencing the effect of power – exercised over other people's time, as he puts it: "Making people wait… delaying without destroying hope is part of the domination" (Bourdieu, 2000: 228). Auyero's (2012) study offers immense value by elucidating people's experiences of waiting and time through the analytical lens of power enacted by the state towards its citizens whereby the state increasingly deprives citizens any means for action as they are pushed towards becoming 'patients' of the state. However, Auyero's analysis, lacks attention towards people's own endeavours while they wait or deal with the waiting time including collective action, since waiting is shaped not merely by those in power or who offer something to be waited for, but also by those who wait (Hage, 2009). Following closely on such insights on waiting, Procupez's (2015) research on housing activists in Buenos Aires, draws on the notion of 'patience' as a political stance in a collective mode of inhabiting temporality. As Procupez asserts: "Being patient is not just waiting and dealing with bureaucratic delays and peer disagreements; it also involves a change in perspective. This new experience of inhabiting time combines both urgency and restraint: patience is thus the active inhabiting of this anxious space, a collective disposition toward the experience of temporality within a project-based politics" (ibid.: S64). [93] What is imperative here is that the notion of patience proposed by Procupez is not so much about deliberate individual virtue, but a feature of 'collectivity' placed upon the group by circumstances that renders waiting an activity to be endured together through active engagement towards and intended purpose (ibid.: S62). Yet, such an emphasis on patience as collective does not presume its homogeneity, since it is also driven by further aspirations, concerns, and intentions, thus placing this modality of waiting apart from others. In this way, waiting becomes its own way of being with its own set of skills which in turn shape and inform migrant experiences. Procupez's emphasis on patience as a way of collective actions towards intended goals within the experience of waiting is aptly exemplified in mass gathering at the EPS Korea section office, organised, and attended by many of the Nepali applicants who faced uncertainty in their migratory endeavours to Korea. Moreover, the space of precarity and anxiety in which people

[93] Procupez (2015) examines the interstices between the ever-present tropes of 'need' (and being assisted) and of 'patience' (and being an activist in an autonomous and project-oriented movement) in people's experience of time. In their attempts to shrug off their subject position of *asistido* placed upon them by social programs, Procupez argues that housing activists assume a political engagement that requires what they call 'patience.'

enacted their actions was not simply due to conditions of waiting enabled by conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic but also due to the 'local politics' and inefficiency of the Nepali state according to some of those present in the gathering. Furthermore, I also argue that within experiences of migration among my interlocutors in Nepal, such a vigour of waiting is not only felt by people on the move but also by an entire network of relationships, from family members and friends to agents, employers, and authorities. Such a *'presence of absence'* has a rippling effect. In this sense, waiting is expansive affecting more than just the individual engaged in waiting.[94]

4.5 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the concept of waiting and illustrated the myriad ways in which it is experienced as a normalised condition within the social and political landscape of Nepal. By drawing on the ideas and endeavours related to migration in Nepal, I have illustrated how individuals (and collectives) deal with conditions of uncertainty or temporality of life alongside the inconsistent practices of the state or authorities. The latter is evident in a familiarity of waiting experienced among Nepalis through political events, nationwide power cuts and *bandhs* or waiting in government offices. The former is implicated in people's everyday experience of waiting within the fold of *bidesh* and its trajectories, which bears strong social connotations. I have argued that condition of waiting is also entwined to ideas of liminality, hope and imagination, thus shaping activities and action among individuals, in connection with migration as evident in the notion of *berojgaar.*

Nonetheless, the myriad actions and activities imbued within conditions of waiting entails what Janeja and Bandak (2018) refer to as politics and poetics of waiting, which entwine shifting between hope, struggle, and movement in the experience of individuals and collectives – generating various forms of social energies. By engaging the concept of waiting and migration within discussions pertaining to theoretical debates on the anthropology of suffering and the

---

[94] I maintain that the ensuing trajectories and forces of migration resonate with a sort of *'presence of absence'* in the everyday lives of many Nepali people. In this sense traces of migration are constantly at work in (re)shaping people's lives both within and outside Nepal, even when migrating individuals are absent in the lives of their kin or villagers back home in Nepal, their presence is felt in myriad forms (I discuss more on this in chapter 5 of my thesis on: *Migration and Interconnected Spaces*) As an example, this could be 'waiting' for updates or news of success when individuals or groups embark on uncertain or clandestine journeys into desired destinations (Also see Graw and Schielke, 2012)

anthropology of the good, I have sought contextualise this chapter within the broader position of my research endeavour – that of hope, dreams, and imagination, which I build on further in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

IMAGINATION, DREAMS AND SPACES

In this chapter I address how individual aspirational dreams feature as a critical condition that underlies much of Nepali migration. I begin with a discussion on the widespread commonplace dream of becoming a Gurkha – a status that is idealised and desired throughout Nepal (particularly among certain indigenous groups with generational military background) and which, I argue, presents an ideal type of migration: one which reflects worldly success while also embodying at-home local responsibilities. I then outline various ways through which dreams and the imagination relate to local understandings of migration and *bidesh* and relate to forms of symbolic and economic capital through businesses such as consultancy agencies and institutions, Gurkha training centres, or media and popular culture, which not only enable but allow people to make sense of migration. I follow this with discussions on migrant dreams by arguing that the pursuit of migration to *bidesh* among Nepalis also brings forth a situational paradox– meaning that while migration enables possibilities for fulfilling aspirational dreams alongside other immediate or lifelong dreams such as building houses, marriages, education of children, it also entails migrants' experience of lived realities in '*arkako duniya'* (other's world) defined by separation from family and a longing for home. I proceed by outlining the various ways that migration shapes and is shaped by endeavours of what might also be related to ideas of a 'good life'. I do not espouse a delineation of or limit the possibilities of what entails a good life but rather elucidate how dreams as intangible facets of imagination alongside the tangible or material forms of such understandings inform the phenomenon of migration in Nepal. Emic understandings relating to notions surrounding Gurkhas and migration carry strong implications throughout my discussions in this chapter. As such, ideas pertaining to dreams and indeed hopes bear strong implications for one's *jimmawari* (responsibility), *kartaavya* (duty), *baadyata* (compulsion) and *iijat* (honour) in Nepali *samaj* (society), since migration enables possibilities for achieving or working towards certain dreams while also obstructing others. Amid such considerations, I also maintain Schielke's (2020) stance that migration is a *desire* that structures the experience of life in a society, entangled in connections between one's own locality or place of belonging, and the opportunities that the world offers – which are imaginable and seemingly at hands reach but importantly, one is not there.

5.1 Gurkha Dreams

"Kathmandu, Nepal – In one corner of Nepal's capital, young men are going through the final preparations in pursuit of their singular lifelong dream: a place in the British Army as a Gurkha soldier, perceived as their ticket out of a life of uncertainty and poverty…" These opening lines from an article in the New York Times (2022) highlights the enduring pull that the successful enlistment into the British Gurkhas has on Nepali peoples. [95] Becoming a Gurkha entails not only earning a significantly higher income in comparison to Nepali military earnings but also gives one a sense of the assurance for a more certain and secure future. Another article titled, "Being a British Gurkha: still a cherished Nepali dream" by the Gulf Times (2016) sheds light on Nepal's dire local economic conditions, citing young Nepali aspirants who regard the British army as a life changing opportunity to follow the footsteps of their fathers and kin to help their families break free from the shackles of hardship and poverty.[96] Similarly, a Kathmandu Post (2021) piece, "The Gurkha dream", further emphasises the economic benefits of joining the Gurkhas particularly the opportunity it offers to settle in the UK after the completion of military service and echoes the determined voices of many hopefuls, eager to triumph over the rigorous Gurkha army selection process.[97]

Nepali *sapana* (dream) parallels Schielke's (2020) allusion to the Arabic term *hilm,* which refers both to dreams in sleep and hopeful imaginations. In turn, this is pertinent to Bloch's (1986) understanding that while night-time dreams are unbounded by the laws and logic of the waking world, hopeful dreams imply potentials of possibility with strong desires to materialise this. As such, the latter dream is a vernacular theory of aspiration (Schielke, 2020), and it is about striving and pursuing towards something that is yet to happen. It is within the pursuits of such hopeful dreams of going to *bidesh,* (including returning) which are entangled within their own real-world conditions in Nepal that the migration phenomenon finds its vigour. Schielke's work is an attempt to give weight to the stories of people on the move towards metropolitan centres that entail socially conservative dreams of fulfilling a good life of material comfort as

[95] Source: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/22/world/asia/nepal-gurkha-veteran-protests.html (Accessed: 18/05/2023).

[96] Source: https://www.gulf-times.com/story/485492/being-a-british-gurkha-still-a-cherished-nepali-dream (Accessed: 18/05/2023).

[97] Source: https://kathmandupost.com/art-culture/2021/09/10/the-gurkha-dream (Accessed: 18/05/2023).

well as dreams that exceed the taken-for-granted social imagination of a good life. Following a similar vein, my analysis is also moulded through two valuable tensions: the conditions of cyclical labour migration abroad, with workers going back and forth between Nepal and other countries, and how migration paves way for possibilities of hopeful pursuits and dreams, including its entanglements and pressures.

My use of the Gurkha soldier as a figure/s of analysis for this research is for the purpose of first, capturing fruitful tensions that are pertinent to Nepali migrant lives in enduring conditions of outward migration from Nepal coupled with spatial or geographical (i.e., favoured destinations amongst migrants), and second, the ways in which migratory undertakings unfold within potentials of societal mobility, while also generating its own pressures and conflicts. As such, the Gurkha referent offers a useful comparative lens to discern migratory desires and hopes in the context of Nepal, since the Gurkha as a migrant epitomises widely regarded notions of economic and material success, and social status in Nepal by way of outward migration.[98] Through such an analytical lens, in this thesis I demonstrate and argue that allusions to Gurkhas are rampant in everyday discourse about migration in Nepal from political engagements to popular culture, humour and exchange among people. More crucially, these understandings seep into the social fabric of migratory desires and experience of people in Nepal.

As noted previously in the introductory chapter, both in literature and everyday discourse, the Gurkhas are often romanticised for their valour and loyalty to the British crown, thus capturing the Western (and local) imagination (See Caplan, 1995). The many military writings on the Gurkhas are scattered with such depictions, inferring an immediate corroboration of the Gurkhas as brave, loyal and fierce warriors (see Northey and Morris, 1928; Gould, 1999; Parker, 1999). Also see Streets, 2004 for discussions on martial races).[99] This offers an understanding of the Gurkhas, mirrored in an image of the 'Other' as the very "lenses through which it [migration] is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West" (Said, 1978:58). While the Gurkha regiment has been awarded

---

[98] I also acknowledge that such attitudes are not simply exclusive to the Gurkhas, nor are they always held in a positive regard in the local context.

[99] The Gurkha identity is built on a familiar discourse entwined in plaudits of bravery – referents that have come to define and dominate the Gurkha rhetoric.

thirteen *Victoria Crosses*[100] – the highest-ranking and most prestigious award of the British armed forces honours system, specifically bestowed for gallantry in the presence of an enemy - a consideration of the Gurkha figure through anthropological analysis offers valuable insights surrounding notions of aspirational dreams, hopes and imagination in the context of Nepali migrations. Concomitantly, such a focus also offers a useful contribution towards anthropological debates around ideas of identity and difference, representation and meaning.

My own life experiences continue to be enmeshed within the aura of the widely embodied aspirational Gurkha dream – at the very least, fragments of it continue to drift around. As the son of a retired Gurkha soldier, reaping the benefits of my father's accomplishments, I am inevitably knotted to the thread of his *bhagya* (fortune or destiny). While I am constantly reminded of this by my own parents and kin, such insinuations were also profoundly echoed by many of my interlocutors, who often resigned their own *bhagyas* to their own numerous challenges – from their everyday worries about financial debts, to sustaining their families while living in separation, as well as the pressurised conditions of undertaking work in *bidesh*. Personal stories of Nepali dreams to become a Gurkha offer insights into what such aspirations mean for those who desire a future with opportunities outside of Nepal. At the same time, while many applicants do not succeed as a Gurkha, they still end up pursuing migratory endeavours outside Nepal.[101]

5.1.1. A Failed Gurkha

I briefly summarise the experience of Hem Gurung, one of my interlocutors. Hem accumulated over fourteen years of work in *bidesh* through his multiple stints abroad in Qatar and Dubai. His first job in Qatar was as a security guard in a warehouse for a couple of years. After the completion of his contract there, he returned to Nepal for a short period, but it was not long before he found himself working as a concierge/storekeeper at a hotel in Dubai. He worked for

[100] The Victoria Cross is the highest military honour for gallantry in the British Army (Gurung, 1998).

[101] Every year, thousands of hopeful young men apply to join the Gurkhas in Nepal. Predictably, the competition is fierce, and the recruitment process itself is by no means an easy task. The Brigade of Gurkhas today consists of five major units, which are the Royal Gurkha Rifles (two battalions), the Queen's Gurkha Engineers, the Queen's Gurkha Signals, and the Queen's Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment (Bullock, 2009). There has been a gradual decrease in the number of Gurkha regiments in the past decades, including changes to the selection tests and procedures in more recent years. Details on Gurkha recruitment, including unit structures can be found on the British Army Website at http://www.army.mod.uk/gurkhas/27784.aspx (Accessed: 10/07/2023).

the same hotel company for almost a decade. He told me that since the company was of good repute, he received a good salary with decent benefits, and his role also provided him an opportunity to earn extra tips from hotel guests. He was even able to return to Nepal numerous times to visit his family during his holidays. In 2003, while he was working in Dubai, he relocated his wife and two young children from his village to a shared rented house in Kathmandu so that his children could be schooled in the city. At the time of my fieldwork in 2020, he owned a three-storeyed house in Kathmandu, which he rented out partially to two other families.[102] Hem Gurung and his family occupied one floor. During my time in Kathmandu, Hem often invited me to his home for tea or coffee or an occasional sample of *kodo rakshi*[103] during the evenings, where we would engage in deep discussions about our own life experiences, or as he would say *'dhukka-sukkha ko kura'* ('conversations about sufferings and happiness'). During one of our many such chats, with a few of his relatives from Pyarjung village present, Hem reminisced about his deep disappointment and the pain of his failure to make it into the British army as a young man.

In the early 1990s, despite his best efforts, Hem failed the daunting recruitment process required to join the British Gurkha army four times. At such a *kalilo umer* (young age), these multiple rejections had left him sad, frustrated and confused without any plans for the future, since, like most young boys in his village, becoming a British *'lahure'*[104] had always been his childhood *sapana* (dream) – furthermore, he had stood a reasonable chance for succeeding since his father was already serving in the Nepali army, while also some of his other relatives were either in the British or the Indian army. With a faint smile on his face, he said: "You know how it is with most of us Gurung, Rai, Limbu or Magar *keta haru* (boys)… everybody dreams

[102] The construction of Hem's house was completed in 2016 although he had bought the land much earlier at around 2010.

[103] *Kodo* (millet) and *raksi* (alcohol). Distilled millet alcohol is a common alcoholic beverage in many parts of Nepal and is often also simply referred to as local *raksi* (as opposed to any other forms of spirits or beers).

[104] In a simple sense, the term 'lahure' refers to an army or military personal in common local parlance in Nepal. *However, the historical origin of this term is related to the city of 'Lahore' and the military recruitment of Nepali men in the city during the British rule of India. For further details see Des Chene (1986). The term is often used in Nepal to denote a 'soldier' (regardless of serving in the British, Indian or Nepali army). It is frequently used as a suffix when referring to a particular kind of soldier. As such Nepali people may refer to a British lahure, Nepali lahure, American lahure etc. It is perhaps the most misplaced moniker given to the British Gurkhas, since the term has its origins in 'Lahore' the capital of Punjab (Karthak, 2012).

of getting into the British army first… if we are not successful, then we try for the Indian army or Nepali army… Otherwise it is the usual – *'bidesh janu'* (go abroad)… Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi, Dubai… and for people who can afford it, may be somewhere better like the US, Australia or Europe… *aru upaaya nai chaina* – there are no other options… and kids from our community rarely want to venture into other avenues – they do not really want to study or take up government jobs or do something in Nepal…" [105]

Taking a sip of *kodo rakshi* from the steel mug in his hand, he continued: "Consider this – where would our children be without all the *dukhha* (suffering) we endured?... We went through many struggles and sacrificed everything for them in hope that they might have a better life than what we had – gain a good education and make something valuable out of their *bhavishya* (future) and lead a *sukkha ko zindagi* (comfortable life)… Kids these days have everything…phones…television, internet...motorbikes… they want to eat out in restaurants, wear branded clothes… carry iPhones... and things that we have never heard of – everything! ... all this never existed in our time… all we did was cut grass, gather wood, graze cattle, plough or help in the fields … even white rice or *bhuteko makkai* (roasted corn) was like a luxury for us back then…"

"*Tehi tah! Ajkal key chaina ra*? – Exactly! What is not available these days?... We had nothing during our time. Kids these days seem to be more interested in indulging in cigarettes and alcohol… *sab 24 ghanta phone ma jhundera baschha* – everyone is stuck to their phone for 24 hours… playing Pub-G all night or using Facebook and Tik-Tyak… or whatever it is called…", one elderly woman stated; her comment was received with much laughter and agreement among all those present.

"*Ajkal ka keta keti haru* – the youth these days…", Hem continued with a tinge of discontent in his voice, "…their parents are toiling hard in places like Saudi…Qatar…Malaysia… or wherever… We have moved from our *gaun* (village), *purkha* (ancestral home) to places like Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan… *Ani basnu, khanu, launu, padaunu* (then there are expenses like rent, food, clothing, school fees) … for what?... not because we want to… but for our children… for their education… for their own future… they need to understand this…"

[105] As such the Gurkha dream also reflects the desire or preference for certain geographical spaces (and jobs) over others outside of Nepal.

Hem's emphasis on his own struggles and years of toiling in *bidesh* as a migrant worker to support his family and ensure that his children received a decent education in Kathmandu were also reflected in, where both his children had now reached in their lives. Decades after his failed attempts, Hem's own son would go on to successfully join the British Gurkhas in 2015, while his younger daughter, only recently moved to New York in early 2023 by successfully securing an Electronic Diversity Visa (E- DV) or the Green Card lottery scheme for the USA – a much coveted possession in Nepal, with a notable opportunity to move to America. [106] Given such family circumstances, particularly that of his children, Hem's own relatives often remarked about how *bhagyamani* (fortunate) both he and his wife were now that their kids were in *bidesh* by suggesting that both their children had found a right *bato* (path) or *thau* (place), which ensured the security of their future/s. Hem's own wife and other relatives also often joked that at 49 years old, Hem had already retired from work and was living like a youngster with his beloved and raucous Royal Enfield motorbike that shook the whole neighbourhood every time he rode it.

While Hem's initial dream of becoming a Gurkha soldier is now a lingering past memory within his imagination, it is the power of such dreams and what they encompass that are significant in migratory projects to *bidesh*, and in steering individuals and groups towards the Not-Yet future. In Nepal migration projects undertaken by young men to *bidesh* are often fragmented failures of certain desires like the Gurkha dream, and as such also follow very closely with hope, in that they go beyond personal or individual desires. Hem's own experience of working abroad and the immense sacrifices or the *dukkha* he endured during his time in *bidesh* exemplify this – for dreams are entangled within continually shifting processes and the making of desired or hoped for future/s, for individuals and their families. Extending on Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus as a way to exert one's given position in a social hierarchy, coupled with Jackson's (2011) idea of the pursuit for a good life 'within limits', Schielke proposes a notion of inevitable dreams as aspirational undertakings and imaginaries that are both realisable on a material plane and socially and morally recognised and encouraged.[107] He

[106] More details on the USA Diversity Visa Program can be found online at https://uk.usembassy.gov/diversity-visa-lottery/ (Accessed: 28/08/2023).

[107] Schielke notes that while these dreams are seemingly more compelling rather than inevitable, the latter appeared to be the case amongst most of his interlocutors from his fieldwork experience.

states: “This is the first power of imagination involved in migratory work: the power of dreams that are so compelling that their pursuit takes on the subjectively experienced power of inevitability. One may not succeed in realizing them, but one definitely will try. That power makes the pursuit of other dreams less likely, even if the means to pursue them might seem to exist on a material plane.” (ibid.:37). This is strongly reminiscent in my research since, for many young Nepali men, desires for Gurkha success and its demanding commitments also often push other immediate endeavours towards the periphery. As such this relates closely to Schielke’s position that often, aspirational dreams become so powerful that they side line others. Although the Gurkha dream with its eminent social standing coupled with economic benefits is a highly attractive career choice for many, the immense pressures these prospective recruits face, including their failures, also attracts equal attention. While such a focus directs us to consider local conditions and desires for pursuing such dreams, it also enables us to weave an understanding about how migration endeavours also compensate for other dreams that fail or are unsuccessful and/or are also awaiting their fulfilment.

Schielke argues that this limiting aspect regarding the imagination is not something inauthentic or harmful, but is rather productive, even if in contradictory ways, while guiding people in their endeavours and efforts. While labour migration reinforces much of the values of a conservative society such as kinship networks through marriages, family support through education and houses, wealth, and religion, it may disrupt and transform them. Hence, its effects are intricate in a sense that the inevitability of socially charged and imagined goals does not merely reproduce the given and the conventional. Espousing a Marxist materialist framework of analysis, wherein power refers to the ‘relations of production,’ Schielke argues that relations of production are also always relations of imagination. This assertion relates to the inseparable domains of economy, morality and dreaming, when considering earning money towards purposes such as building houses, marriages, education of children or everyday household expenses. While, it is this inseparability, which provides the first power of imagination to effectively produce and reproduce undeniable and compelling realities, “this power has probably always coexisted with another, weaker power: that of the desire for something more than what is known and what can be expected, a dream to have other dreams” (ibid.: 38).

In this regard, Schielke notes that although the “imagination relies on an available stock of knowledge, figures of speech and ways to think, popular culture, underlying and explicit moral sentiments, and intuitive limits of the possible and thinkable.” (ibid.:39). As such, dreams are regularly moulded through existing ideas and conventional aspirations, often in creative and

innovative ways. However, he makes a crucial point that the required means and possibilities to support one's ability to nurture such dreams are not unlimited, nor are they freely available, which he refers to as "other dreams", which should "…not be mistaken for authentic ones, as opposed to a socially imposed first power of imagination. Almost all aspirational dreams are made up of socially available stuff. What makes some dreams difficult to achieve is not where they come from but the scarcity of the means to realise them, their lack of social acceptability, and the low likelihood of their success." (ibid.: 39). This is highly pertinent to the migratory endeavours among many Nepalis, where migratory dreams and desires of going to *bidesh* – whether as Gurkhas or students to the US, Australia, Japan or a European destination, or as migrant workers in Korea, Malaysia or the Arab Gulf, are entwined to myriad conveniences and constraints, from educational qualifications or financial status to individual background, interests and kinship networks. Furthermore, Jackson's (2011) idea of a 'life within limits' mentioned above offers a useful point to frame migratory experiences alongside dreams, as people continue to strive towards their achievements, reformations, or replacements.

5.2 Airport Stories: Departures and Connections

Rudai hide phool mala gasera

Pyari ko nau gedi masera

Airport ma chhu

Kasari samjhau ma runi maya lai…

Afai chot ma chu… ma ta afai chot ma chu…[108]

Crying I walk adorned with a garland of flowers

Spending my love's nine beaded necklace

I am at the airport

How am I to console my crying darling…

[108] The *Naugedi Mala* (*nau* = nine; *gedi* = beads) is a culturally significant form of ornament, traditionally gifted to women as a symbol of marriage in Nepal. As the name suggests it is decorated and embellished with nine golden beads and strands of glass beads (or *potay* in Nepali).

When I myself am hurting… when I myself am hurting…

- (A Nepali *Lok dohori* (folk) song, *'Airport Ma Chhu'* (I am at the Airport) by Ganesh Adhikari & Sunita Budha Chhetri) [109]

Prem's mother seemed to be in good spirits when I arrived at their place one late afternoon. Both, mother, and son were relaxing outside on a *gundri* (straw mat), under the shade on the small veranda at the entrance, which also faced the main road. There was a tinge of delight in her voice when she told me that she would finally be getting her hands on a brand-new smart phone. With his usual sharp sense of humour, Prem instantly remarked, "yes yes… now you can finally watch all the YouTube and Tik Tok videos in the world now…that too *aaramley,* in peace," as he scampered inside to get ready.

His mother, chuckled with the evident delight of an inquisitive child, jubilant in the inevitability of an imminent box of treats. It was a hot day, so I happily obliged when an offer of a glass of soft drink came my way. No sooner had my glass of chilled *sprite* arrived than Prem came out with a black helmet partially submerged over his head and began inspecting his trusty old hero Honda motorbike that stood in the corner. *Dai!*[110] Shall we make a move? he asked me as he dusted off its weary looking body and wiped down its cracked headlight and side mirrors with a piece of cloth.

"Ekchin Na! – Hang on! Let *Dai* finish his drink first!" His mother shrieked at him almost immediately.

I took a large gulp of the chilled fizzy drink in my hand that almost sent my brain to a numbing freeze, and before I knew it, I found myself seated behind Prem on his motorbike, who now faced the stern test of navigating the chaos of Kathmandu's iconic ring road.

The ring road is a 17-mile circular route encompassing parts of Kathmandu (and Lalitpur), connecting many of the capital city's major sites, whilst also facilitating interstices for an array of socio-economic and political activities. Inevitably, it is well renowned for its abundance in *dhulo* (dust) as much as its congestion and disarray. I recall a taxi driver during my previous visit, who jokingly commented: "if I could sell all this *dhulo* on ring road, I would be a

[109] The music video for this song can be found online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEd5GYnNtQw (Accessed: 08/02/2023).

[110] Elder Brother in Nepali

millionaire by now. Just look at all this top quality *dhulo!* You will not find this anywhere else in the world… only in *hamro* (our) Nepal!"

In the West of ring road, the vigilant eyes of the eminent *Syambunath stupa* gazes down upon the valley from a hilltop adjacent to the road, between the lively *Gongabu* bus park and the relentlessly jammed hub of *Kalanki*, with the latter serving as the Kathmandu's major entry and exit point via road. Moving anti-clockwise along ring road towards Lalitpur sits the busy Transport Management Office in *Ekantakuna*, immediately recognisable by its omnipresent queue of vehicles lazing along the roadside. This is followed by a long stretch passing through *Gwarko*, eventually leading to the exasperating traffic intersection of *Koteshwor,* which connects the highway further Eastwards to the rich cultural and heritage district of *Bhaktapur* and beyond. At this three-way junction, the airport runway is somewhat noticeable with the regular hovering of aeroplanes overhead offering a moment of distraction from the chaos and clamour of the roadside. After another long stretch parallel to the airport runway, past *Tinkune park,* the ring road arrives at the Tribhuvan International Airport, with the revered religious sites of *Pashupatinath temple* and *Boudhanath stupa*, both within close proximity. Moving further North beyond the airport, the ring road endures through the ever-congested intersections of *Gaushala, Chabhil and Maharajgunj,* before finally arriving at *Gongabu* bus park, which is also a haven for countless hotels and lodges.

In many ways, the ring road is a lively conduit that feeds Kathmandu city with life, character, exuberance, and chaos. Given its critical position in the valley coupled with its multifarious sites for everyday social, economic, and political pursuits, it is a thread that binds the capital city. It is not only travellers visiting Nepal who are certain to get an instant feel of the country along the ring road, upon immediately arriving at the airport, but the ring road also bears much of the emotional and physical exertions of thousands of Nepalis who make the journey into Kathmandu from all over Nepal, before eventually flying off to countries like Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Qatar, Dubai and beyond.

Like many airports all over the world, the Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) in Kathmandu is a busy place. I have often heard people compare it to a *sabji baazar* (vegetable market) or the notoriously crowded *Asan baazar* in Kathmandu, both in seriousness and jest. A friend once made a blunt joke that, 'Kathmandu airport feels less like an airport and more like a bus park,' and it is not difficult to discern why given that it is the country's only international airport, centred as a nucleus for Nepal's connection to the world. TIA's lacklustre structures,

inadequate facilities and often tumultuous organisation are commonly picked upon as strands of discontent and sadness in public discourse, including visitors to the country. Frequent speculations about rife bribery activities amongst airport officials are also a cause of serious concern, further adding to its reputation.[111]

After parking his motorbike, Prem and I make our way towards the international terminal building. Across to the footpath, adjacent to a big roundabout cum garden encircling a small pool with pipes of cascading water accompanied by a row of colourful flags, I observe scattered people with trollies or bags and suitcases. Some are even posing for photographs, adjusting their angles to evade the constant flow of white taxis and motorbikes from disrupting their moment. Straight ahead, the terminal stands as an elongated edifice, prominent via its make of red *Chinese 'ittah'* or bricks, complemented by a sloping roof, designed as smaller rectangular blocks, upon which Prem comments, "doesn't it look like a slab of dairy milk chocolate?" as I concur in laughter. Several white taxis and cars are parked along the road under the canopy of the arched roof extension protruding from the building, as disgruntled passengers attempt to gather their baggage in haste, succumbing to the relentless whistling of a determined police constable in blue uniform.

"Eta ta jaile pani esto ho Dai – it is always like this here Brother," Prem tells me as we are immediately engulfed by a storm of commotion, stirred by the familiar sights and sounds infecting an airport premises. I glance left towards the shiny red bricked wall bearing the TIA logo with TRIBHUVAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT written across in bold golden letters coupled with its Nepali Devanagari script. Beneath it gleams a contrasting yellow board with 'Nepal' composed in white, flanked by numerous delicately crafted wooden frames in the well-recognised local style of *'ankhi jhyal'* (eye window) holding flowers, which add their glowing presence. This wall attracts moments of intimacy, as people in their own accord pose for photographs, while some wait keenly for their chance – a chirpy young man carrying a backpack, with a yellow *khada* draped around his neck is surrounded by a group of others as they all synchronise a thumbs up in unison; beside him, a woman with several *khadas* around her neck and a garland made of marigold is accompanied by a young man and a girl on each

[111] An acquaintance once offered to help me bring in as many new mobile phones or bottles of Johnnie Walker whiskey through the airport customs without any issues (if I compensated him accordingly for his assistance!).

side; while a sombre looking man wearing a *dhaka topi* [112] with red *tika* (vermilion) on his forehead with even more colourful *khadas* around his neck is embracing a woman and two young boys.[113]

In front of us, the stretch of departure area, in its normality is swarming with scurrying people emitting a certain air of endeavour and organisation. From the ceiling above suspends a partitioned green sign board, which reads, 'All Other Passengers' with an arrow facing upwards at the top and 'Nepali Migrant Workers' with another arrow facing downwards, both also accompanied by their Nepali translation.[114] We walk past the long queue of people, many holding their passports and documents in hand, some with anxious faces, consoled by the colourful garlands and *khadas* around their necks, while random bursts of laughter, yelling and murmuring, ringtones and music from mobile phones, squeaking trolleys and the regular whistling of the police add to the cacophony of noise. Towards the far corner, I witness a large congregation of individuals with their bags and suitcases, all donning similar white caps, like a troop of mushrooms firmly standing their ground.

As we meander along the fissures left unoccupied by masses of people or trolleys, we reach the small coffee shop located just before the stretch of arrivals section, which seems slightly more open than its counterpart. The authorised waiting room, nonetheless, is effervescent with individuals, mostly eager family members or friends who have come to receive their dear ones. There is a swarm of people at the far end of the room, all gazing attentively towards the transparent glass at the arrivals door, through which all arriving passengers make their way.

"Dai, the flight has already landed, it is the Flydubai one," Prem informs me as he nods to the TV monitor mounted on the wall in front of us, which depicts the status of all scheduled flights

---

[112] The *dhaka topi* is a traditional hat worn in Nepal. It is made with *dhaka* fabric and is discernible by its distinct shape and intricate patterns.

[113] *Khada (or Khatak)* is a traditional ceremonial scarf, which symbolises purity and compassion in accordance with Buddhist traditions. In Nepal, it is usually presented to people as a gesture of goodwill during auspicious ceremonies like birthdays, weddings, graduations, and funerals including the welcoming and departure of guests, symbolising a safe journey in the case of the latter. Similarly, garlands usually made of marigold as a departing offering also symbolises good fortune or good luck for the undertaking that lies ahead.

[114]Also see an online article regarding this, which can be found on https://www.recordnepal.com/yet-another-iron-gate-now-at-nepals-immigration (Accessed: 08/02/2023).

at TIA. To avoid the congestion of people, Prem suggests that we wait just across the adjoining road from the arrival point, at the entrance of the taxi parking lot, as we walk past another policeman who is frantically gesticulating and yelling at vehicles and individuals along the exit area, with random bursts of his whistle.

"How will you recognise this person though? Do you know him?" I ask Prem, as we look around for a convenient spot to wait under the shade of the tinned overhead shelter on the side of the road, which is already occupied by a small crowd of people.

"No *Dai.* I have never met him before in my life, but *Santosh* has given me his phone number. I am trying to call him, but it won't go through. I'll keep trying. Maybe he will call me once he has network or is outside. Let's see…" Prem replies with a grin.

Santosh, Prem's elder brother, is four years older. He has been working as a security guard in Dubai for the past 5 years and is a colleague of the arriving individual we are due to meet. Upon noticing a couple of boisterous taxi drivers in their luminescent hi-vis jackets leaving their spot under the shelter, I immediately urge Prem towards the vacant space. With a swift move, we triumph over a few others, and find ourselves leaning over a metal railing under the shade with an unobstructed view of the arrivals door. Amid, the gathering there are also representatives from several hospitality establishments, holding papers or placards, with some labelled– *'Mr and Mrs Agarwal,' 'Miss Rebecca, UK,' 'Karma Treks & Adventure Nepal,' 'Kathmandu Guest House,'* among others. A few are even enthusiastically shouting out the names on their paper to almost every foreigner walking out the arrivals door, while I overhear someone complaining about the long delay with a frustrated tone – *"Chyaa… Nepal ma jailey ni estai ho* – It is always like this in Nepal." While we wait, I manage to strike a brief conversation with an elderly couple next to me, who tell me that they had come to receive their son who was returning from Japan, but their act of punctuality is swiftly swept aside when they learn that his scheduled flight is yet to arrive, leading them to make a quick retreat from the crowd.

While we share our observations, Prem checks his mobile phone regularly and I maintain a keen eye on the arrivals door, noting the people coming through in dribs and drabs. A few are immediately mobbed by their loved as soon as they step outside the door, while others glance around with uncertainty, before moving along with their trolleys, often stacked with large TV cardboard boxes, suitcases and bags wrapped meticulously in plastic or fastened with

interlacing rope, bearing personal information printed on A4 sized paper or written across with a marker pen –

MR MAQBUL

RIYADH TO KATHMANDU

SITA PRASAD YADAV

SAUDI-TO-NEPAL

UPENDRA

DOHA TO KATHMANDU

(*phone number)

It has already been over an hour since our arrival at the airport. As I continue to observe the mundane movement of people, amplified by regular eruptions of jubilation of people behind me in the open taxi stand, I notice two chirpy little kids in blue school uniforms, a boy and a girl, attempting to squeeze in beside me, exerting every sinew and muscle in their body, with necks extended to catch a clear sight of the arrivals area ahead. The girl, carrying a small bouquet of colourful flowers yells out, *"eta eta!* –here here!" as I notice two women behind us waving their hands as a gesture of approval. I shift slightly to one side to allow the little boy to fit in, who grins back at me with a, "thank you uncle."

"Are you here to receive your *baba* (father)?" I ask him, to which the girl echoes back at once, "*hoina! hamro Mama*…. Qatar bata' – No! Our uncle…from Qatar." I continue to chat to them about their family and school, until Prem steps aside with his phone and signals me to follow him. As the two siblings wave goodbye to me with big smiles on their faces, I try and catch up to Prem, who tells me, "It seems like he arrived quite a while ago but couldn't get in touch with me."

We make a steady march along the taxi parking lot, back towards the direction of the departure terminal, and after another quick phone call from Prem, we eventually stumble upon three men, who are standing in a corner along with their bags and suitcases in their trollies. As we greet each other with a formal exchange of *'Namastes'* followed by friendly handshakes, one of the

older looking men, wearing a red t-shirt with a large puma logo, dark blue jeans and white adidas trainers, tells us, "Sorry, we got out a while ago, but my sim card was not working. How long have you all been waiting for?"

"Probably over an hour or so," Prem replies, as I join the conversation and ask him, "how was your flight *Dai*?"

"It was fine. Nothing special really." He replied, as I further probed about his *chutti* (holiday), to which he replied, "about two months before I head back…Things look so different here in Nepal," followed by a burst of laughter.

Following a brief exchange, I came to learn that he had been working as a security guard in Dubai for the past 5 years and this was his first visit back to Nepal during this time, but he had also worked for a few years in Malaysia and Qatar. The other two men with him, were also working as security guards in Dubai but in a different company. They had come on the same flight from Dubai and all three of them happened to be from the district of *Tanahun*.

Amidst our continuing conversations, he reached out to his backpack on one of the trollies, and retrieved a light brown tote bag, quickly examining the small box of Samsung phone inside it before placed it back in the bag.

"This is what Santosh has sent for your *Ama* (mother)...*etti ho* (this is it)" he declared as he handed over the bag to Prem, who accepted it with both hands and a smile, while offering his *'dhanyabad'* (thanks) nodding his head.

My offer to sit down and have some tea somewhere was politely declined by all three men, who informed us that they had other friends they needed to meet as well, before making their way outside Kathmandu for their *'gaun'* (village) in *Tanahun* as soon as possible. Our brief encounter ended with a further exchange of customary *Namastes* and handshakes before Prem and I take our leave. As we make our way back towards the motorbike parking area, we are engulfed by yet another wave of people, trollies, and emotions.

Figure 11. Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu – Arrivals Area. Credit: Author 2020

Figure 12. Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu – Departure Area. Credit: Author 2022

5.3 Dreams and Imagination of *bidesh*

While the imagination is an intangible high-level mental capacity (Smith, 2023) often linked to empathy (Mezzenzana and Peluso, 2023), how it works together with ensuing shared realities has attracted much interest and continues to pave pathways for further research in the social sciences. Benedict Anderson's (1983) seminal work 'Imagined Communities' offers one way of understanding how powerful imagining can be through his research on the role of the imagination in producing the notion of nation/s: "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined… Finally, [the nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings" (ibid.: 49-50).

Among Nepalis the idea of an imagined community is apparent in endeavours and activities that link them to significant others from family to *gauleys* (co-villagers), or fellow members of indigenous groups (castes) or religious communities, who dwell not only in places across Nepal but also abroad in *bidesh*. While there is a strong presence of Nepali communities or social/charitable organisations in many countries outside Nepal, Nepalis in the UK offers a case in point. According to a study conducted by the Centre for Nepal Studies UK or CNSUK (2011) there are 303 (although likely more) Nepali communities and organisations based on ethnicity or lineage, district of origin or village back in Nepal, with the 'Gurkha' related category as the highest group at 64 (21%) out of the total number (Adhikari, 2012: 129).[115]

The ethnographic example I describe above on Kathmandu airport is a mundane yet crucial illustration of the imagination at play among Nepalis within the migratory trajectory. Undertaking responsibilities such as carrying family gifts on the behalf of their colleagues, friends or roommates from Qatar or Dubai when visiting Nepal on holiday or bearing Nepali food items and gifts when returning back are common endeavours among many. As indicated previously, the collective we *'hami'* or ours *'hamro'* are common expressions used frequently

[115] Furthermore, the word 'Gurkha' appears in the name of 57 Nepali businesses in the UK in favour of other words such as 'Himalaya', 'Nepal' and 'Everest', and is only second to the 69 Nepal, Nepali or Nepalese name bearing Nepali community/social organisations in the UK (Adhikari, 2012: 22).

by Nepalis to indicate the normality of migration to *bidesh*. Moreover, a separate entrance at the airport specifically for 'Nepali Migrant Workers' exemplifies a cause of discontentment amongst many, as one individual remarked: "After all that we have to go through, running around at the mercy of brokers and government officials to formalise our application to go abroad, we are treated with discrimination from the very start of our journey by our own government, even at the airport – we are looked down upon and made to line up separately as if we are less deserving just because we work in places like Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi or the *'khadi'*." This is not only a reminder about the everyday presence of state apparatuses in the lives of ordinary citizens but also pertains to ideas of belonging to a certain community as that described by Anderson (1983). However, in this case the notion of community emerges from a strong sense of the shared conditions of being a 'migrant worker' among Nepalis leaving for the Gulf countries, and in a way similar to that among Indian indentured labourers or *girmitiyas* of being *'jahajis'* or ship-board brotherhood/sisterhood that had also emerged from the collective pains and shared sufferings of the long and arduous journey across the waters to Fiji (Lal, 2000). In this regard Bruslé (2012) also highlights how there is a disregard or shunning of caste-based discrimination or *'bhedbhava'* in the shared spaces of labour camps or housing of workers in Qatar, since even upper-case migrants know perfectly well who belongs to lower castes are part of the same experience of being a Nepali migrant. Furthermore, the state or Qatar authorities hardly make any interventions in the camp, which is run by a camp supervisor, while room setup and mates are based on common affinities, and as such there is also a strong emphasis on being in a *gaun* or village regarding movement and activities in the camp.

The shunning of outward-bound migrants at Kathmandu Airport is also noteworthy and an experience that was repeatedly recounted. Here, I refer to the experience of Nepali migrants through an interview that I had with a former British Gurkha army, (Mr Limbu). Mr Limbu had also worked for over 30 years in Brunei as part of the GRU (Gurkha Regimental Unit). The GRU is a special guard force in the Sultanate of Brunei – comprised of mainly of veterans from the British Gurkhas and the Singaporean Police Force, as a second career choice. The GRU, as such is also a unique community since it is not associated with the British army but is a part of the Ministry of Defence Brunei.

Since Mr Limbu was also required to liaise and deal with Nepali government officials at Nepal's DOFE office (Department of Foreign Employment) as part of his job in Brunei, he expressed his discontent at the rife corruption he had witnessed in Nepal: "from a simple peon to high management officials, everybody wants to make something …and get a piece of the

pie… the big officials all want a ‘free ride’ to travel abroad on public expenses… the f***ing corruption was so obvious among these people…”

In speaking of a time when he had met a group of stranded Nepalis at Kuala Lumpur airport during a visit to Malaysia from Brunei, Mr Limbu stated: “they had all the legal documents and proof of job contracts and visas and everything… however, nobody had turned up to receive them at the airport … these bloody agents had simply conned these people and left them *alpatra* (stranded)…” In addition, he raised another aspect of Nepali migrant movements– something that I was already familiar with through numerous other accounts - which concerns travelling during international flights and dealing with Nepali immigration officials or airport staff, who are alleged or known to often treat Nepali migrant workers, particularly those leaving for the Gulf countries or Malaysia, with impudence. Given such circumstances, coupled with his own previous experiences, he told me that he would always dress presentably in a suit or a formal attire to ensure that he similarly did not face poor behaviour and conduct from Nepali officials when travelling. Hence, it is worth emphasising that one’s physical appearance through appropriate attire, or the proper presentation of one’s self in spaces like the airport matter. It implies an expectation of respect and amiable behaviour from the government officials one interacts with while also simultaneously differentiating one’s self from those who are considered to be grouped such as migrant workers going to the Gulf or other countries (See Goffman, 1956). The positioning and the presentation of one’s self is critical at the airport as elsewhere. As Vertovec (2009) notes, “specific practices and processes across borders affect how people think about and position themselves in society both here-and-there: how they undertake aspects of their everyday activities while considering multiple connections; and they organise themselves collectively according to multiple criteria and participate within encompassing contexts and scales – within or spanning specific localities –politically and economically” (2009:24). In Stewart’s (2012) work, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*, he describes how dreaming, in its myriad forms (prophetic, apocalyptic, rational historicist), alludes towards an understanding and envisaging of the future. For Stewart, dreams unsettle the dictates of historicism thus bringing together the past, present and future into coexistence (ibid.: 10-11) thus providing a sense of the importance of context and history for migrants' aspirational dreams. Moreover, Peluso and Alexiades’ (2016) assertion that *urbanisation* begins with new ideas and images in people's minds whose power lies in the ability to evoke new kinds of desire — not just material desires but also those for different lifestyles and identities- is similar in how ideas of migration take hold long before one takes

action toward its occurrence. This notion of how migration begins in people's minds long before it potentially takes place is pertinent for understanding the Nepali context where migratory dreams are shaped within the complexities and interactions of ideas as they unfold in villages, cities and *bidesh.*

Bloch (1986) also distinguishes daydreams from night-dreams. He contends that one is never tired of wanting something better; the basis of one's inclination to wish or dream is that the matter in question will improve or be fulfilled someday encompassing a form of dreaming as wish-fulfilment. For Bloch, the daydream is not necessarily a predecessor for nocturnal dreams, as he puts it: "Even with our eyes open, things can be colourful enough or dreamy inside our heads. Of the inclination to improve our lot does not sleep even in our sleep – how should it do so when we are awake?" (Bloch, 1986:78). Bloch contends that this differs from a Freudian psychoanalytic approach which places both day and night dreams on par with each other and views daydreams as forming essential models for nocturnal dreams (ibid.: 95). In this sense, the daydream is extensively capable of communicating itself beyond the individual by representing others along with it, since the dreamer can refer to others, unlike the sleeper who is left alone with his/her own treasures. Hence, for Bloch although, the day-fantasy like the night-dream begins with desire, the former, as is the case among Nepali considering migration, also brings them profoundly towards pursuit of their fulfilment.

The potential for aspirational dreams to transcend the individual, I argue, is a crucial aspect of migratory quests in Nepal. This is because dreams are not simply an accumulation of individual desires, but connect one to family and relatives, community, the nation, and the world. Dreams are not straightforward nor are they simple. In many ways migration and its dreams may be considered a form of "imagination as a social practice" (Appadurai 1996: 31). Lambek's (2018:11) understanding of horizons as "the extensions of the worlds we inhabit, not only in space but in time and understanding", also follows closely with Crapanzano's (2003) notion of 'imaginative horizons', which encompasses the heterogenous, flexible, and myriad features that characterise lived experience and its interpretation. Crapanzano emphasises on the dialectic between open and closed facets of human experience and is therefore concerned with the determinants of what has come to be termed social imaginaries. Hence, dreams and the imagination relate to myriad processes involved in Nepali migratory undertakings, which not only enable but also make sense of migration. As I will illustrate, dreams are also often fragmented desires or remnants of other failed processes and are often moulded as layered trajectories in the migration phenomenon. Aspirational dreams commonly take form in the

everyday activities of migratory pursuits, from the arrangement of finances, negotiation with brokers, maintenance of social relationships, relocation of families, construction of houses or purchase of land, and indeed waiting, hope and disappointment.

In consideration of such elucidations of aspirational dreams and imaginings, my focus is not to delve thoroughly on matters pertaining to the scientific explanations of neurons or the brain in the dreaming phenomenon, including variations of artificially induced dreams (i.e. drugs), but rather how the *waking dream* – one that is not oppressive but remains within one's power through a preserved ego (Bloch, 1986), relates to migrants' imagination and activities as understood through the narratives and experiences of my interlocutors in Nepal.[116] Following such a vein, for the purpose of my research, I draw on *sapana* or 'dreams', first, as a means to emphasise emic understandings of migration projects and experiences; and second, to illustrate how the entanglement of active forces such as dreams, hope and migration, not only continually shape ideas about the future, but also endure in times of uncertainty and difficulty. Schielke brings this point home by affirming that, "dreams of the waking kind, in contrast, thrive on the desire to make something unreal real" (2020: 66). Schielke's interlocutors – young Egyptian migrant workers emphasised on not only having a dream but also pursuing it to endure their predicaments, thus highlighting a crucial point that dreams as a locus of potentiality are located mainly in the future. This aptly epitomises Bloch's understanding that for the daydream, an essential aspect, especially in the journey toward an end, concerns the seriousness of a pre-appearance of that which can be or might become 'possibly real', which unlike the night-dream is simply made up of symptom-like indications (Bloch, 1986:97).

5.4 Dreams for Sale

Far-far away, my beloved must be looking at the road

Hoping that I might return, she must be counting the days

Under the shade of that peepal tree, where we rejoiced so much

Remembering me, my love must be sitting and staring out the window

---

[116] For my research, I do not explore the phenomenon of 'dreams' as mechanisms of the brain per se, since this would merely scratch the surface of a vast and valued subject interest in the sciences, which merits examination in its own accord.

My Maili…. My Maili…

What kind of future is ours, to be in separation

To remain content as if it was a game of fortune

I will cross the boundaries of time and come

I will lie to Karma and overcome the mountain

Once again, we shall rejoice under the shade of the fig tree

When I return from abroad, we shall decorate a new world

My Maili… My Maili…

- (A Nepali song *"Maili"* by Ankita Pun)

"We Nepalis are always flocking to *bidesh*. As soon as we hear about an opportunity to go to *bidesh*, we rarely think twice… *Acchamma cha*! – It's remarkable! But what can we do? Look at the state of our country too. *Testai cha eta* – It's just normal here…", Pratik, tells me nonchalantly, as we scurry across the long stretch of road on *Putali Sadak* – a busy and eminent hub particularly for education institutions, consultancy offices, and stationery supplies in heart of Kathmandu. Tall, crammed buildings surrounding the area stand as imposing figures, strewn with conspicuous giant advertising boards or signages in every possible size and manner. A massive board containing a map of Australia with a student in a graduation gown atop a building reads, 'STUDY IN AUSTRALIA- Scholarships available… IELTS success rate 100%... Apply now' while others bearing messages such as 'Study in USA, Canada, Australia, UK', 'Crash Course, IELTS/SAT', 'Study and Live in Japan', 'Learn Korean Language' etc. invigorate *Putali Sadak* with a certain sense of power to broker dreams – with better education opportunities and a future in *bidesh*, away from Nepal.

As a schoolboy, I had often frequented *Putali Sadak,* and the surrounding area with my friends during our school holidays, mainly prior to our return to school for the new academic year. We would flock around the whole city with excitement looking for essential school paraphernalia, including clothing brands such as Nike, Adidas or Reebok to flaunt back at school for the year. I noticed that one of the clothing shops I was familiar with had now been transformed into a language teaching centre. Pratik ushered me on with a grin, ensuring that I was not engulfed by a wave of people, as I attempted to observe the various signboards and posters floating all around us:

> Orbit International Education… Landmark Education… Dolphin Education Consultancy… Expert Education and Visa Services… Sydney Express Education Consultancy…

As I followed Pratik up a flight of stairs from a building entrance, we were greeted by a placard at the door entrance, which read – 'Right Path Career Counselling.'

This was not my first-time accompanying friends to such establishments that offered counselling services for those wishing to go abroad for higher education or employment, while many also offered foreign language courses or skills-based courses (culinary classes, security courses, computer classes etc.), which are deemed necessary and or beneficial for endeavours abroad. A common joke about *manpower* or employment agencies popping up like mushrooms in Nepal exemplifies the ordinariness of such establishments that sell dreams of *bidesh* and the possibilities it brings outside Nepal. Such ordinary displays and choices of economic and symbolic capitalism (Bourdieu, 1998) are plentiful in Nepal.[117] These are not simply forms of marketing displays but also bear the imaginative implications of *bidesh* and about the opportunities and possibilities that the notion of *bidesh* brings with it. These also aligns closely to the explicit ways in which ideas of the *bidesh* seep into forms of popular culture – particularly cinema and music. As I have maintained throughout my thesis, Nepal is a country saturated with migratory aspirations, articulated in everyday life through local terms such as '*bidesh janu' or 'bahira janu'* (to go abroad or to go outside, respectively), due to a lack on a substantial definition for the term migration in Nepal. Allusions to *bidesh* beyond everyday language and conversations, found within forms of popular culture in Nepal not only bring forth interesting ideas about migration but also give weight to its significance in the local milieu. For example, the lyrics to a song, *'Eh Saili'* by a Nepali band *Cadenza Collective* reads: "… how long must we serve in a *bidesh* job… promises are difficult there... let us instead endure *sukkha* and *dukhha* create our own green garden… let us toil in our own country…".[118] Another popular *lok* (folk) Nepali song, *pir* (sorrow), which deals with notions of *paristhiti* (situation)

---

[117] According to Bourdieu (1998:47), Symbolic Capital may be understood as a form of property (whether social, cultural, economic, or physical) which when perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception, cause them to know it and recognize it, thus giving it value.

[118] Cadenza Collective is a band from Kathmandu, popular for their eclectic blend of Jazz, Afro-funk, and Nepali folk music. The band is also widely regarded to be the pioneers of Jazz music in the Nepali music scene. More details can be found online on the band's website, available at: http://cadenzacollective.com/

faced by many Nepalis both at home and in *bidesh* also emphasises on migration in Nepal as described in a conversation between a couple presented below:[119]

Husband: I will never go to *bidesh* – even if I must die of hunger, I will die in this country.

Wife: So, will you also kill your daughter with hunger? And do you think that I do not love my country too? (as she shows her husband her battle scars and questions him – what did we get for this?)

Husband: A *'ganatantra'* (Republic)

Wife: Here I cannot even breast feed my daughter, nor can you satisfy her hunger. You go to *bidesh* or I will go myself.

While, my emphasis here is not on the notion of diaspora in the strict sense but towards a way of shared ideas about *bidesh*, this depicts a particular kind of understanding of what Cohen refers to as a 'de-territorialized diaspora' (Cohen 2008:8), where space itself has become re-inscribed by cyberspace, and a diaspora can to some degree be recreated through the mind, through artefacts or popular culture or shared imagination. In this regard, Bloch (1986), too, contends that popular images produced, consumed, shared in the mass media project visions of the "not-yet" and encourage affective contemplation in the realm of the "could-have." Wishful images invite people to imagine not-yets from the potentiality of the present, providing momentum toward the actuation of aspiration. "Only with a farewell to the closed, static concept of being does the real dimension of hope open. Instead, the world is full of propensity towards something, tendency towards something, latency of something, and this intended something means the fulfilment of the intending" (ibid.: 18).

Only a few weeks prior to my visit described above, I had accompanied another friend of mine, Raju to a similar establishment in the more upscale *Lazimpat* area, a haven for numerous foreign embassy buildings in Nepal. On that occasion we had visited 'US Edu-Consult Pvt. Limited' as Raju was keen to figure out his options for attempting to go to the US. Raju's case was interesting, because he himself had reasonable job working for an offshore legal consultancy firm based in Nepal, while his wife held a senior position for an international

[119] The music video for this song can be found online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDNV4OnYzp8 (Accessed: 02/11/2023).

embassy in Kathmandu.[120] His wife had recently visited the US on a visit visa and stayed there for a few months, and the couple had informed me about their hopes to move to America within the next year .[121]

At the same time, the ambivalence or disenchantment about *bidesh* is also much talked about in Nepal. Many of my interlocutors, who had returned to Nepal after having *'chakeko'* or 'tasted' (sampled or experienced, usually in reference to eating) multiple countries abroad, highlighted such a situation in their disappointments or failed migratory projects abroad, or simply expressed a realisation of *bidesh* as nothing but a sort of myth, or a hyperreal world as described by Schielke (2020) (I discuss this further in the following section). An anecdote from one interlocutor also captures such a sense of paradox about *bidesh* along with its complexities, which concerns a couple who had returned to Nepal after living in Germany for a couple of years. Upon their return, many of their relatives expressed their surprise and questioned them about their decision to return to Nepal, without enquiring about or understanding the couple's real motives or circumstances for their decision. Instead, their relatives were simply baffled that they had chosen to return from *bidesh,* and more so from an opportune country like Germany in Europe – a place that was unlike Malaysia and the Gulf states, destined for so many Nepalis. The ambivalence of *bidesh* here concerns ideas that living in Europe or so called *'thulo'* (bigger) or *'ramro'* (better) nations like the US, UK, Australia or European countries are seen as destinations that evoke a sense of the real *bidesh* or what it ought to really be, unlike common destinations among Nepalis like the Gulf countries, Malaysia, India (or even places like China and other Asian countries), which are not really considered to be *bidesh.*

In the case of the Gurkhas, ideas of what might be 'possibly real' through a successful enlistment into the British Gurkhas, and indeed other fruitful migratory endeavours in *bidesh* continue to bear significant social and economic implications in Nepal. Narratives of early memories and images of Gurkha soldiers expressed by many Nepalis (including retired soldiers

---

[120] They would often invite me for coffee or drinks, where we would have long and eclectic conversations. Raju had obtained a bachelor's degree in law from an Indian university, and together with his wife they earned enough to rent a decent two-bedroom flat, just off the bustling and popular *Jhamsikhel* area (which is also home to many NGO offices in the area).

[121] The couple are still in Nepal (as of Jan 2024). Raju was also made redundant from his job recently, while his USA visa application also ended in rejection, and is still working out other options to move abroad (the USA remains their preferred destination).

themselves) capture a sense of such possibilities. As one ex-Gurkha soldier put it: "the image of a Gurkha soldier back in the village during his first *chutti* (leave), with his own *swang* (swagger) – in his new smart clothes, sunglasses, radio and the *bideshi saman* (foreign items) or elaborate gifts he would bring back… the whole village would go to welcome him with garlands and flowers… all the girls trying to grab his attention and the marriage proposals he would now receive… being a *lahure* was tantamount to being a king…" Such majestic images strongly form the Gurkha ideal that Nepalis carry in their minds.

For any hopeful recruit, a commitment towards the realisation of making it as a Gurkha soldier demands months of disciplined preparation and strenuous training leading up to the selection tests. Hence, it is common for many young boys to move to the cities from their villages, with some often lodging with their kin/relatives to enable them to prepare more efficiently for selection and improve their chances for a successful recruitment.[122] This has also led to a growing presence of Gurkha recruitment training centres in cities across the country. Many of these training centres are founded and operated by ex-Gurkha soldiers,[123] who offer potential recruits an opportunity to gain expert physical fitness training and guidance in their preparation for the tough selection process –in exchange for a decent amount of money of course.[124] By capitalising on the *Gurkha dream*, such enterprises, which can be found distributed across Kathmandu (and other cities like Pokhara, Chitwan, Dharan etc) are successful thriving

[122] Karan and Saroj –two young boys from Pyarjung who had rented a shared room in Kathmandu and were training for the Gurkha selection while also pursuing their education/course in college). Similarly, other youngsters from Pyarjung are also in Pokhara or Chitwan, while some have already made a move to Dubai and Qatar. The village has seen a few successful Gurkha soldiers from the community (and Indian or Nepal army) over the years.

[123] These are mostly retired Singapore police-force contingents, who are not entitled to settle down in Singapore after the completion of their service unlike their British army counterparts who are entitled to UK citizenship and rights.

[124] A young man who failed the 2022 selection tests informed me that he had paid around NPR 35,000 as part of the initial training package in Pokhara (however there is an additional cost if an individual is selected for the final recruitment stage) with an additional NPR 12,000 per month for hostel fees, which included lodging and food (he stayed there for around 8 months). Staying in the training centre hostel is optional, however, since many hopefuls come from outside Kathmandu or Pokhara, this is a convenient option at an extra cost.

businesses.[125] While ostensibly they provide expert training and coaching, these training centres do not warrant any guaranteed success for those who enrol in their training programmes. Yet, it is not difficult to discern why young men and their families are attracted to such training centres and are willing to invest in their services. Ironically, during the Gurkha selection tests, potential candidates are either themselves fully aware or advised to deny undertaking any training services if questioned, since this not only raises questions about candidates' privileged or affluent background, but also their sense of work ethic and willingness to overcome challenges independently. This also concerns a display of a fair Gurkha recruitment process by the British army without any prejudice towards candidates based on their ethnic or socio-economic background including the threatening reach of *afno manche* or nepotism in Nepal. Bearing such a connation coupled with other complexities, the strict and strenuous Gurkha recruiting processes are made overt in a documentary titled *'Who will be a Gurkha?'* (2012). The film offers some insightful understandings surrounding the symbolic values attached to Gurkhas, not only in its historical legacy but also through the voices of potential recruits as eligible Nepali male citizens attending a '*free, fair and transparent'* selection process (also see Karthak, 2012).

At the same time, comparing ideas surrounding the Gurkha *lahure* (soldier) to local monikers or parodied terms such as '*Saudi lahure*' (Saudi soldier) or '*Qatari lahure'* (Qatari soldier) among others are also a strong reminder about local perceptions towards outward migration – not simply as desires and aspirational dreams for certain careers but also the conditions of their very failures or unfulfillments. This was a common theme among many of my interlocutors, who had attempted and failed the Gurkha selection process in the past. Dreams about joining the Gurkhas among Nepal's youth as expressed by many young men (as well as active and retired Gurkhas) with whom I shared deep conversations, were not solely motivated by material desires, status or economic benefits but also by the desire for the responsibility of meeting the immense pressures and burdens of expectations placed upon individuals. As one individual aptly put it, "chasing the Gurkha dream is fuelled by a sort of a high-risk high reward mantra…*mehenat ko faal mitho huncha* – the fruit of hard work is sweet". Since the annual recruitment numbers is relatively small in comparison to the number of applicants, competition is extremely fierce for the limited vacancies available each year. Hence, when considered from

[125] Even within the locality, where I was living in Kathmandu during my fieldwork, I noted at least five or six different training centres in the local area (within a radius of about just three kilometres!).

the perspective of sheer numbers, the Gurkha dream ends in failure for most applicants every year, often leaving many young men in precarious situations.[126] Rejections can have devastating impacts on hopeful recruits (and their families) both emotionally and in terms of their socio-economic conditions, with some already in mounting financial debts, usually incurred through informal loans borrowed from kin members. Anil, a 24-year-old man from Pyarjung, who had come back to Nepal from Abu Dhabi for a holiday in January 2023 spoke to me about his failed experience: "I remember I did not go back home for a good few days after my rejection[127] during the final selection process in Pokhara. It was the second time I had reached this stage, and it was heart-breaking for me since it was also my last opportunity to apply. I just stayed with my friends and drank every day to ease the pain… after all that training and *dukhha* (hard work) … I was really sad and disappointed to let my parents and other family members down who had put so much *aash* (hope or expectation) from me…" Such anecdotes are common among unsuccessful candidates, as I recall my own brother facing a similar situation during his attempts to join the Gurkhas in his late teens. The emotional burden of the Gurkha aspirational dream, as those of any migrant 'soldier' are a heavy emotional burden to carry.

Dreams, as such, are not solely shaped in the imagination; they are also formed through profound emotional activity and experiences. Bloch (1986) makes a crucial observation that the waking dream is steered in the medium of expectant emotions, such as anxiety, fear, terror, despair, hope, confidence etc. Dreams of migration as expressed by my interlocutors situated such expectant emotions within the tensions of what they hoped for themselves and their families in possible future/s, alongside the impediments towards their realisations. Furthermore, as I have discussed, such emotional expectations are also driven strongly by a highly saturated availability of enterprises and negotiators in Nepal who not only maintain an easy hold on the imagination and offer dreams for sale but also give direction to such dreams. This relates to a notion of aspirational dreams among migrants as one that is directed towards the future, and other dreams but not without an effervescent sense of emotive quandaries. In this regard I found

[126] According to the MOD, for the intake year 2023 there were nearly 20,000 applicants for the 204 vacancies.

Source: https://www.army.mod.uk/news-and-events/news/2023/02/new-gurkhas-selected-in-nepal/#:~:text=Nearly%2020%2C000%20applied%20for%20only,standards%20as%20a%20starting%20point (Accessed: 18/03/2023).

[127] The Nepali term '*falnu*' (to throw away or discard) is used commonly in this context.

as does Bloch that, “the intention in all *expectant emotions* is one that points ahead, the temporal environment of its content is future. The more imminent this future is, the stronger, ‘more burning’ the expectant intention as such; the more extensively the content of an expectant intention affects the intending self, the more totally the person thrown himself into it, and the ‘deeper’ it becomes a passion. Even expectant intentions with a negative content as regards self-preservation, like anxiety and fear, can likewise become passions, no less so than hope” (Bloch, 1986:108).[128]

Figure 13. Education Consultancies (i), Kathmandu. Credit: Author 2023

[128] “Thus: if the *mood* is the general *medium* of daydreaming, then the *expectant emotions* (including the extension which they can build on the filled emotions, on envy or respect for example) give the *direction* of daydreaming. They give the line along which the imagination of anticipatory ideas moves, and along which this imagination then builds its wishful road, or even (in the case of negative expectant emotions) its unwishful road… Both future-oriented intentions, that of expectant emotions and that of expectant ideas, accordingly, extend into a Not-Yet-Conscious, that is, into a class of consciousness which is itself to be designated not as filled, but as anticipatory. The waking dreams advance, provided they contain real future, collectively into this Not-Yet-Conscious, into the unbecome-unfilled or utopian field.” (Bloch, 1986:113)

Figure 14. Education Consultancies (ii), Kathmandu. Credit: Author 2023

Figure 15. Online Applications and Visa forms, Kathmandu. Credit: Author 2022

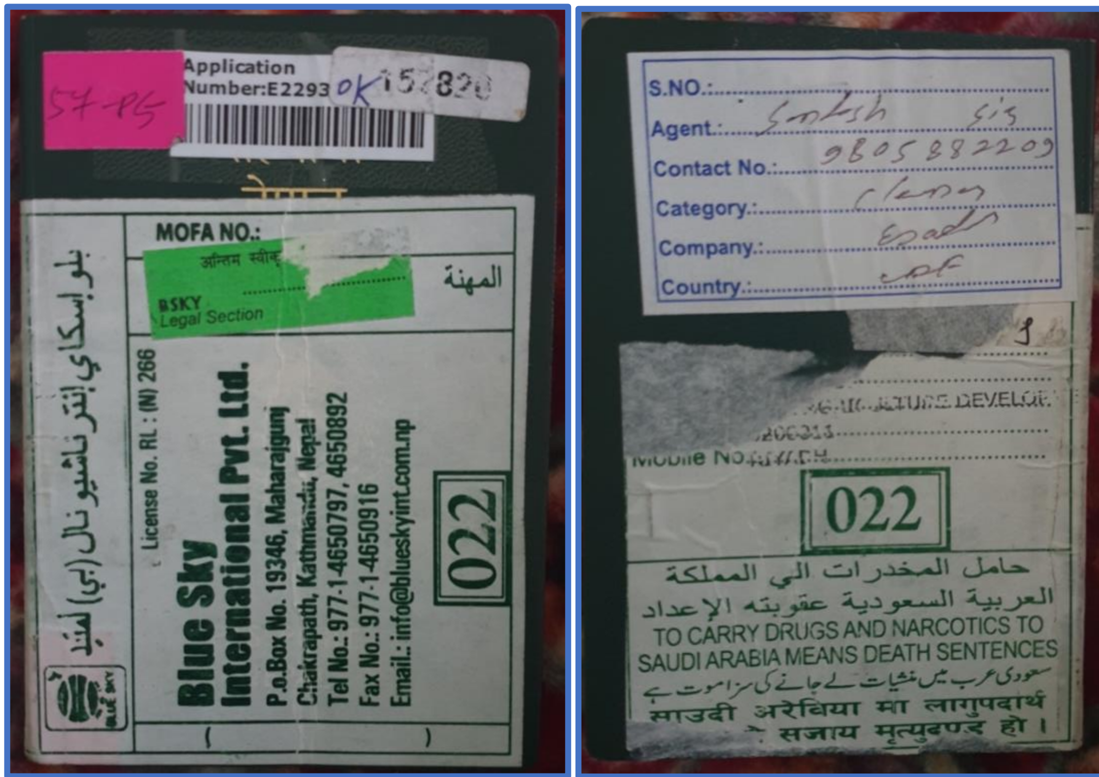


Figure 16. Passports (with permission from owners). Credit: Author 2021

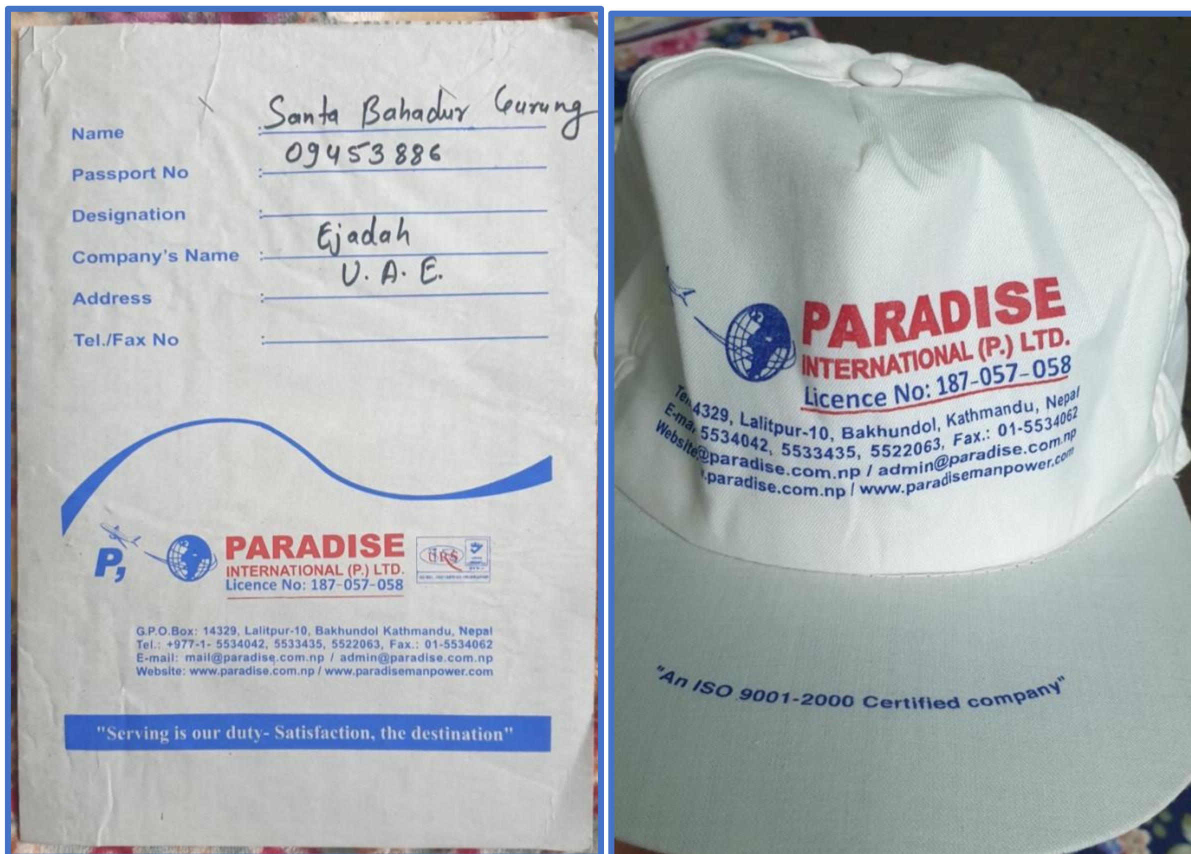


Figure 17. Paradise International "Serving is our duty- Satisfaction, the destination" Credit: Author 2021

5.5. Migrant Dreams, Lived Realities

The theme of aspirational dreams is examined extensively in Samuli Schielke's *Migrant Dreams* (2020). Schielke's book details the experiences and narratives of Egyptian migrant workers who travel to and from Qatar for employment amidst ongoing conditions of cyclical impermanence for workers. He depicts the ways in which migration enables social mobility and creates its own complexities. Given the overlapping connections and interests with Nepali labour migrants, I follow Schielke's analysis closely, who traces the implications of migrant dreams at the intersection of his own reflections and mechanisms of globalisation, and migration in the Gulf countries. Schielke's (2020) examination of the notion of dreams is situated against the background of the 'hyperreal' (Baudrillard, 1993) exemplified in Qatari society by a sense of a living dream – an image of living in the Gulf states as perceived by many of his migrant interlocutors. According to Baudrillard (1993) *hyperreality* is a form of replication so realistic that it makes the original seem less real. Schielke, draws on this notion to indicate reflect the excessive magnification of luxury and pleasure in the novel expansive building projects in Gulf cities, with its spectacular high-rises, air-conditioned buildings, malls, and parks. He also uses the term to convey the sense of wonder and confusion that the hyperreal can generate. Although, examples epitomise a type of utopian hyperreality, Schielke elucidates upon the everyday experiences of his interlocutors to argue that migrant workers are actually living in a state of 'hyporeality' or a less-than-real life that provides less than imagined: "a dystopian existence that is somehow less than real: a dim state of routine, focused on something other than the immediate material spot in which they are present—a life of enduring for the sake of something other than this" (ibid.:2). Furthermore, Schielke's interlocutors also often spoke about their prolonged stated of being abroad as a state of *ghurba* (strangerhood) due to constant delaying of their hopes to return home to their family. Similarly, Bruslé (2006) also elucidates how Nepali migrant workers in India describe their everyday experience of migration as living in an upside-down world, since they find themselves in an opposite world from an ideal life of earning and living in their own ancestral village in Nepal (ibid.). As such, migration is also an *exile experience* among Nepali migrants, mainly those who are temporary

or seasonal migrant workers who spend their time between their village in Nepal and Northern India.[129]

While such concepts are useful in helping to understand the pull factor of the Gulf on aspirational dreams as saturated with possibilities, Schielke (2020) accentuates a crucial argument that unlike Baudrillard's hyperbolic "desert of the real," that fantasies hardly drive one away from reality, but rather, they change reality.[130] It is precisely this ability for aspirational dreams to shape the way that people navigate their lives that make them significant. Like Egyptian migrant workers in Qatar, the aspirations of my Nepali interlocutors also entailed everyday projects such as marriage, home, and family. In this sense, it is crucial to grasp that the experience of migrant workers as a less-than-real sense of existence is also considerably entwined to accomplishing pursuits that are significant at home, or in other words, in undertaking work outside home such as in the Gulf cities, migrant workers are also building their lives elsewhere (ibid.). One such resultant paradox from the pursuit of migratory work is that migrants' success in earning money also makes it more challenging to return to the stable life one hoped to build back home, which according to Schielke is experienced by migrant workers as a form of double alienation – alienated work coupled with alienation from the very life they seek to shape through their efforts. Many of my Nepali interlocutors, also spoke frequently about their desires to return, particularly during the COVID pandemic or cases, including cases of reflection among a few who had endured years of separation from their families alongside coping with earning money while living illegally in Korea. Such quandaries and dilemmas of migratory situations are regularly expressed as *badhyata* (obligation) and *majburi* (constraints) in connection to one's duties and responsibilities towards their family (Also see Bruslé 2006). Hence, while social and individual pressures encompass a longing for home and return, they often force one to persevere in *bidesh*, thus constantly delaying their return (or compel one to leave Nepal as soon as possible). It is in such a vein that I also attempt to follow the dialectics of the pressing aspirational dream of migration and its endeavours – the

[129] In his study on Nepali migrants from far-west Nepal, Bruslé (2006) notes that a majority of migrants follow a strategy of moving between Indian towns and their village in Nepal – an undertaking connected to a combination of constraints at home (such as a lack of food, money and available jobs in Nepal) coupled with existing networks in India.

[130] Falseness may be a virtue in shopping malls, but they nevertheless, structure the material ways in which people move, eat, shop, and work, or enable some people to get rich while others toil for a meagre pay.

life of migrant workers, although often experienced as 'a world upside down' (Bruslé, 2006), entails shaping a sought-after life whereby their hopes and futures (which are also continually delayed) are conditioned by an oppressive labour regime (Schielke, 2020), while the tangible material effects from their ongoing strivings and pursuits, in turn, also shape new dreams. Schielke (2020) notes that concrete aspects of the aspirational dream are framed by larger scale norms and the economic, moral, and religious values of society. Indeed, he points out how in the case of Egypt, migration made it "economically and politically dependent on Gulf monarchies". Migrants' earnings play a critical role in the Egyptian economy, especially in the countryside. Similarly, in Nepal, remittances make a significant contribution to the national GDP. For instance, in 2021 it was estimated by the World Bank that 22.7% of Nepal's GDP is attributed to migrants' economic value.[131] In addition, migrants' experiences abroad also attribute other kinds of value. When they return from abroad, they contribute toward more global perspectives on culture, society, politics, views, education, and lifestyles. This is the case of Schielke's Egyptian migrants, who while also holding a nourishing a perception of Egypt as their home country, wrestled in-between intimacy and estrangement. These roles of both cultural brokers and, at times, social critics are similarly commonplace among Nepali migrants. Migrant workers are significant cultural brokers and economic contributors who come and go while living among and between spaces. They both desire to stay and desire to go. It is imperative to analyse the multiple layers of the relationships between aspirational dreams and migration at the individual and group level, including their experiences in the spaces they inhabit both at home and abroad. Following such a vein, I now aim to further probe two questions in the following sections: *What is the experience of being a migrant worker (a question which I have continually engaged throughout this thesis)? And what effect does this have on the world in which one lives?*

By examining these questions, I aim to draw on the paradox of migration in relation to the experience of migrants and their families, both at home and abroad, which is also captured powerfully in the experience of being a guest or a stranger in one's own home. The spaces that individuals occupy within the conditions and enabled possibilities of migration, thus carry

[131]According to the World Bank, personal remittances received in Nepal accounted to 8.23 billion in 2021, amounting to 22.7 % of the GDP, thus evidencing the economic value and contribution of labour migration and remittances to the Nepali economy.

Source: (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=NP) (Accessed: 18/03/2023).

strong connotations in Nepal – which I analyse through the lens of *bikas* (development) in relation to the village and city.

5.6. The Experience of Migration, Bikas and Space

Pyarjung Village: Friday, October 1, 2021

Kumari: Even our own sons are daughters are like *'pahuna'* – guest these days... they just visit every now and then during festivals or certain cultural occasions for a few days and then go back… In the village it is just mainly old people… The young ones are either studying in schools in Kathmandu, Chitwan, Pokhara or other places… and most of the men are working abroad as usual…

Rudra: These day kids in the village cannot even speak the Gurung language properly… *"Gurung ko chora chori bhayera bolena vane ta Gurung nai hoina"* – if they cannot speak the language being the child of a Gurung then they are not Gurung (laughing) …

These comments are part of an interaction with 28-year-old Rudra and his mother while, we were having tea one evening in *Pyarjung*. Rudra had recently become a father and been in Nepal for about 5 months after returning back from Abu-Dhabi – where he had been working for the past four years. He was actively looking around for new opportunities again to go abroad now that he had also had a new-born child to look after. Recently, he had also attended an interview in Kathmandu for a potential role as a security guard in Dubai but had not been successful in his interview. When I probed this further, he mentioned that the interviewers had asked him to speak a bit of Hindi, which he was not fluent in. They also did not seem to be in favour of his short height. As he burst into a laughter, he also added, "but there were also some people who passed the interview by answering: I am fine… when questioned how old are you in English."

Rudra was a jolly young man, who had a sharp way of always amusing those around him and turning any serious conversation into a light-hearted one. He always wore a smile on his face, and I enjoyed his company. In what might be considered as one of our more serious dialogues, he had once poured out his pain and sadness for the loss of his first-born child, who had survived for just over a week, and said: *"afno bhagya ma testai lekheko chha, key garne ta?"* – this is how my *bhagya* is written, so what can I do? I have to go *bahira* (out) again to make sure that I can support my child and family. "*Testai chha zindagi"* – that is how life is.

Migration is a collection of experiences in diverse spaces and meanings – sometimes the mundane becomes the locus of overlooked meanings. In this section I focus on the domestic spaces between the rural and the urban alongside that of *bidesh* while making references to every day migratory experiences to ideas of *bikas* (development) to glean on the materiality of migration and space such as *gaun* (village) or *bidesh,* but also situate localised meanings connected through the same phenomenon. While I will detail numerous experiences of my interlocutors in this section, I will not follow a chronological illustration of migratory experiences in accordance with a certain space or place in the strict sense (such as Kathmandu, Lamjung and abroad in Malaysia or Qatar). This is perhaps an attestation to a friend who epitomised migration in Nepal as a mess but a "beautiful mess" nonetheless. I feel this also captures the constant flux of people and things – just so much going on simultaneously in multiple spaces, all interconnected to the phenomenon of migration.

5.6.1. Kathmandu is not a place one can belong to

In Nepal, terms such as *'gaun'* or '*gaun ghar'* (village home) or '*pahad'* (literally translates to mountain) are not mere terms referring to a certain space or rural place. These bear significant meanings of home or references towards one's sense of belonging, when gleaned from an emic perspective. While such an understanding is tangled in the traces of historical and internal migration of Nepalis, which I have partly detailed earlier in this thesis, the remnants of this past continues to sway everyday activities in Nepal – *'basai-sarai'* (official settlement transfer) is not only a term that relates closely to migration in Nepal denoting this historical internal movement in Nepal but it is also an official government document that is necessary for many bureaucratic purposes, including the attainment of a Nepali citizenship certificate.[132]

Hence, the notion or understanding of *gaun* or village in Nepal has significant implications within local social, economic, and political landscapes of Nepal. Noting that there is not one single meaning attached to the notion of village that can evoke belonging, familiarity, ambivalence, disdain, or nostalgia, Stacy Pigg (1992), argues that images of the village in Nepal take shape not in counter distinction to the city but in relation to *bikas* (development), amid which the village moulds into a distinct social category in the context of this national project of development. While development in a broad sense may be defined as a process of social transformation ('modernisation;' 'empowerment'), moulded as outcomes of specific

[132] *Basai-sarai* (basai = live; sarai = to move), indicates movement from one's original settlement within Nepal.

programmes, projects, and policies, from maternal health to hydroelectric plans or 'meeting basic needs'; in Nepal, *bikas* entails a different, more profoundly social meaning, a meaning that weaves *bikas* into the fabric of local life and patterns Nepalese society (ibid.: 496).[133] As Pigg points out the Nepali word *bikas* as understood by Nepalis, and indeed my interlocutors, also implies what we refer to as development. This historically and socially induced meaning while different from various models and theories of development discussed in academia or the head offices of agencies such as the World Bank, entails ideas of *bikas* which are imbued with meanings particular to Nepali society. As such the meaning of *bikas* in Nepalese society and the meaning of development in international institutions differ but are not separate from each other in Nepal. Pigg notes that while so many carefully designed development programs fall short of accomplishing their goals for change, a diffuse, international development vision succeeds in producing a profound ideological shift. Hence, *bikas* alters the meaning of the village in the Nepalese social imagination, perhaps more than the actual villages in which its programs are carried out, and in transforming both the terms in which social identities are cast and the symbols that mark social differences, development has effects that are cultural.

In following Pigg, the development discourse creates a paradox in that it locates villages on the periphery of development, while seemingly endeavour to make villages developed, thus leaving no space for villagers' subjectivity. Hence it is critical to expand further on such understandings since ideas about *gaun* are also situated firmly in the migration phenomenon and/with meanings of *bidesh* in Nepal. Perhaps a good starting point pertaining to *gaun* as experienced during my fieldwork, is epitomised in a common question posed by many Nepalis: *"where is your gaun?"* pertains strongly to one's original (ancestral) home or a place of belonging.

Pigg contends that there is an obvious perspective built into the category, *gaunley* (*villager)*, as it is formulated in the rhetoric of development: One cannot be one to see one. The social ideology of modernisation espouses a binary logic, opposing the village to *bikas* and villagers to the people who can recognise that "they do not understand" (ibid.:507). Hence, the social categories of development are not simply imposed from the outside upon rural peoples but assimilated into the ways that they see themselves and their relationships to other Nepalis: "Not

[133] At least, this aligns closely to the institutional self-conception of development drawn from the perspectives of international development agencies, policymakers, and academics.

only can one hear rural people talking about their neighbours, residents of the same village, mind you as people who do not understand, but more profoundly, rural people adopt the conceptual polarity of bikas and village to orient themselves in national society" (ibid.: 507). Pigg notes *bhari boknu kam* or physical labour as a common narrative representing the challenges of village life as opposed to the comforts of the city[134] – allusions, which are often also at the core of many conversations with my interlocutors who expressed similar circumstances and contrasting ideas about life between the village and city, and indeed Nepal and *bidesh*. Notably, provisions or the substances of bikas, such as medicine supplies, arrive in villages carried on the backs of porters. In reference to such labour, Bruslé's (2006) research documents feelings of shame and the disdain among Nepali migrants in India when working as a *bhariya* (porter) or carrying things as a form of earning money. Furthermore, Pigg also notes that ideas superstitious beliefs (such as witchcraft or the supernatural, which I discuss this further in the next chapter) among villagers indicate villagers as not lacking in knowledge but in fact it is the presence of too much locally instilled beliefs in villages that hinders bikas in Nepal. Using Pigg's model, Nepali people are simultaneously embroiled in two social worlds. One of local worlds of hierarchies of age, gender, and caste (ethnic group) encompassing relations of patronage, inclusion, and exchange, while the other is the national society scattered within the fabric of development. Here Pigg notes that, "each provides people with a way of framing local identity, and the disjunction between these overlapped worlds makes their place as villagers in national society a real and important question for local people. Like a magnetic field aligning iron fillings, the polarity between the village and *bikas* exerts its influence on local social relationships. As people move into, out of, and through the social spaces of *bikas*, their orientation within rural society changes." (ibid.: 510).

Such conditions of maintaining a connection and living between the spaces of *gaun* and Kathmandu is emphasised strongly in the conversation between Kumari and her son, in the beginning of this section. "Our children now come as guests even in their own homes", expressed by Kumari is a familiar yet profound experience that many migrants and their families now face, within the interconnected spaces of the rural-urban and *bidesh*. Alluding to such an enigma through a similar question of "have you ever felt like a foreigner in your own

[134] As noted by Pigg, the symbolism of carrying load reverberates to the conceptual path from village to bazaar to town to *bikasi* (developed) places like America, where "no one has to work" (ibid.: 508).

home?”, Craig (2020) describes a situation of a young Nepali girl from Mustang whose international sponsor had abandoned her educational support from a Korean missionary school where she had been studying. Since could not speak her own native tongue or Nepali, and she came from *gaun*, she faced further difficulties from other children, since those who come to study in the cities from *gaun* are often subject to slurs and remarks such as *‘pakhe’ or ‘laato’* – dirty and stupid. It is in a similar sense many Nepalis working in the Gulf countries are often referred to as by others or by themselves in parodied terms such as *Qatari lahure* or *Dubai lahure* or *cheurey* positioned alongside allusions to that of being a Gurkha *lahure*, suggesting a shared connection to *bidesh* but also separated by dissimilar and contrasting life conditions. A young man had once asked me if I was a Gurkha soldier returning to the UK during a flight to Doha from Nepal, and when I asked him about the reasons for his travel, he had replied with a loud laughter: “*Ma ta tehi Qatar samma, hami tah Qatari lahure* – I am only going till Qatar, we are (I am) just a Qatari soldier”. Such parodied characterisations or references are constructed in relation to the migratory figure of the *‘pardesi bideshi’* (Nepalis living abroad) and the spaces they occupy as migrants (also see Bruslé, 2013). While such Nepali figures also live outside Nepal in *bidesh* or abroad, they are seemingly considered to be in a more fortunate or privileged position due to the desired spaces they have come to occupy – as a Gurkha or his family, or a USA green card holder or naturalised citizens in Europe, Australia, and Canada among others. As such, undertaking migratory endeavours or going to *bidesh* also encompasses imaginative possibilities entwined to notions of space, reflected in a geographical hierarchy of places coupled with the kind of work that one undertakes abroad.

While space is a difficult concept to grasp, full of abstractions (Creswell, 2008) and increasingly understood in conjunction with power and knowledge (Lefebvre, 1991), notions of space, as evident in ideas such as *gaun* in Nepal offers a useful tool for analysing migration. Migration as a social phenomenon sets distant places in closer relation to each other, thus creating specific relational spaces, which unfold at the crossroads between individual agency, collective imagination, and global migration (Bruslé and Varrel, 2012). Such South Asian spaces ‘on the move’ thrive in secondary spaces such as restaurants, religious buildings, or community centres – (re)created by migrants to feel at home while outside their home countries (Rigg, 2007). Other kinds of spaces also (such as temples or dwelling places are not places per se, but can be better viewed as *loci* in broader, transborder, multilocal and trans scalar migratory spaces to analyse the materiality of placemaking by migrants (Bruslé and Varrel, 2012). How and where migrant places are designed, built, organised, funded, made visible or not to the

public at large adds a new dimension to understanding migration. As Brickell and Datta (2011:17) note "migrants' everyday lives are renegotiated and experienced not just at the level of the city but also within specific urban sites – in its workplaces, homes and range of buildings, streets and neighbourhoods where divergent and often conflicting formations of the local are produced." Spaces provide critical sites for sociality, commensality, information-sharing and intimacy. For instance, accommodation spaces among Nepali workers in Qatari high density labour camps foster a certain kind of intimacy of soft resistance as they act as a refuge even if without a visible or typical claim of identities (Bruslé, 2012). Moreover, camps are also emphasised as being a *gaun,* in terms of camp set-up, movement and activities, which are usually based on common affinities, and overseen by camp supervisors who are also migrants themselves, without any interventions from state authorities.

5.6.2. Migration and Interconnected Spaces

Lefebvre (1991) examines 'the production of space' by espousing the very notion of space as something that is relational, which cannot be adequately surmised simply in its nature (climate, site) or by its history. Instead, as something that is complex and relational: "…social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information. Such 'objects' are thus not only things but also relations. As objects, they possess discernible peculiarities, contour, and form." (Lefebvre 1991:77). As such, social space entails a wide array of knowledge, while also raising questions about its status and very relationship to production. In this sense Lefebvre argues that: "(social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. At the same time there is nothing imagined, unreal or 'ideal' about it as compared, for example, with science, representations, ideas or dreams. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occurs, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. Among these actions, some serve production, others consumption (i.e. the enjoyment of the fruits of production)" (Lefebvre, 1991:73).

Bruslé (2012) offers a valuable analysis towards migration studies by drawing on issues of 'housing' in Qatar amongst migrant workers, which is also an area of research which demands further attention, since a focus on ascertaining how spaces are utilised or and crafted by often

exploited transnational workers brings a view people '*from below'* about their lived migratory experiences. Truslé's examination of space maintains that 'labour camps' (or housing for workers, often located on the edge of cities) with its segregationist style is a key means of managing migration in the Gulf, particularly in Qatar. In this regard, Gardner (2010) further notes that the sponsorship or *Kafala* system facilitates a means of 'structural violence' to maintain control of migrant workers in Gulf countries. Such labour camps as that described by Bruslé not only carry ideological and spatial dimensions, but also serves as a biopolitical device to accommodate and control migrant workers' bodies. As such, in many ways, the politics of migration in the Gulf, and particularly in Qatar are geared towards non-integration (Bruslé, 2012: 6; Schielke, 2020). Schielke (2020) brings this point home by elucidating the conditions and experiences of his interlocutors in relation to space, in similar ways as highlighted extensively by Bruslé (2012). Schielke's emphasis on an oppressive labour regime is exemplified in Qatar's system of segregation of its labour migrants from the wealthier local population. Interestingly, many of the workers who are considered bachelors and therefore not allowed in certain public spaces such as shopping malls or parks, are actually married and have children back in their respective home countries. In this regard, Schielke asserts that the project of labour migration is also driven by gender and sexuality in a country, such as Qatar. For migrant workers, the need to earn money to support their families back home or to start a family or undertake marriage altogether, requires men to undertake basic jobs such as security guards, construction workers or cleaners in Qatar. This means that men are required to live as law abiding migrants within enforced conditions of a less-than-real life (Schielke 2020: 26), which questions their very sense of manliness, since they must also meet expectations as capable earners back home.

Meanwhile, Bruslé's (2012) investigation on how space in the camp is utilised in daily interactions among workers and how everyday activities contribute to creating places are discerned through the rhythms of camp life.[135] Bruslé maintains that the bed is the only space

---

[135] For Bruslé this attempt to make daily life heuristically significant as a researcher entails an observation of both, everyday life and what migrants say about it – encompassing the mundane reality of life in camp from eating, sleeping, and playing to doing laundry etc. In other words, while mundane activities in spaces in the camp also labelled as an ordinary place is ostensibly inept, it also "… ends up becoming de facto commonplace for thousands of migrants who spend part of their active lives in the Gulf. The camp is not therefore uncommon but is part of Nepalese migrants' realm of experiences: transnational labour movements contribute to creating new social places." (ibid.: 9).

of freedom, where men can act without being controlled by the company (employer) or the interference of the camp boss. The room is the space of free and unconstrained time. As such, the bed is either a public or private space – a place to hang out and chat, but also a personal place of remembering home with personal decorations, closing off or extending the space – while also constrained by the high density of men and of things in the camp. At the same time, Bruslé also notes that descriptions of Qatar like a jail are also mutual, through narratives and experiences of living in a camp, where there is an absence or lack of freedom or *'Swatantrata'* and references to Qatar as a prison *(kaidi)* or a cage *(pinjara).* The absence of freedom is often due to structural restrictions about being confined to a certain space such as the camp or Friday restrictions or having to go through every day through company consent. Yet, the camp is not despised in the same way as Qatar or the industrial area, because men regard it as a social setting where everybody gets on very well with each other,' and this half-closed space of confinement is a space of making new friends, including forms of national belonging beyond caste-based discrimination (ibid.). While this highlights the relationship of the everyday and temporality whereby passing time becomes a sort of deprivation of freedom due to the structural constraints in the camp, I note that there is also a similar parallel to this situation in Nepal when individuals come to Kathmandu to submit or prepare their documents for employment and visa application purposes. In many cases, such individuals are often positioned in a space of uncertainty or limbo, where they are simply compelled to wait by their agents without any clear or definite answers regarding their visa confirmations or flight dates. I came to learn (and witness) from a few of my interlocutors, it was quite common for individuals to be kept on standby for flights by their agents and that they could therefore be summoned to depart at any moment, sometimes even with a notice of 1 or 2 days. In the meantime, postponements always remained a possibility, as one man waiting to fly out to Dubai shared his annoyance: *"khoi... bholi bhanchu bhancha key ho key ho* – I don't know, they always say they will inform me tomorrow". Hence, in many cases, potential migrants also end up adding to their expenses when confronting such a liminal phase by being waiting in hotels (many also stay with kin or co-villagers) in the city or engaging in activities such as drinking or hanging out in bus park hotels with friends and potential colleagues applying through the same manpower agencies.

5.6.3 Materiality of Bikas and Migration

For many of my interlocutors from Pyarjung village, buying land and or building houses usually outside the village in places like Tanahun, Chitwan or Kathmandu were seen as

immense achievements - while also stirring talk- among villagers. Building houses alongside other tangible features such as gift giving among kin and co-villagers are not only crucial material forms of migratory successes, but also an embodiment of materiality of *bikas* thus highlighting the implications of migration. Lim (2008) illustrates such as case of understanding *bikas* as embedded in everyday life in Nepal, leading to two important questions: how does the development ideology become integral part of Nepali life and migrant work, and how is it embedded within the conception of 'good life'? and how does the discourse of development become cultural practice in everyday life?

Lim's use of a socio-semiotic approach takes the epistemological position that both the artificially produced material object (houses or hotels or new businesses) and one's understanding of it, "derives from codified ideologies that are aspects of social practices and their socialisation process" (Gottdiener, 1995:26). According to Lim, socio-semiotics espouses the conception of meaning not as an infinite free play of signifiers but as emerging between the production of knowledge and the power relationships which delimit the operation of signification (Lim, 2008: 116). Appadurai's (1986) focus on the social life of things in their forms, uses and trajectories also algin closely to similar understandings about the value of meaning of things (also see Keane, 2003, Geismar, 2010). Lim' ethnographic analysis provides an insight into building houses and hotels in the Langtang region as a sign of development, as an emerging of new materiality.[136] While Kathmandu is also a sprawling space for individuals hotels, bars and restaurants offering latest services for those who have the money to splash it, likewise, Nepal's eminent trekking hotspots and circuits have become a similar haven for bringing what might be considered the global to local. For example, many hotels and guests house at *Namche bazar* on the route to Everest base camp offer hot showers, internet connections, with hamburgers, pizza, and pasta on their food menu – a commonly highlighted topic among many people within and outside Nepal. Many local people residing in trekking circuits or national zones are directly involved in hotel operating business and have made a steady income, while German or Swiss style bakeries or pizzas are not uncommon in places like Langtang or Namche bazar (ibid.). As such, Lim's contends that hotels also become spaces

[136] In a historical sense, the tourism industry has been a crucial component of the development project in Nepal. Nepal's development goals saw the establishment of tourism development board or TDB in accordance with the development act in 1956, while also introducing a tourist visa scheme, while the cessation of the trans-Himalayan trade compelled certain groups like the *Langtangpas* to become integral players in the tourism and trekking sector.

for political relationships and contestations, and local power struggles, while also offering an anthropological tool for understanding communities' pursuits of development and intense engagement with tourism, which have resulted in new forms of subjectivity, alongside new social and political relationships.

In their study on consumption and social mobility among the Izhavas of Kerela, Filippo and Caroline Osella also described how the house, due to the identity between family and house names, have become an embodiment of worth and reputation, especially for migrant workers who have returned to their home communities. Furthermore, eschewing thatched or wooden huts, these returnees seek to project their affluence, status, and taste by choosing house designs that are "reminiscent of luxury bungalows, occupied by the rich and western characters in popular Malyayali films" (1999:1017). This is reminiscent of many typical houses owned by retired Gurkha soldiers in parts of Pokhara and Tanahun, which contain visible insignias of the Gurkha regimental crest or regimental numbers carved on gate fronts or parts of the house façade, which project a certain symbolic prominence within their community. Varrel's (2020) own work is a reminder that places can also be considered firstly as purely economic goods, such as an example of a house that is built or bought made possible by migration, while elaborate designs and distinct architecture may be a question of prestige, yet it is also an investment carefully selected for its financial worth.

Following such understandings, purchased lands or houses built by migrant workers in rural areas (although not always the case) are significant for individuals and their families in terms of material needs and convenience in the form of easier access to healthcare facilities and education institutions for their children. However, this also means that migrants and their families go on to occupy new spaces beyond their *gaun* or *purkheli* (ancestral) homes; they go to places like Kathmandu, which is not a place where once can belong to, according to an interlocutor from Pyarjung. Hence, when individuals return to visit *gaun* occasionally during certain festivals or events, they do so merely as guests in their own homes. Hence, such a paradox of migration is shaped by one's desires to achieve various dreams, while also dealing with conditions of prestige, family commitment, and endeavours towards a better future embedded in ideas of *bikas* encompassing spaces of the rural, urban and *bidesh*. During a housewarming gathering in *Tokha,* among a group of Pyarjung villagers in Kathmandu for which I had also been invited, I recall how someone had expressed: *"Hamro manche eta ni cha hai"* – Our people are here too. While this evoked a profound sense of pride among those present to commemorate the achievements of a fellow villager who had managed such a feat

in a place like Kathmandu, more crucially it was also a strong reminder that it is Pyarjung that remains a place that they will always belong to. Furthermore, revisiting Bruslé's (2012) analysis of a camp in Qatar also illustrates how the critical idea of camp is often emphasised as being in a village or *gaun* among Nepali workers. While the word *ghar* – home or house, is never used to talk about camp, it can sometimes be described as a *gaun,* emphasising solidarity amongst other co-workers and the familiarity of the place. The word camp, as used in Qatar is equivalent to the word *'dera' (temporary place)* used by Nepali migrants in India (Bruslé, 2006; 2018) both referring to the temporary nature of their accommodation. As such, "the camp is therefore a spatial hiatus, which is not mentioned when migrants return home and seldom advertised. Camp life is not a subject of identification or of pride" (Bruslé, 2012: 22).

By closely following such significant and varied approaches towards ideas about space and the materiality of migration, an analysis of the more physically tangible aspects of migratory undertakings offers a useful way of understanding peoples' hopes and desires within Nepal's complex social and economic circumstances. As such, I argue that the ensuing trajectories and forces of migration resonate with a sort of *'presence of absence'* in the everyday lives of many Nepali people. In other words, I maintain that traces of migration are constantly at work in (re)shaping people's lives both within and outside Nepal, even when migrating individuals are absent in the lives of their kin or villagers back home in Nepal, their presence is felt in myriad forms – from the houses that migrants build in or outside their *gaun* or the remittances they send back that enables their children to attend boarding schools and help other kinsfolk or villagers to migrate to *bidesh*, or donations that goes back into helping their community are only a few of the ways that typifies such a '*presence of absence'* of the migration phenomenon.

The material effects of migration are apparent through forms of expectations and duties back home. In attempting to build a life back home, workers manage their finances frugally when living and earning in *bidesh,* as indicated frequently by my interlocutors. The money that migrants send back to family members is expected for a wide range of daily activities; these include important future oriented aspirational dreams or goals, like buying land, building a house, raising a family, marriage, or also offering a pathway for migration ventures for kin members (this typically transpires through informal loans and the explicit sharing of information, networks, and experiences). It is here that kinship networks or what Bourdieu referred to as 'social capital' (Richardson, 1986), the ability to access people and resources through one's personal relationships and networks, comes to the fore of migration. Among individuals from Pyarjung it is very common for kin to borrow money as an informal loan

(some interest free but more commonly at an agreed interest rate). While informal borrowing negates the potential external negative forces and reach of loan sharks or formal banks, it represents the importance of kin relations not simply in terms of their economic pull but can also influence where people decide to migrate to and where they live or choose to work. Such kinship ties are often maintained beyond one's village into cities like Kathmandu, Chitwan, Tanahun, and in *bidesh* where migrants may work in the same companies or live together. Hence, the conditions of being a migrant worker in *bidesh* coupled within same spaces where Nepalis are able to live, eat and sleep together, not only make life abroad more bearable but also render many hopes and dreams as a shared one – lived through a collective experience.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has expanded upon the workings of hope within the everyday experience of migration located at the intersections of the imagination as aspirational dreams and understandings of space. I have examined the common aspiration of Gurkha dreams as a way of imagining possibilities of hope and success towards desired futures, augmented by a proliferation of other mediums offering such dreams in *bidesh* in the form of training centres, consultancies, and agents. I have further explored dreams as a critical facet of the imagination of migration by analysing how everyday experiences unfold within the complex and interconnected spaces of the rural and urban in the form of *gaun* and cities, alongside ideas pertaining to *bidesh*, and how movements between these spaces shape and reshape one another. These understandings coupled with the ethnographic examples presented in this chapter capture a paradox of migration within these multiple spaces – which open myriad possibilities for migrants' and their families but also within everyday experiences of separation, felt through the rippling effects of migration as a form of 'presence of absence'.

Figure 18. The Primary school at *Pyarjung* village. Credit: Author 2021

Figure 19. A House belonging to an interlocutor under construction in Kathmandu. Credit: Author 2023

Chapter Six

BHAGYA: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Bhagya is a sophisticated commonplace polysemic term that refers to an everyday philosophy of life. Throughout this thesis I have been referring to the Nepali notion of *bhagya* as '(mis)fortune' so as to emphasise how the term signifies two different ways of looking at the same phenomena (thus denoting one as having fortune/misfortune or misfortune/fortune). I also leave the notion of *bhagya* open to other related terms – connected to notions of luck, destiny, fate, and auspiciousness, thus also considering its multiple meanings.

This chapter discusses the multiple meanings associated with the notion of *bhagya* in Nepal and its role in everyday moralities, decisions, and the conditions of everyday living. I argue that *bhagya* in the Nepali context is not only related to idioms of luck, fortune, destiny, fate, or auspiciousness, but can also indicates misfortune. By engaging with ethnographic examples, I discuss how *bhagya* expressed through such idioms encompasses anticipated viewpoints on unlimited potential future outcomes, constituting imagined viewpoints on an almost-happening series of best and worst possible worlds. Following such a vein and focusing on how cosmologies of (mis)fortune manifest in contingent, singularities and temporal views, I aim to discuss how individuals and groups think about and experience migration in relation to *bhagya*. As I will illustrate, this can be something as simple as playing a game of cards, undertaking travel, or dealing with more serious concerns such as undertaking migratory decisions, marriages, managing finances among others in relation to hoped-for or desired futures.[137]

More significantly, I show how meanings associated with *bhagya* affect everyday actions and motivate individuals to undertake active measures in the now and present to positively augment

[137] A more serious consideration of the notion of *bhagya* as a lens to understand how individuals and groups think about and experience migration in Nepal is also something that occurred out of 'luck' during the COVID lockdown period, when some of my interlocutors would often gather regularly to gamble/play a game of cards called 'marriage' (when some of my research participants spoke regularly about 'being *bhagyamani'* or 'being (mis)fortunate'). Furthermore, in many ways, the very act of gambling and its ties to notions of risk, luck, or chance, resonates strongly to Nepali migration undertakings (and even more so when considering that gambling/playing cards for money is illegal in Nepal, although my interlocutors did not gamble in huge sums of money – but more so as a form of '*time-pass'* according to a few of them).

their *bhagya* as something favourable towards the future. Hence, I also elucidate *bhagya* as a way of determining actions towards desired migratory endeavours, or ways of well-being and family projects as an engagement with the future alongside its connections to the present, since individuals are constantly concerned with laying the groundwork for the future through 'futural orientations' that effect both our social interactions in the present as well as our understanding of the past (Bryant and Knight, 2019:15). I argue that *bhagya* and its idioms not only offer a way of understanding explanations of events and activities but also relate to ideas of agency and everyday action in order to confront conditions of being. This also bears strong implications on questions of hope and desired futures, which I have discussed throughout this thesis – *how are futures anticipated and produced with hopeful and creative acts of engagement with (mis)fortune events or fatalistic worldviews?*

6.1 Witches, (Mis)fortune and Superstition

A conversation on misfortune:

Kancha: *"Hunchha bhanera bhanchha khoi... aba gaun-ghar ma esto kahani haru dherai chha"* – I don't know, but they say that such things exist… there are many stories in the villages…

Things such as witches, ghosts or spirits are often viewed in our *'samaj'* (society) with *'sankha ko distrikon'* – a sceptical eye. *"Bastavikta key ho hami ley bhannu sakdenam"* – While we cannot tell or know for sure if such occurrences are true or real... but people say that there are things like this out there…

Bhokraj: Please can you tell me a bit more about this? How are they discernible?

Kancha: Well… for instance, if a healthy buffalo or goat was giving milk regularly without any issues... but one day if the animal was to fall sick suddenly without any prior symptoms or also stop giving milk like before… it could be the doing of a *boksi* (witch)[138]…

Bhokraj: And is there a way to tell if someone is a *boksi?* Or if such cases are their doing?

Kancha: *Boksis* possess and make use of '*adhrisya shakti*' or invisible powers… When something like this happens in the village, people can just tell… Usually if there

[138] Interestingly they are also often referred to as '*donkeynis'*.

is such a case, a *jhakri* (shaman) is summoned who is able to provide a diagnosis of the event by using his knowledge and ritualistic methods… so he can determine things like the direction from where this malice originated or how it happened, or the timing of the event… It is quite common to offer the offals from a sacrificial animal like a chicken to appease this unknown entity, which are usually placed at a *dobato* (crossroad).

Ram: And this *adrishya shakti* can also be passed down from one *boksi* to an apprentice…*boksis* in general are '*chori-manche*' (women)… they do so because it is also their *karma ko faal* (fruits of their karma) … She has no option but to do it, so she might also teach her ways to her daughters, cousins or niece through a simple whisper in the ear or actions[139]… this is most receptive during pregnancy or menstruation… Sometimes, if her *guru* or master *magyo bhane* (demands it), she will even have to sacrifice her own husband or children. *Boksis* can also speak through the body of another individual… hence, sometimes they might express their woes or concern by possessing someone else…

Kancha: There are also things we call *boksa or chhundah* – they are *'chora-manche'* (men) and are usually a partner or husband of a *boksi* … they ride on a horse but instead of walking on the ground they are said to float in '*hawa'* – the air… which is why they can reach from one place to another *'ekai chin ma'* – in no time…*"Uni haru ko afno time huncha"* – they are active during their own time… whenever they need to feed on something or give *dukkha* (trouble)…

Ram: Of course, these days such things are viewed with suspicion, even more so in the cities but sometimes these things can happen anywhere, and it is difficult to explain them because we cannot see these things…

You are already aware about '*phookney'* places (spiritual healers), but these days, *"duniya ko matah niskeko cha"*– there are numerous '*matahs'*[140]

[139] In a way this is similar to Azande witchcraft as a form of inherited psychic power, usually passed down from a parent of the same sex, while witchcraft substance can also be found in the body of a deceased person (Bowie, 2006).

[140] The word *matah* means 'mother' or 'goddess'. A *matah* is a (self) proclaimed individual who is believed to be a deity possessing divine or healing powers, and usually has a large following of devotees. Despite much

> everywhere now in Kathmandu and elsewhere, who are able to see such things and can help people deal with their problems… *"dasha haru ni katchha*" – they can also expel bad luck or misfortune.
>
> But for me personally… Me and my family members been going to a "*dhyan kendrah"* (meditation centre) now for many years [141]… also because "*dhyan bata ra maan bata"* – with meditation and belief, you can still overcome these unseen forces or evil… and here there is also no need for any sort of ritualistic *'maar kaat'* (sacrificial killing) unlike other religious sites or temples (For example sacred Hindu religious temples such as *Manakamana or Gorkha or Dakshinkali*, among others)…

The above dialogue with two senior individuals in *Pyarjung* conveys commonly held views about means and matters of misfortune personified through beings such as witches or *bhoot-pret* (ghosts-spirits) in Nepal. From a young age I have been well acquainted with stories about impediments to everyday well-being in the form of sudden illnesses or deteriorating health complications, overnight bruises on the bodies of new-born babies and children, or worse, deaths that are nonchalantly attributed to the activities of a *boksi* (witch) in Nepal.[142] Even within the parameters of my own family and kin, I have witnessed first-hand occurrences deemed as *'bigar'* (harm or spoil) or '*akha lagnu'* (evil eye), exemplifying such harmful forms of misfortune or trouble– often ascribed to the activities of maleficent beings, both human and non-human. While *bigar* may befall upon anyone, most people are aware and accept that victims are usually a target of jealousy, particularly from their own kin. Hence, individuals with some sort of success, particularly financial success, or social standing are prone to facing difficulties or harm from such invisible forces of misfortune. In this sense, the very notion of success (in a general sense) places one at a risk of facing *bigar*, as Broz and Willerslev, in describing ideas about victorious hunting in Siberia, have so aptly put it, there is a *"*highly precarious tension between too little and too much luck" whereby one's success simultaneously

unwavering support from people, some *matahs* are surrounded by controversies amid accusations of fraud and deception.

[141] I was able to visit this *dhyan kendrah* on several occasions and also register for a membership card.

[142] A common preventive measure to avert the reaches of a *boksi* during the night is by sleeping with some form of metal usually a knife under the pillow or mattress.

"inhabits the alternative possibility of his own failure" (2012: 73). Nonetheless, although *bigar* denotes some form of harm or misfortune in a way similar to the notion of '*din dasha graha' (din dasha = daily misfortune; graha = planet),* the difference between the two is that while *bigar* may be inflicted upon an individual by a malignant being using invisible powers, *din-dasha* is influenced by one's planetary alignment and movements of celestial objects and is therefore based on astrology.

Reports pertaining to witchcraft are widely reported with popular news headlines that read, *'Woman thrashed, force-fed faeces on witchcraft charge'*, or *'Single, elderly woman tortured on witchcraft charge',* or *'Couple ostracised for practising witchcraft'* are among many others in Nepali newspapers. An article on the Himalayan times (2021)[143] indicates a 79.41 percent increase in cases of witchcraft allegations and subsequent torture across the country in 2020-21 (there were 61 cases in 2020-21 compared to 34 in the previous year), while most victims continue to be women, mainly from low-income families. An excerpt from this report cited below captures the general outlook towards witchcraft in the country:

> Statistics show that the harmful social practice has been increasing at an alarming rate. Accusation of witchcraft is a form of violence against women. Nepal police said such incidents resulted from unequal power relations between men and women. The victims are often physically and mentally tortured after being accused of practising witchcraft. Senior Superintendent of Police Basanta Bahadur Kunwar, Nepal Police spokesperson, warned that the main reasons for the prevalence of such malpractices were superstition, illiteracy, social and economic disparity, and lack of public awareness, among others.
>
> Usually, helpless women, single women and differently-abled women are accused of being witches when their neighbours or family members die or fall ill due to whatsoever reasons. The victims are sometimes smeared with soot, forcefully fed human excreta, beaten up, expelled from the village, or even killed.
>
> According to Nepal Police, the perpetrators include family members, neighbours, and witch doctors. The Criminal Code Act stipulates stringent action against those involved in the inhuman treatment of men or women accused of practising witchcraft. As per Section 168 of the act, the perpetrator shall be liable to a jail sentence of up to five years

[143] Source: https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/cases-of-witchcraft-allegation-rise-by-7941pc-in-2020-21 (Accessed: 10/11/2023).

> along with a fine of up to Rs 50,000. If any person working at a government office commits such an act, he/she shall be handed an additional three months' jail term, in addition to the punishment prescribed by this law. If the perpetrator fails to pay compensation to the victim on grounds of his/her poor financial status, the government will make necessary arrangements to provide relief to the victim through Gender-based Violence Prevention Fund.

While accusations of and the perpetration of violence against any individual under the premise of witchcraft is punishable by law in Nepal, it remains a persistent occurrence across parts of the country. The Nepali term '*andhabiswas' (andha= blind; biswas= belief)* denotes *superstition* and is typically invoked by those who hold a more sceptical attitude towards malicious ideas such as witchcraft *(boksi)* or ghosts and spirits *(bhoot pret) and* also toward a range of traditional remedies for maladies including (but not limited to) *jhakris* (shamans or healers) or divine religious mediators in the figure of a *matah.*

I also came to learn from various senior figures in *Pyarjung* that within the (Gurung) community, there are various individuals who have their own specialised roles in dealing with such invisible powers or specific religious rituals. For instance, *jhankris* are shamans who mostly deal with *bhoot-pret* – ghosts, spirits, or witches in - everyday life and direct these forces away from affected people. *Jhankris* also perform spiritual healing duties. *Kebrehs* are responsible for performing various death rituals and guiding the dead to the other world, while *pachyus* deal with appeasing spirits of people who have died in unfortunate circumstances in places like rivers-forests etc. Both *kebrehs* and *pachyus* are traditional Gurung priests who hold their own specialised knowledge on how to perform ritualistic duties particularly in dealing with the dead, and often work closely with each other. *Jaisis* assess and provide forecasts for various occasions or activities and perform everyday healing duties. *Lamas* may be called in for various auspicious *pujas* (acts of worship) who offer prayers especially in relation to *'anna-pani'* or harvest and rain, and general well-being. However, many of the above individuals also deal with the expulsion of '*din dasha graha'* (everyday misfortune) through rituals or prayers, while also providing people with protective amulets and other religious items in this regard. At the same time many also go to see a *jyotish* (astrologer) for similar purposes including an assessment of and engagement with *bhagya,* which I discuss further in this chapter.

I have drawn on the notion of *witchcraft* as an entry point here broaden my focus on discussions surrounding *bhagya* in Nepal for two reasons. First, there is a long-standing anthropological

attention to witchcraft as a critical subject matter, and second, it is relevant to the conundrum it poses towards everyday experiences of things such as *(mis)fortune* or *belief* among many Nepalis– mostly in relation to Nepal's religious diversity and complex overlapping of indigenous practices. Concurrently, this also speaks to some of the tensions regarding (mis)fortune within the discourse of migration, as it is connected to ideas about *andhabiswas* or superstition, while also encompassing the spatial boundaries of *gaun-ghar, sahar* (village-home, city) and beyond in the milieu of *bidesh* or abroad. The perils of *andhabiswas* are often viewed as a hindrance towards Nepali society, particularly regarding an openness to modern ideas and changes alongside a non-discriminatory and civic society. As discussed in my previous chapter regarding the experience of migration, *bikas* and space, it is noteworthy that social construction of the notion of *gaun* (village) as a space fraught with superstitious beliefs and traditional practises stands in opposition to a rational *sahar* (city) in Nepal. And yet, such beliefs pervade all spaces. Similarly, Phillimore (2014), also draws on the notion of *'jadu'* (witchcraft) in rural north India in relation to local understandings of 'modernity'. He discusses the diminishing cogency of witchcraft and its potent ideas of fear and magic in sphere of the village – as a form of change, by discarding an unwanted character embedded within the discourse of modernity, and identity politics in India.

In his seminal text *Witchcraft, Oracles and magic among the Azande*, Evans-Pritchard (1937) examines beliefs and practices of witchcraft as an ethnographic example to illustrate an 'explanation of events' demonstrating that people can hold such a set of beliefs and practices that are coherent.[144] In other words, for the Azande such understandings about witchcraft make sense and are rational based on logical principles. Witchcraft is a logical explanatory system – a rational theory for understanding causation, and a manner for assessing what the Azande believe or consider to be true. While Azande witchcraft may be used to harm others, either consciously or unconsciously, it is not something that is frightening but an everyday event. Hence, any aspect of life is open to the activity of witches. However, it is not evil as such but an inherent part of people's lives. Witchcraft is not only used to explain events such as failed hunts or injuries in the case of someone stubbing their foot on a tree stump or an event of a collapsing granary but it is also an integral explanation in cases related to adultery, jealousy, and sickness. While these examples elucidate a coherence of Azande belief systems, witchcraft

[144] For Evans-Pritchard, the emphasis was on comparison of all kinds of societies as necessary to ascertain general tendencies and functional relationships that are common to human society as a whole (Kuper 1996: 82).

is also constant with other beliefs– beliefs in the senses, empirical evidence and observation, and the principle of cause and effect. What seems critical in Azande belief is that they view that something is missing in the chain of causation, such as injuries or death in the instances of a tree stump or a falling granary, leading to questions such as – *why did such a misfortune or event happen to an individual at that particular time and place? Or in other words, why did this series of events come together as it did in that particular way?* For the Azande Witchcraft provides explanations beyond what is perceptible, and addresses questions of 'why now, why here, why me? while also offering a path toward action, allowing one to actively seek out the source of the witchcraft. This makes the Azande belief system coherent as well as useful in their cultural understanding, while also remaining persistent despite the influence of other religious beliefs alongside the reaches of science. As in Nepal, witchcraft does not deny empirical facts or evidence, it is an attempt to go deeper and more broadly beyond simple western notions of causation.

Similarly, Astuti's (1995) ethnographic work among Vezo fishermen in Madagascar also resonates with the Nepali context. Astuti examines understandings and practices of knowledge and belief, which are oriented towards the future, dealing with questions that go beyond the ordinary such as what happens after death. Astuti describes the Vezo as 'present-oriented', as they are not greatly concerned with the past nor are they capable of planning for the future but are regularly surprised by how life unfolds around them (ibid.).[145] The Calvinist belief and pursuit of hard work and success in the present also deals with anxieties about the future (Weber, 2001). As Bourdieu (2000:226) notes on a somewhat similar context "all discourses about the future … had no purpose than to fill what is no doubt one of the most painful of wants: the lack of future" (2000:226).

Following such understandings closely, if one it to consider the notion of the future as a profoundly human one, or more precisely, the common question of *what is going to happen next?,* then seeking answers is an equally crucial element of investigation (Stafford, 2007). As such, approaching and undertaking actions in the present in particular ways encompass notions of hope and desires oriented towards the future.

[145] Astuti's (1995) work also presents an ethnographic dilemma for researchers, who notes that her Vezo interlocutors expressed that even after the death of a Vezo individual, the spirit of the deceased could still visit her in London. In this regard, Vezo people would still leave food or tobacco for the dead, since they believed that the dead coexisted alongside others in the living world even after their death.

Through the voices and actions of my Nepali interlocutors and their outlooks toward their lived conditions alongside their desires for certain future/s, I expand on similar discussions in relation to *bhagya* as a notion that encompasses notions of (mis)fortune, luck, fate, destiny or even will of a higher known or unknown power/God. Nonetheless, the subject of truth or belief amid such ideas remains a complex and open question in Nepal, particularly given the religious and diverse overlapping of understandings about the workings of *bhagya* and indeed in the antagonist extension of *dasha.*[146] As such, I do not seek to ascertain a homogenous understanding of truth or belief in a strict sense but rather illustrate the ways in which my interlocutors consider such idioms of *bhagya* and engage with them in their everyday lives. With such questions in mind, I also aim to locate understandings of *bhagya* within migration phenomena and *how they connect to people's everyday migration aspirations and actions in relation to hope in Nepal?*

6.2 A *Bhagyamani* Individual

Hami ley hijo ko karma aja bokera aunchhau; bhagya ko fal ahile khane ho – jey afno bhag ma chha tehi pauchhau…

We carry our karma from yesterday into today; we bear the fruits of our *bhagya* in the now and present – we receive what is in our own share…

Kasi Gurung (Pyarjung village)[147]

While it is difficult to ascertain an exact measure of one's *bhagya*, there is a notion that it is determined in the present life in accordance with one's deeds in the past life that is paramount to Hindu (and Buddhist) ideas and beliefs. Hence, *bhagya* is this sense may be seen as an *'allotted share'* of destiny or (mis)fortune in one's life (Guenzi, 2012). While ideas of karma

---

[146] Many beliefs or ideas are shared or hold true in a general sense in Nepal regardless of one's indigenous community or religious belonging. At times people also spoke in the collective sense of *'hamro'* (ours), when mentioning specific instances. For instance, a friend from the *Sherpa community* explained to me that all Sherpa names bear meanings in accordance with their Buddhist beliefs and cosmological significance. Her first name "Sonam" signifies a fortunate or a lucky individual. Interestingly, Sherpa names also lack any form of gender differentiation, evident in her and own brother, who also shares the same name.

[147] *Kasi Gurung* is a well-respected senior figure in his community, who is also a retired British Gurkha soldier. My conversation with him on this occasion took place during a Gurung death ritual event or *'pae'* in Pyarjung village. His explanation that one's *bhagya* is written in accordance with our karma from yesterday – *"bhabi ley bhagya lekhdincha: hami ley Karma anusar ko faal pauchha…"* resonates a widespread local assertation.

echo a similar notion about an accumulation of deeds in Buddhist beliefs, it is also difficult to blur the boundaries between the two, and as such perhaps better approached as overlapping ideas in Nepal. Kasi Gurung's explanation that one's *bhagya* is written in accordance with our karma from yesterday – *"bhabi ley bhagya lekhdincha: hami ley Karma anusar ko faal pauchha…"* resonates a widespread local assertation. As such, it is not simply one's actions or deeds in the previous life that defines an accumulation of one's *bhagya* but also the very kind of life that one must live or endure in the present – as I will attempt to demonstrate using an ethnographic setting in Nepal. For many aspiring Nepali migrants and their families, *bhagya* is often located in the moral strivings and understandings of everyday life.

One young man who had returned to Nepal after 3 years in Qatar spoke about the unfortunate death of someone he knew well while working in a construction site there – "Death is certain in life… we cannot change that… But imagine dying in *bidesh* – in someone else's land. We Nepalis leave Nepal to go abroad with a *sapana* (dream) or *asha* (hope), so that we can do something for our family…but sadly many go to places like Qatar and Dubai only to come back in a box… *kasto bhagya hola ta?* – what *bhagya* is this?"[148]

It is difficult to curtail the question of *bhagya* – whether considered a form of (mis)fortune, destiny or luck in the narratives and experiences of Nepali people I spoke with both within and outside of Nepal. People regularly remarked on their own or other's *bhagya* as a way of indicating life conditions in the present, from an abundance or lack of '*sukkha'* (comfort) or '*dukkha'* (suffering) to the blessings of *dhan-sampati* (wealth-possessions) as well as other aspects of life. Similarly, Huslé (2012) also highlights *'sukkha'* and *'dukkha*', as related closely to ideas of comfort or happiness and suffering or unhappiness, respectively in the experience of many Nepali migrant workers abroad. Moreover, *bhagya* was often called upon

[148] Maya informed me that she was going to the *Pashupatinath temple* one morning in early October 2021 to attend the rituals of a forty-year-old man from *Lamjung*, who had died in Qatar in his sleep, although the exact details about his death were not clear. I came to learn that his body had been flown over from Qatar, and the expenses were being covered by his insurance coupled with the help from the manpower agency he had applied through for his employment there. He had been working as a security guard for about 3 and a half years, and Maya also reiterated that the company he had been working for was also *'ramro'* or good. His brother had come to receive his dead body, and the final rituals would take place in *Lamjung.* He had three children from two different partners. Many of my friends continue to forward me newspaper articles or videos on social media on reports pertaining to such a situation, which has sort of become a regular condition of many Nepali (and other) migrant workers in the Gulf countries.

alongside or used interchangeably with karma as an insinuation for one's present life as connected to past deeds. Hence, both *bhagya* and *karma* feature regularly in numerous aspects of everyday life and discourse among people, encompassing (and often also blurring boundaries between) ideas such as luck, fate, destiny, (mis)fortune, and failures, evident in common local expressions such as *'bhagya mai lekheko' (written in one's bhagya), 'futeko karma' (broken karma), or 'bhagya nabhako' (not having enough bhagya) etc.*

Such allusions were a constant reminder about life's *sukkha* and *dukkha* during many of my conversations with interlocutors about their migratory experiences as well as when describing their social or economic conditions. Hence the idea of being a *bhagyamani* individual relates to all aspects of one's life – from family to material wealth and success, careers, and indeed fortunes and misfortunes. For example, *bhagya* often cropped up in the conversations of many of my interlocutors who had failed to enlist in the British Gurkhas and spoke about their *bhagya* as a compulsion to continue with their life in the village or undertake work in the Gulf countries or elsewhere in *bidesh*. Similarly, many also questioned the uncertainties and possibilities about the future and what lay ahead, whether one was looking to leave for *bidesh* or was already there coupled with its resultant trajectories. As mentioned previously, many of my interlocutors viewed my position as someone living in the UK not only as a privilege but also as that of my own *bhagya*, or similarly, in the case of Hem – whose relatives often commented on how his *bhagya* had taken a turn, since his children had found success in *bidesh*. *Bhagya*, in this sense is also viewed through a comparative lens, to ponder on one's life circumstances – in the past, present, and the future.

An understanding of *bhagya* as manifested in the present, in a way also resonates with Heidegger's notion of 'thrown-ness' – a state of being or life that one is thrown into in a particular experience and moment of human history (Mulhall, 2005). For Heidegger this constitutes an arbitrary facet of *Dasein's* experience, from 'being-toward-death' in the sense that one's existence in the present also entails sufferings, vexations, and burdens that are beyond one's being (such as kinship or social ties or duties). Similarly, as referred to previously, Zigon's (2018) understanding of hope is located within a constant slippage between the temporal structure of everyday life and the temporal orientation of intentional ethical action, following closely on the anthropological theory of morality that views being-in-the-world as partly characterised by the constant shifting between morality and ethics. These two aspects of hope, then, can be seen as the temporal aspects of the anthropological theory of morality, which makes an important distinction between morality as one's unreflective and non-conscious

everyday way of being-in-the-world, and the reflective and conscious ethical action necessary in moments of moral breakdown or ethical dilemma.

Expanding on such ideas of *bhagya* and its ties to one's lived conditions, I argue that *bhagya* also entails a certain paradox in Nepal – in the simple sense, *bhagya* is a notion that is regarded as something already written or decided as a form of karmic deeds or destiny, it is not only pondered or remarked upon but also constantly assessed, redirected, and acted upon. As such, people persistently engage in an array of actions to nourish, augment, or even adjust the course of their *bhagya*, towards hoped-for futures. Hence, while *bhagya* is something that is accepted as (mis)fortune, fate or destiny as it imposes itself on one's life: whether as a friend or foe, it is also constantly made or unmade despite an understanding that it is something that is already decided. As fate and destiny may be ideologically viewed as being predetermined, there simultaneously exists a sense that one shapes this predeterminability through their everyday choices and actions. This is where *bhagya* as (mis)fortune or luck or auspiciousness is persistently focused upon and nurtured towards hoped for outcomes, resonating back to Stafford's (2007) attention on the crucial aspect of seeking answers to *what is going to happen next?* – which I elaborate further in the next following sections.

6.3 *Bhagya* as Luck or Auspiciousness or Destiny

Gongabu bus park, Kathmandu, December 18, 2020

Our bus was scheduled to depart at 7:30 am but the driver and his assistant were nowhere in sight. In Nepal, drivers are often quite reluctant to depart without fulfilling the maximum capacity of passengers in their vehicles, which seemed to be the case this morning. In the meantime, I had already been approached by several vendors, whose energy and enthusiasm I had failed to resonate with at this hour while I waited indolently inside the bus. They had come bearing all sorts of items from disposable masks, earphones and portable phone chargers to crisps, tea or coffee and water. The last vendor, a young kid, had offered me a whole breakfast of dried salted peas and *titora* sweets, which I politely declined. [149]

"*Jai Bholenath… Jai Sambhu... Shubha yatra nani haru…"* – Praised be Lord Shiva… Auspicious journey children… – a *Sadhu* (holy man) muttered as he approached the two girls

[149] *Titora* is a food item made from a variety of dried fruits (plum, mango, tamarind etc). Its taste is usually an amalgamation of spicy, tangy, sweet, and sour flavours, making it a popular snack in Nepal. They are usually sold in small packages, either in dry form or with a mixture of sauce.

who were seated in front of me. With a line of red *tika* was visibly marked across his forehead along with a long saffron scarf draped around his neck, he was carrying a small basket in one hand, while a *mala* (holy beads) in multiple loops dangled around his wrist. The basket was graced with a bed of yellow marigold buds and petals, adorned with an elevated picture of the Hindu Goddess Laxmi (Goddess of wealth and good fortune) and incense sticks, coupled with other paraphernalia, which included a small brass bowl with cloudy water *tika*. A few coins and colourful notes were also cushioned comfortably over the flowers as I discerned the distinct figure of a gazing antelope on a Nepali 10-rupee note. The girls were swift to brush aside his advance, with a quick *"hudena hudena",* as they directed their attention towards their mobile phones.

The man's eyes now seemed to focus on me, and no sooner had I seen him crouch under the bus door, than I noticed his extended hand offering me a bud of marigold, which I accepted with slight hesitation and a gentle nod. Encouraged by my gesture, the man then proceeded to dot a *tika* on my forehead accompanied by a synchronised recital of words followed by a sprinkle of water over my hands. The act was complete as I reciprocated his auspicious bestowal or blessing by placing a 10 rupee note over the other notes in his basket. In a matter of seconds, he was out in the open again, attuning to the rhythm of an increasing movement of passengers and vendors alike in the area.

The everyday fabric of *bhagya* in Nepal is saturated with myriad ideas connected to understandings of luck and fortune as in the case above. A common way of greeting elders with respect in Nepal is by bowing down with a 'Namaste' (a gesture with folded hands), which is often also reciprocated by the elder person with expressions of *ashirvaad* (blessings) such as but not limited to: *"bhagymani bhayis (or hos)"* – may you be lucky or fortunate; or *"dherai thulo manche bhayis"* – may you be a very successful individual. As Guenzi (2012) has shown, *bhagya* can relate to any aspect of one's life to the material possession, careers, marriages, relationships, money etc. to name a few. Efforts on *how or what* course of actions one might take to ensure that one is favoured by luck or auspiciousness, and in this sense also steer clear from misfortune or harm's way are a common feature of people's everyday engagement with *bhagya*. Ideas of mis/fortune especially pertaining to travelling offer useful insights for understanding how people engage with luck or fortune in their everyday undertakings. An ostensible practise is the common act of presenting one with a *khada (or khatak)* during numerous social occasions, especially in affairs of greeting or farewell. In the event of the latter, the airport in Kathmandu provides an important case in point where these simple scarves are

easily discernible among many passengers as they look to undertake their journeys. Since the *khada* signifies good luck and respect, they serve as a way of wishing one good fortune in their endeavours ahead, and as such are given during marriages, birthdays, graduations and also during funerals.

The major Hindu festivals of Dashain and Tihar are celebrated with much pomp and zest by Nepalis alongside their family members and loved ones. Critical to both these festivals are acts which not only embrace a religious devotion to Hindu gods but also entail a profound affinity to ideas of auspiciousness, luck, and fortune. The festival of *Dashain* in particular, is an occasion where blessings of *bhagya* – whether as luck, fortune or success pertaining to all aspects of life are bestowed upon by elders to younger family and kin members. Similarly, during the holy month of *Saka Dawa* – which celebrates Buddha's life achievements (birth, enlightenment and passing), it is believed that one's actions are merited tenfold times. Hence, Buddhist devotees consider it as a crucial month to earn merits in line with Karmic beliefs and engage in selfless acts such as giving donations or refraining from eating meat to augment their merits or good deeds. In such a sense, rituals or practices in affiliation to sacred deities are plentiful, including the Hindu religious occasions of *Laxmi puja* (Goddess of wealth and good fortune)*, Saraswathi puja* (Goddess of knowledge) or *Vishwakarma puja* (God of divine Architect or a Craftsman deity) *among others.* Regardless of the sort of rituals that people carry out during festivals or non-festivals in reverence of specific gods and goddesses, their actions are generally focused on desired conditions of well-being, success, good fortune and so forth among others.

Sandesh, a young man I had befriended in Kathmandu during fieldwork had recently shared an Instagram story, which echoed a candid view about *bhagya*. The message, which included a laughing emoji read: "only those who are *bhagyamani* (fortunate or lucky) are able to find a job within one month of arriving in Japan". Such an indication of *bhagya* as an expression for good luck is hardly exceptional, since it commonly finds a place in many aspects of everyday conversations as an allusion to (mis)fortune. During one of my conversations with *Sandesh* and a few of his college friends, I had posed the question about their future plans after the completion of their college education, which was met with a usual answer that I had become so accustomed to hearing: "You know how it is for us Nepalis. The *Sarkar* (government) will not do anything for us. *Last ma sabai jana bidesh tira ta janey ta ho* – in the end everybody eventually goes abroad. Those who are fortunate may end up in Japan, Korea or better places

like the USA, Australia, UK or Europe but for most of us it is the usual Qatar, Saudi, Dubai, Malaysia…"

Similarly, reflecting on his past experiences, and his present situation in Portugal, Jonny had stated: "All my friends were going abroad… I am also not well educated…and I want my family to have a good life… I suppose it was in my *bhagya* to go to *bidesh* … of course there are always moments of *dukhha* and *sukhha*… sometimes a lot of laughter but also crying…" Jonny further emphasised on his *bhagya* by contemplating about how life unfolds alongside the course of *bhagya*, by expressing: *"nahuda ni pugi raheko thiyo jhan pugeko bela ma jhan kamaunu maan lagcha… tara chaliakheko cha... herum aba bhagya ley kata kata lancha* – It was enough, even when I did not have anything, and now when I have something I feel like I want to achieve much more… but life goes one… so let's see where my *bhagya* takes me…" I had maintained contact with Jonny ever since our first meeting in 2013 and we have grown to become good friends over the years. We had met again in the summer of 2017, when he had come back to Nepal after working for 2 years in Dubai as a warehouse assistant. At the time, he had been attempting to secure a job in a cruise ship in Macau (where his elder brother was working as a casino staff) but had failed to meet some of the required criteria. His other unsuccessful ventures involving *bidesh* included several attempts to join the Indian army, and a failed Korean language examination, necessary to go to Korea. Jonny's case, however, is also not unique among many of my interlocutors– many of whom have similarly worked in multiple countries and reflect profoundly on their *bhagya* – as embedded in their past or ongoing life situations, while also playing on the hopes and desires towards an unknown future.

While such contemplation and acceptance of *bhagya* as conditions of everyday life within understandings of luck, good fortune, or auspiciousness are strongly evident in mundane forms of practises and activities in keeping with *bhagya*, it is also constantly worked upon to direct favourable outcomes towards desired futures. I discuss such active engagements with *bhagya* in more detail in the following sections of this chapter, particularly in the context of astrologers who help people in '*jhokana'* (an assessment or weighing), or *'dekhaune'* (showing) of *bhagya*. Having briefly discussed the notion of *bhagya* pertaining to ways of understanding luck, fortune, and auspiciousness, I now draw on the notion of *dasha* to elucidate similar understandings of bad luck or misfortune, in the subsequent section.

Figure 20. Auspicious Moments. At a Wedding (L); Before a Flight (R). Source: Author 2021

Figure 21. *Pyarjung* Village Lamjung. Source: Author 2021

6.4. *Dasha:* Bad Luck or Misfortune

Akin to many of the efforts or attempts to attract good luck and fortune through various actions, the notion of *dasha* or misfortune is also regarded with critical importance and acted upon vehemently through various means and measures. Just like good luck or fortune, *dasha* can be manifested into every aspect of one's life from health, wealth, career, to relationships etc. This can entail physical harm or danger during travel to setback in education, career prospects, and also marriages or other human relationships. While *bhagya* is manifested at the intersection of the past, the present, and the future, it is in the *now and here,* or the living present that one is able to influence what is yet to come in the future. If *bhagya* is something that is already predetermined as 'an allotted share' (Guenzi, 2012), everyday actions are an effort to maximise this very allotted share of *bhagya,* and by this extension, also curtail one's *dasha* in daily life.

In Nepal, close attention is also paid to ensure that *dasha* is avoided through numerous ways, especially by following or simply being aware of certain procedures when undertaking everyday activities. Such an awareness about *dasha* were regularly communicated to me by people across my field sites in Nepal from Kathmandu to Surkhet and Lamjung. For instance, it is considered bad luck to leave the house as a group of three, or inauspicious to return home after nine days, months or years when undertaking travel for longer periods of time, as one interlocutor emphasised: "nine days, nine months, nine years – this is something one needs to take very seriously". Similarly, it is also inauspicious to undertake travel on certain days of the week, especially departure from home on a *Shanibaar (*Saturday) or return on a *Mangalbaar* (Tuesday) epitomised by the phrase *'Shani na chutnu, Mangal na misinu'* – Avoid separation on Saturdays and reunion on Tuesdays.

This idea of *dasha* was vehemently advocated by Shanta, a 45-year-old woman (a relative of Prem's), due to a mishap she had faced a few years prior, which happened on a Tuesday on the day that her husband was about return to Nepal from Kuwait after being away for nine months. She told me that she had been trimming the shrubs in the yard and doing a bit of gardening that morning like every other occasion in the past. Only this time she had decided to cut the overgrown branches of the guava tree near the main gate, which had protruded beyond the compound wall. She had climbed the tree without much problem to a reasonable height that was manageable enough for her to undertake her task, but she somehow lost her footing in a most innocuous fashion and before she could realise it, her upper left arm was partly impaled to a pointed metal arrowhead structure at the edge of the main gate. She informed me that ever

since this incident, she had been strictly *'bareko'* (observing or following) the *dasha* related to Tuesdays.

47-year-old woman, Rupa also recounted her experience of suffering a similar case of misfortune, when she had failed to regard necessary precautions – leaving her in a vulnerable position to the forces of *dasha*. Her anecdote also included other similar experiences related to ideas of *dasha*, such as one occasion during her return flight back to Nepal when the aeroplane faced serious landing difficulties, or the time when her vehicle broke down in the middle of a forest area, resulting in inconvenient circumstances. However, Rupa*'s* narrative emphasised on an occasion when she had reluctantly accompanied a friend to her village, who had come back to Nepal after nine months. Rupa tells me: "We reached her village without any issues, and my friend told me – see nothing has really happened… everybody always mentions this nine-month tenet... to which I replied – we have only just got here, so let us not get too carried away… we have to return back too…" As Rupa continues with her account, she tells me that there were many people looking to head back to Kathmandu on the day of their return, resulting in a large crowd of people vying for the limited vehicles available for travel: "People were rushing towards this one bus like *'bheda-bhakra'* (sheep-goat) …I was carrying my son in my arms and ran like everybody else and before I could even realise it I felt my ankle give way over a hole on the ground that was covered by leaves… I ended up spraining my ankle very seriously, and was bed ridden for a few weeks…" When I discussed this further with her, she seemed convinced that one can be placed in a vulnerable position, at a higher risk of facing *dasha*, without one's own doing, as evident in her account since she was accompanying someone who had returned after nine months.

As such, the above examples also illustrate a transcendental force of *dasha* and its effects, which can also surpass individuals and into the experience of others, much like my own *bhagya*, which was regularly remarked as entwined to the fortunes of my own father who had managed to successfully join the Gurkhas. While the force of *dasha* and its effects are discernible in the explanation of events and situations in ways similar to cases of Azande witchcraft, the dangers of *dasha*, however, can be avoided or minimised by observing various rules and engaging with specified forms of practises in everyday life.

Amid similar understandings of *dasha* the following account was recounted to me by a mixed group of individuals from *Pyarjung* during a small gathering in Laxmi's small, rented shared house in Kathmandu. Laxmi's husband had been working in Dubai for a couple of years and

she lived with her five-year-old daughter (I would have an opportunity to get acquainted with her husband on numerous occasions, during his visit back to Nepal in the winter of 2023, including an invitation to their daughter's birthday celebration party). Having watched a Nepali horror film together in the cinema a couple of days earlier, it did not take long for our conversations to creep out from the fictional realms of popular culture to real life experiences. The girls told me that Aasha, whose father was a *khebre* (Gurung priest who specialises in death rituals) and dealt a fair bit with the traditional healing of illnesses and rituals was more informed about such matters since she had also spent most of her younger years in Pyarjung. A general insinuation was that such phenomenon regarding *dasha* and evil or maleficent beings were not very common in a place like Kathmandu. As Aasha put it: "here such occurrences are rare but they are more frequent in the village; *Gaun ma tarsauchha eta Kathmandu ma ta tarsaudena* – these beings are apparent in the village, not in Kathmandu".[150] Hence, it is significant that the village or the rural is often viewed as a space where ghosts, spirits or otherworldly beings can be felt and experienced in a tangible sense but is also regarded as a space which stands in contrast to a rational outlook, as I have described in more detail in my previous chapter, in the section – *Kathmandu is not where one can belong to* (also see Pigg, 1992; Phillimore, 2014).

As our discussions moved on, I probed the group about any specific cases related to *dasha*. They informed me that as far as they were aware, there had been four cases of death related to people who had gone to *bidesh* from their village. One had died quite recently in Qatar about 10 years prior, where he had been *'pureko'* (buried) by concrete during an unfortunate accident at a construction site where he worked. Two others had died of cancer and one of HIV upon his return to Nepal. The person who died of HIV had contracted the disease when he was abroad. The common story was that this individual had met a *Kami* (a person from a lower caste of blacksmiths) on the way, when he was leaving for Kathmandu, which is considered as bad luck when assuming a *'shubha sait'* (auspicious moment), especially during travel for any '*ramro*

[150] Aasha had also described her experience of witnessing a shadow like figure one day when she was cutting grass for the livestock out in the forest. According to her, this figure only seemed to grow taller gradually every time she turned around (Another individual, who was aware about such beings also explained that if one were to fall within the shadow of such a being, they could become seriously ill, which could even lead to death).

kaam' (good endeavour).[151]However, they expressed this could just be village rumours or people gossiping in the village, but this is what they had heard when they were young.

The notion of *sait* carries strong temporal connotations, since it concerns a specific time or moment in relation to auspiciousness or good fortune. A significant situation concerns the right or auspiciousness moment to undertake the *tika* ritual (exchange of blessings) during the major festivals of Dashain and Tihar.[152] Similar observations are also made during weddings, in discerning auspicious days and specific timings for fulfilling rituals. Hence, the notion of keeping *sait* as an auspicious moment during any form of travel is emphasised with great importance to avoid any sort of *dasha.* For example, I was informed that one must not return immediately after leaving with an auspicious *sait* or if one is due to depart on a Saturday, usually a small clothing item like a sock or handkerchief belonging to the individual is left outside the house a day before departure to circumvent any sort of misfortune. As such, *sait* also implicates a form of action, which negates or minimises the risks of facing *dasha* in relation to ensuring forms of favourable *bhagya* into the future.

Additionally, I came to learn of a sad story about three brothers from the same family, living in the nearby *Kami* neighbourhood in Pyarjung who had all committed suicide in recent years. According to Laxmi, one had even become like a '*chatako manche'* (mad person), who used to often bite his own hands. A noteworthy anecdote that came up regarding one of the brothers in this conversation was as follows:

Aasha: His name was *Chandra Bahadur Bika* from the *Kami* neighbourhood, and he also had a similar story. He must have been about 25 years old or so. He even had a pregnant wife at home. He was about to depart for Saudi, and I think just about 3-5 days prior to his travel, *"aago ko raap ayera khutta ma chireko"* – he burned his foot from a fire… they said it was the work of a witch… but he still managed to go to Saudi…

Jyoti: But he fell seriously ill when he was abroad… we heard he had even sent back around twenty-six thousand rupees to his family from his first month of salary but after that his sickness got worse… and for about 2 months his friends there

[151] Interestingly, in contrast to this, another individual explained that it is considered auspicious to meet an individual from another lower caste – the *damai* caste, who are traditional tailors and musicians.

[152] These auspicious timings are determined by Hindu priests.

managed to gather enough money to help him and eventually send him back to Nepal.

Aasha: When he returned to Nepal, he stayed in *Kalimati* in Kathmandu for like 5 days… and people from the village went to visit him… his wife did not even know he had returned… we heard he used to scream erratically and say things like "*Utaah…aayo aayo…*" – There… it's coming…it's coming… and he eventually hanged himself in the month of *Srawan*[153]… On the night before his death, I even had a dream where I saw *"mero chura haru phooteko thiyo... ani aina ni phooteko thiyo... gham chai nalageko rey bihana huda pani…"* – all my bangles had broken… and the mirror had also broken… and there was no sunshine although it was already morning…

Jyoti: They say such dreams appear before something like this…

6.5 The Predicament of *Bhagya*

In my discussions thus far regarding *bhagya* and its related ideas such destiny, luck, fortune, and misfortune, I have alluded to my own *bhagya* on numerous occasions – often considered to be a fortunate one in the views of many of my interlocutors. However, *bhagya* as understood, in its numerous forms are not simply accepted as they unfold in everyday experience, but it is also constantly pondered, assessed, and worked upon in numerous ways. While the actions of the past cannot be changed, it remains implicated to one's course of *bhagya* both in present and future – saturated with myriad forms of fortune and misfortune outcomes. Hence, given the locus of *bhagya* in the intersections of the past, present and future, it demands a constant attention and nurturing towards desired outcomes and conditions of being in the world in anticipation of the not-yet future (Bloch, 1986).

An analysis of migration as a form of *lottery* amongst Nepalis has been highlighted by Khadka (2018) and brings ideas of *luck or chance* into its fold. The lottery of migration according to Khadka concerns migrants' successful realisation for desired or hoped for pursuits in their migration undertakings – in the form of securing decent job roles, visa rights or settlement facilities among others against a backdrop of the numerous risks and complexities involved in migration journeys. As Khadka points out in the case of Nepali migrant workers, the winning

[153] *Srawan* is the fifth month in the Nepali calendar (which falls during the month of July-August in the Gregorian calendar).

aspect in a lottery is akin to migration in the sense that while some individuals are certain to win, others are bound to lose, since individuals going through the same networks or channels might also find themselves in differing circumstances. Hence, a migration process facilitated by the same intermediary or agent may lead certain individuals towards satisfactory job roles, while others face disappointment and deceit. Similarly, some undocumented workers manage to navigate their work and life beyond the reach of government authorities, while some find themselves in the shadows of jail and detention centres. People also borrow large sums of money to undertake migration projects and find themselves in a quagmire of debts, often with their own relatives or loan sharks; while many are frequently swindled off their money, which was the case for one man in his sixties from *Pyarjung*, who was still chasing after agents in the hope of recovering back money that he had lost from them under the pretext of securing a decent job in the Gulf for his son. The point being here is that, regardless of the risks and uncertainties involved, Nepalis like many other migrants elsewhere are prepared to take a chance. However, such a notion of chance, and indeed uncertainties in migratory undertakings are strongly embedded in ideas of *bhagya*, as I have elucidated through various ethnographic examples.

Hence, it is also insightful to consider the phenomenon of migration coupled with understandings of *bhagya* as informed by many Nepalis as a form of an 'uncertain event' (Graeber, 2012). As I have argued through ethnographic instances Nepali migratory undertakings are fraught with conditions of uncertainties, waiting and hope, from instances such as managing financial arrangements and visa applications or dealing with brokers to also dealing with all myriad and challenging circumstances after arrival in *bidesh* (there are many forces at play here – pertaining to a phase of liminality). Graeber draws on many of the apparently mystical terms familiar to anthropologists (e.g., mana, witchcraft, destiny etc.) to demonstrate ways of coming to terms with basic dilemmas concerning the very possibility of human knowledge – dilemmas that are in most cases just as much a problem to social theorists as they are to those we study; that our own popular notions of chance, luck, and probability are best considered as concepts of this sort. Graeber notes that politics is the domain of the performative, but therein lies its central dilemma, its fundamental paradox – that is, to conduct politics effectively one cannot admit this (ibid., 2012:29). According to Graeber the paradox of performativity is akin to that of anthropological theories of magic in form of performance – politics like magic is halfway between poetic expression and fraud. As such the interesting aspect about this theoretical emphasis on performativity is that things must be constantly

created and more importantly maintained through human action. Further, with this undertaking at hand, the concept of chance presents a peculiar case: “To make a case that notions such as fate, luck, chance, or probability, and also ones like *mana, grace, or witchcraft*, are all ways of grappling with this fundamental paradox – that while we cannot foresee the future, once that future has become the past, it is almost impossible to look on what happened as something that should not have been foreseeable – would be an elaborate project. But it is easy, I think, to see how such a case could be made. The concepts of fate and luck are particularly straightforward” (ibid., 2012:35).

Indeed, the power of hindsight is seen through the lenses of *bhagya* as a way of understanding one’s unique circumstances and outcomes, alongside an acceptance of conditions including those pertaining to uncertainties. As long as *bhagya* and its various manifestations are perceived as posing risks then measures and strategies will be put in place to avoid or embrace it in proportion to the perceived risks and rewards. In this regard, Stafford (2007) notes that people are able to take necessary steps to try and control what happens to them and others through the calculation of fortune: “One is able to work on and transform relationships unlike the unfolding patterns of the universe that one simply has to live with while tinkering at the edges. People around us may have their own plans and intentions and understandings that may not correspond to our own. Patterns of separations and reunion are by their very nature, a field of ‘strategic action’” (ibid., 2007: 72).[154] Taiwanese individuals talk about good and bad fortune in the form of *Suan ming:* ‘calculations of fate’ (Stafford, 2012), while also placing a great deal of effort into accumulating and redistributing fortune or auspiciousness through religious rituals and other mechanisms, akin to some of the examples I have discussed in Nepal. Hence, questions of luck and fortune also deal with ideas of agency and limitations in relation to desired outcomes in life trajectories of individuals.

Col and Humphrey (2012) note the tensions between the impersonal and individual aspects of fortune and fate, while Malinowski (1939) also remarks on calculations of auspiciousness for

[154] Patterns as discussed by Stafford highlight the extent to which the historical past (including kin relations across ancestral lines) are not simply determined in the present but also the extent to which the future may be predictable, and in some ways even controllable (Stafford, 2007:59). Here Stafford focuses on two ‘pattern recognition exercises’ that are relevant to such an understanding: first is the predictions of the future that are centred around Chinese cosmological scheme, and second relates to patterns in interpersonal relations.

activities in relation to times and days, including the concept of luck during Trobriand sailing (as a form of individualised luck). Similarly, Vezo fishermen also undertake important rituals on favourable days after consultation with divine specialists (Astuti, 1995:129). Hence, one is able to determine whether certain days or years are favourable for certain activities, and this form of looking for patterns of reality in numerical or quasi-mathematical terms, is one way of pondering about the future, or even *quantifying* it (Stafford, 2007). In this regard, I have already noted similar religious figures or specialists (such as *jhakris* or *matahs)* in Nepal, who are approached to deal with everyday problems related to instances of *dasha, bigar*, and auspiciousness. However, visiting a *Jyotish* (astrologer) to assess or calculate ones' *bhagya* as a form of counselling is a common way of making active attempts to act upon *bhagya* and its trajectories. Guenzi's (2012) work on astrological counselling in India exemplifies such a case, which draws on people's engagement with astrology as an ideological basis for the conceptualisation and management of fortune in India. She elucidates the ways in which semantics of *bhagya* are connected to decision making processes and values of achievement among people, particularly among middle-and upper-class families in contemporary India.

In following Guenzi, I briefly discuss an ethnographic example that emphasises similar endeavours undertaken by people in Nepal as a way of engaging with an acting upon *bhagya* and the future.

6.5.1 Computer Bajey

December 5, 2022

I am accompanying a friend, Prabin and his mother to visit a *jyotish* (astrologer) in *Satdobato, Lalitpur,* who according to numerous accounts is an eminent astrological guru in the local area and is popularly known as *'computer bajey'* (computer man).[155] His office is located on the second floor of a three storeyed commercial building, at the end of street away from the main road. The stairway entrance leading upstairs is flanked by a medial pharmacy and a small convenient store. On arrival, I notice a few individuals sitting on *mudas* (small handmade stools) – sipping on their morning tea and basking in the winter sunshine.

[155] While the Nepali word *bajey* means grandfather (or an elderly man), I surmise that this reference is embedded in Nepali notions of respect, since the man himself is most probably somewhere in his early or mid-thirties according to numerous individuals.

"Dai! dekhaune thau etai ho ni? – Brother! the astrology place is here, right?" Prabin asks one of them, who nods back with an immediate, "*hajur mathi* –yes upstairs", as he directs his palm towards the stairs. Several pairs of shoes, sandals and slippers are scattered in the corner on the stairs leading up to the second floor. On the wall halfway up the stairs, a worn paper notice in Nepali writing reads, "astrology-reading this way with an arrow". At the door, we are immediately greeted by another paper sign on the wall in Nepali writing: "please leave your shoes and slippers outside or downstairs", as I notice the patterned carpet flooring in the room, while we take off our shoes. A few people are already seated on a cushioned bench placed below a small narrow window, with its glass replaced by sheets of paper from a Nepali calendar – discernible in the tilted figures of the *Buddha* and *Goddess Saraswati*. The room, intended as a waiting area -is bare and contains nothing more than the mentioned solitary bench and notice, coupled with a Nepali paper calendar hanging in the opposite corner near the large window, which embraces an abundant amount of natural sunlight. Faint voices can also be overheard from the adjoining room, only separated by a plain curtain over an open doorway, which acts as a threshold between the two rooms. After waiting for about 45 minutes, we finally get our turn, and make our way into the other room.[156]

At the entrance of the room, in the corner stands an imposing structure in the form a grandiose golden coloured altar, designed as a temple, with pillars and steps leading up to the images of Lord Shiva and Goddess Durga at the centre of the structure. It is also adorned with a collection of religious paraphernalia from candles, multi-coloured garlands, and incense sticks to intricately designed water jugs and leaf shaped plates. Several images of other divine Hindu figures also hang on the walls around the room.

On the other side, a smartly dressed man in a white shirt and grey coat is seated behind a desk. He is wearing a traditional *dhaka topi* (Nepali hat) and white mask across his face. Prabin's mother greets him immediately: "Namaste guruji, I am Bina's mother", reminding him of her daughter's recent visit, who had persuaded Prabin and his mother to make this visit in the first place.[157] After we exchange *namastes,* Prabin and his mother take the seats in front of his desk

[156] When visiting on another occasion one early morning with Prabin, we were compelled to return, since there were already too many people waiting ahead of us.

[157] Prabin informed me that although he was sceptical about things such as horoscopes and astrology, he had decided to visit 'computer bajey' on this occasion due to his sister's strong influence, who herself had visited the place recently, and suggested that Prabin should consult him too.

and hands him a piece of paper containing Prabin's *chino*,[158] while I occupy a chair behind them, and quietly listen to their exchanges. During the conversations, *computer bajey* scribbles pieces of information on a white piece of paper, while also typing and observing intently on his red Toshiba laptop that is accompanied by a collection of books and stationery on the table, while a couple of peacock feathers with it its distinct eyespots also extend out visibly from one side.

I provide a selection of excerpts from the exchanges between them as follows:

Computer bajey: You seem to have a '*taal saruwa yog*'[159] or a tendency for a restless mind… one small thing can affect you a lot… and you have health issues related specifically to your back and leg…

Prabin's mother: Yes, that is very true. He is always anxious about very small things, and he over thinks a lot… and he pours down his frustration at us, he is always angry (Prabin smiles at me)

Computer bajey: You have *shani* related *dasha* (Saturday related misfortune) at the moment in your life… it shows that this will carry on for a few more years… in order to deal with this *shani*, you will need to pour *jaal (*water) over a *peepal* tree, and you can also visit the *Sankata temple*, in Kathmandu on Saturday mornings to pay your worship to prevent forms of bad luck and health related misfortune.

[158] A *china (or chino)* is one's astrological or birth chart, which contains personal information such as one's name, horoscope, date (time and place) of birth alongside information regarding the alignment of planets, sun, stars, and moon. It is also called one's *bhagya kundali* (See Guenzi, 2012). This information is required for an astrological consultation regarding one's *bhagya* (although not necessarily in the paper form), since this can also be conveyed verbally, provided that the accurate details are known to an individual). Furthermore, Prabin's mother informed me that one's *chino* is highly personal and should never be disclosed to others.

[159] In Sanskrit, the concept of 'yog' indicates the moment in which the good allotted to an individual is available to the person, amid an understanding that *bhagya* is an allotted share (Guenzi, 2012:48). Hence, this can be understood through examples such as a *yog* for a new house, a *yog* for a new job, or a *yog* for marriage, among others.

Prabin: I would also like to know about his future career prospects, since he is looking to go out of Nepal to work. He has found a new job in an international cruise ship. Will this work out well for him?

Computer bajey: It looks like you are destined to go to *bidesh*…you have a *yog* for earning money and living abroad… I can see that he has already been to *bidesh* on several occasions before, right? His job prospects are definitely better if he leaves Nepal…

Prabin: Yes, I lived in Australia for my higher education for a few years, and my current job at an international NGO also allows me to undertake international travel occasionally.

Prabin's mother: Also, regarding some problems in his personal life… we are very worried for him, since we are going through some difficulties. He has already separated from his first wife, but we want to know if it is ok for him to marry someone else...

Computer bajey: His *graha* (planetary positions) reveals that he will go through one serious separation in your life before he can find another partner for more stable and happier relationship… I can see that there is also another girl in your son's life at the moment… she has also been through a separation with someone else in her past…

Prabin's mother: Will the relationship between my son and her work out in the future?

Computer bajey: It seem ok here according to the *'guna'* [160] between the two but the *yog* for marriage is not there yet… It also looks like your son's ex-partner can cause some difficulties for your son… you have to be careful with her… she may cause trouble for your family in the future… So, it is best you sort out any differences with her first and come to a mutual understanding before you decide on any marriage related decisions or

[160] In a general sense, *guna* refers to an attribute, value or a trait held by an individual. During a potential marriage, calculating the *guna* assesses the compatibility between two potential marriage partners. It is assessed in accordance with various points-based categories to determine a total score out on 36 *gunas* (for example a *guna* of 36/36 is considered a fitting match. An interlocutor expressed that a minimum of 18/36 *gunas* is usually considered as acceptable for a marriage between two individuals.

> arrangements for your son and his current partner… because if it is written in your son's karma that he should suffer then it is not fair for his partner to bear a part of that suffering…

The dialogue presented here represents a way of engaging with *bhagya* in Nepal, not simply for calculating forms of (mis)fortune but also for actively finding ways through which one might shape their hoped-for and desired future pathways. Astrological counselling which deals with one's information such as date, time and place of birth reveals the planetary positions of individuals within reference to naturalistic patterns of the universe (Guenzi, 2012) is often strongly considered when making important life decisions. Prabin's case exemplifies an active engagement with *bhagya* not only in relation to everyday management of physical or mental health and well-being, work, and relationships with people but also and assessment for undertaking important decisions such as choosing marriage partners, making financial investments (buy property or new car/bike) and indeed decisions for going to *bidesh.* On another occasion, I once met a young girl, probably in her early 20's in the same office, who infromed me that she had come all the way from *Bandipur,* in *Tanahun* district (about five hours drive from Kathmandu) to visit a few educational consultancies and employment agencies in Kathmandu to learn about her options to go to *bidesh*. She explained that was staying with a relative in the local area, who had informed her about *'computer baje',* and she was here to assess which destinations might be more favourable for her in *bidesh* in accordance with her *bhagya*. More importantly, such everyday actions to *'jokhnu'* or weigh one's *bhagya* and take auspicious decisions directed towards the future, also follows Guenzi's (2012) argument that they are not so much a way to deal with questions of Karmic determinism and misfortune but rather to deal with *bhagya* to maximise one's share of fortune or luck, thus also suggesting that they are not very fatalistic. Although Guenzi's work in India parallels people's active engagement with *bhagya* also followed heavily by many in Nepal, the Chinese notion of *'suan ming'* as a way of calculating *bhagya* and the future also resonates strongly with Nepali actions through astrological counselling. Stafford's (2012) discussions of misfortune in Taiwan scrutinises what can be done about fortune and misfortune. He draws upon three accounts of fate-intersections of cosmological, spirit-oriented, and social explanations in Taiwan.[161] The

[161] Stafford's (2012) discussion deals with questions of: (i) What happens to us is determined in the mechanisms of the universe; (ii) What happens is determined or heavily shaped by interventions of gods, ancestors, or other

boundaries between these distinctions illustrated by Stafford, nonetheless remain blurred, since they overlap with understandings and everyday experiences of people, in a similar way that idioms of *bhagya,* as I have previously discussed, also connect to one another in Nepal.

Graeber's (2012) discussion regarding ideas about the future and people's engagement with luck, is indicative of the everyday actions in the alteration or shaping of *bhagya* towards favourable or desired outcomes in the future, as he states: "Fate might best be considered as a matter of seeing the future from an imaginary point in time even further in the future when that future will have become the past… This is like destiny, which is a matter of ends. At some point in the future, we will look at our lives or current events as a story. Stories, by definition, end. Destiny is that currently unknowable future point that people even further in the future will construct as the end. And if this is the case, luck is a simple inversion, a mere matter of flipping the chart around. Luck is (first and foremost, anyway) seeing the past from a point even further in the past when it was still the future" (ibid.:35). Hence, according to Graeber the foundational structure of the notion of luck is transposable. What I would like to emphasise here is how the notion of hope affects action regarding *bhagya* since hope is also driven by '*iccha or chahanna'* (desires or wishes). What is critical in following Graeber in this analysis is understanding that they are similar and related conceptions with pivoting perspectives along the same temporal continuum regarding the present and the future, and the ones who invoke notions of fate or destiny have the most elaborate technologies in place to alter them (ibid.:36). In Nepal this also entails taking actions through active ways of shunning and avoiding these fatalistic points, which may otherwise eventually lead to unwanted consequences. So, there is some sort of action that must be taken to prevent good things or preventing bad things from happening. There is an element of appeasement to unknown superpowers or higher beings. In the case of *hasina* as expounded by Graeber, one must believe it to render it true – a paradox of performativity is that it will only work if you believe it will work. Furthermore, he also notes that *waha* is crucial in the sense that no one really reflects much on destiny as an abstract concept. As such, people rarely reflect on the nature of *hasina,* but if destiny comes up, it is because there is some practical problem that needs to be addressed – that is, because there is something that can be done to alter it.

---

spirits; and (iii) What happens to us is shaped by something we create for ourselves, through interactions with others.

The case of *bhagya* in Nepal invokes notions pertaining to fortune and luck profoundly alongside that of misfortune. Understood in this sense, misfortune presents itself as an obstacle, or a sort of detriment or obliteration in dealings related to ideas of hope and the future. Fortune however indicates a somewhat slightly different proposition, since one can never know for sure whether the potential for fortune is adequate or where one exactly stands in relation to one's fortune. Hence, fortune and luck comprise a particular kind of happenstances, as almost-happenings, the 'quasi-events' of everyday life – not as ordinary facts but as unique facts of the everyday, one that forces a shift in attention toward what will happen next (cf Stafford, 2012) or toward what might have happened – "a mishap, an omen, a winning, a sign of hope" (Col and Humprey, 2012:2).

6.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed and demonstrated how the notion of *bhagya* - in the form of various idioms related to (mis)fortune, luck and destiny - encompasses anticipated viewpoints on exhausting potential futures, constituting imagined viewpoints on *almost-happening* series of best possible worlds. Manifold temporalities of fortune and the elucidation of how fortunate futures are anticipated or produced and how subjectivities are revealed or crop up in the process of migration. Here, I argue that while *bhagya* features profoundly yet also casually in everyday discourse in Nepal, it also adds to the aforementioned conundrum of people actively engaging in working toward or away from predetermination. Despite how *bhagya* and its ensuing relations are viewed with a certain sense of scepticism in Nepal, many engage in actions or seek active measures to sway *bhagya* in their favour in everyday activities. For many Nepalis, *bhagya* is not simply something that is willingly accepted or endured as a fatalistic attitude but also incessantly examined and worked upon within conditions of migration – amid hope and precarity, success and suffering, while building a future saturated with possibilities. Such myriad attempts by many to embrace *bhagya* or coax it in towards their favour entails a striving towards what might be related to constituents of a desired and good life. As such, *bhagya* with its manifold connotations, and as idioms of luck, destiny, auspiciousness or (mis)fortune relates to something that although carries strong connotations as a fatalistic viewpoint, it is also continually enacted upon and shaped through everyday actions. In many ways, such a presence of *bhagya* as a formidable force within moral understandings of everyday life coupled with the social, economic and political fabric of Nepal brings forth interesting anthropological queries regarding luck, (mis)fortune and its role in everyday moralities and migratory decisions.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION: Kata Janey Aba? (Where to Next?)

March 5, 2022

The Air Arabia flight from Kathmandu to Abu Dhabi is expectedly crowded with many Nepali nationals. Many are returning to their jobs in the UAE as security guards, cleaners, and construction or hotel workers after their *chutti* (holiday) in Nepal. Many are also boarding a plane for the first time in their lives, while some are already seasoned veterans used to the rites of passage and ordeals of the airport and air travel. Only about an hour ago, a young man from *Parsa* district in the *Terai region* (plains) of Nepal had approached me at the immigration lounge seeking help with the completion of his departure slip. The aircraft is animated with pulsating echoes of audible music or insouciant chatter including people speaking on their mobile phones or making video calls, while an ongoing scattered movement of people only add to the commotion. A sense of resignation is palpable behind the smiling faces of the flight attendants who are clearly used to this ordeal, as they make their way back and forth across the aircraft assisting people and even calling out firm instructions, at times in Hindi. More discernible are the clusters of matching-coloured caps or t-shirts bearing the names of various manpower agencies or companies donned by faces radiating a sense of both unease and elation.

I make my way towards my assigned seat number, and find a young man already seated beside my seat, who is occupied on his phone. As I make myself comfortable in my seat, I can overhear numerous conversations around me, but more perceptibly someone contently describing his job in Abu Dhabi to another passenger, including how decent his employer is, as he states: *"company dherai ramro cha hamro…* (our company is very good)."

While a feeling of chaos is inevitable and even considered a norm during flights arriving to or departing from Kathmandu, a unique hint of excitement is also visibly present among many passengers, a feeling I also recall from previous flights into Kathmandu over the past many years. Numerous of my own Nepali and non-Nepali friends have also often remarked on this situation, mentioning the absence of any flying or passenger etiquette among most Nepali passengers, who look to leave their seats immediately after the aircraft touches ground or rush to open the overhead cabin baggage compartments, despite the announcements or requests from crew members. Such instances are often laughed off amid the frustrations of other passengers,

epitomised by a familiar and unperturbed acceptance of being a Nepali: *"Nepali ta ho… hami estai ho"* – We are Nepalis after all… we are like this. At the same time, the ordeal of flying in an aeroplane is also not something that many of these passengers are used to, with some simply returning back after having flown for the first time when leaving Nepal, while also exhilarated by the expected exultations of reunions with loved ones or simply returning back to "*afno ghar… afno desh"* – one's home… one's country.

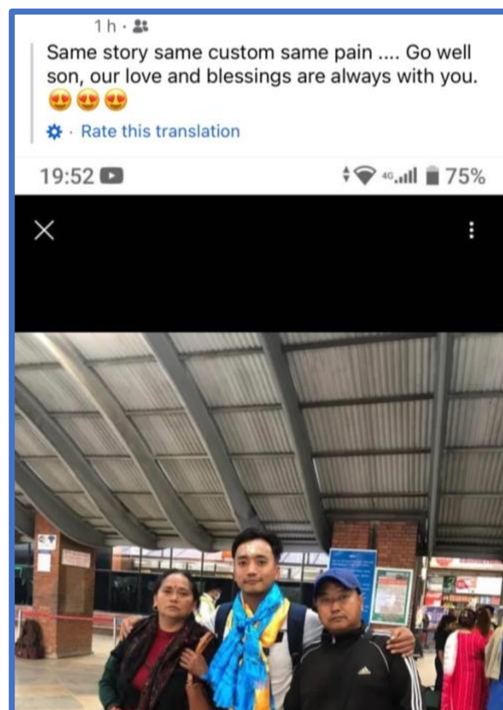


Figure 22. *Same Story.* Kathmandu Airport 2023 (with permission from owner)

This research has examined a myriad of intricate migratory experiences of Nepalis – those who have returned from a migratory past as well as those soon to embark on one. My arguments in this thesis have built on the theoretical notions and entanglements of hope, dreams, waiting and *bhagya* within the experience of migratory undertakings in Nepal. More significantly, the discussions and ethnographic descriptions I have presented in this thesis follow back to a key question I set out in the introduction: *why is there such a persevering desire to go to 'bidesh' from Nepal, and how does this relate to one's hopeful dreams and the future?*

An examination of the trends and historical context of migration within the socio-economic and political conditions of Nepal offers a valuable point of departure, enabling one to grasp

some of the significant tenets in answering such a question. The notion of *bidesh* itself bears significant weight in terms of both, the tangible and intangible dimension of understanding a culture of migration in Nepal. While *bidesh* represents a place which is *bahira* (outside) that is not exactly home in many aspects, it conveys and enables a space for scaffolding dreams projected towards hopeful futures. However, the everyday experience of migration in Nepal is not a simple straightforward migratory undertaking to *bidesh* as might be implicated in ideas that one's dreams alongside hoped-for futures will follow. This is also emphasised as a common and persistent voiced enigma among Nepalis: "*aakhir ma* (in the end) … what is so special about *bidesh*?", as was frequently expressed by my interlocutors who had never been to *bidesh.*

During our conversations in Portugal, Dawa and Sushila both profoundly resonated with this very dilemma of whether the intense planning, preparation and journey to *bidesh* produces as much uncertainty as the conditions one is leaving behind. They described how although so many Nepalis, have come to Portugal (and continue to do so) by embarking on precarious and arduous life risking journeys, while bearing multiple dreams and hope (like themselves), upon arrival, the reality for many is marked by a heightened sense of uncertainty – a facet of indeterminacy, which always remains open within the ground of hope and migration.

I have sought to engage with the interdeterminacy of hope throughout this thesis – driven by both its potentiality and precarity, which are intricately embedded to ideas of *bidesh* not only in the imagination as forms of dreams but also within the experiences and lived realities of individuals and their families. Migratory endeavours, bearing momentum of hope in dreams and the imagination, both in the individual and collective sense are tied intensely unfold within the possibilities of not-yet futures, where migration undertakings also often lead to failure, disappointment, and tragedy, as evident in numerous Nepali cases in the Arab Gulf.

Yet, this does not imply that hopes ends when one is confronted with precarious conditions, since the momentum or force of hope often also thrusts one towards intensely different from what was imagined (Bryant and Knight, 2019). In the context of Nepali migration, hope's myriad trajectories play out in conditions which continually shape and are shaped by one's engagement to ideas about the future, *bhagya*, family responsibility or compulsion within the fabric of Nepal's economic and political conditions. By considering hope as a central theme in my thesis, I have drawn on both the potentialities and indeterminacies of hope's trajectories and indeed ways of dreaming through the works of Bloch, Appadurai, Crapanzano, Hage,

Miyazaki, Schielke, Bryant and Knight among others, to capture the multiple paradoxes of everyday life and migration in Nepal – a position I have sought to emphasise throughout the various chapters of this thesis. Pine's (2014) statement also exemplifies hope amid such complexities:

"Hope is a complex, many-layered notion resting on the capacity for imagination, on a sense of time and of temporal progress, on a desire to believe in a better future or in the possibility that something can change, and to some extent on uncertainty. Hope is also always mirrored or shadowed by its opposite, despair. We hope for a particular future, but we do not know with certainty that it will take place or take place in the way we desire. We fear that the outcome of this uncertainty may be despair or what will happen if hope diminishes and fades away" (Pine, 2014: S96).

Alongside hope, my research has considered the ways of the imagination through aspirational dreams alongside its connection to spaces and the diverse meanings they encompass in the everyday lives of people in Nepal. As I have shown, this is epitomised in the myriad ambiguities of the migratory experience within the interconnected spaces of the urban and rural alongside *bidesh* – not only among individuals who leave for *bidesh* but also those who remain, particularly in relation to meanings of bikas and the spaces of *gaun* and cities. By examining these connections and meanings that emanate through movement between these spaces, elucidated through ideas of bikas, I have also drawn on the imaginative understandings of *gaun* alongside *bidesh*. At the same time, working towards achieving one's dreams or hopeful futures also requires one to confront conditions of disappointment, separation, or pain of living in *bidesh* – often also viewed as a world that is 'not so real' or 'upside down' in contrast to home.

Hence, the migratory experience among many Nepalis and indeed their families is one that is fraught with ambiguities, but it is also a place of potentialities where opportunities are aplenty. This also affirms my assertation that migration is a collection of experiences in diverse spaces and meanings – often where the mundane becomes the locus of overlooked meanings. The analytical lens I have considered does not seek to lay out dichotomous opposites amidst concepts such as urban-rural, imagination and materiality, hope and disappointment as polar counterparts, rather I have examined how these co-exist within the same plane of migration phenomena in Nepal. Nepali migratory lives and experiences in *bidesh,* whether as individuals – undertaking military operations as Gurkha soldiers, constructing skyscrapers in Qatar, guarding malls in Dubai, serving coffee at the Doha airport, studying at universities in Japan

and Sydney, or picking strawberries in the Portuguese countryside can be viewed as *situations* –invigorated with the potentialities of hope, dreams, and existential considerations as *bhagya* projected towards the future.

As I have emphasised throughout my thesis, dreams relating to *bidesh* and migration in Nepal, is exemplified particularly through the figure of the Gurkha, which also offers a fruitful analytical lens to examine a dimension of dreams as imaginary aspirations towards the future, or as bringing them forward into but not-yet an achieved consciousness (Bloch, 1986). Dreams of *bidesh* filled with hope and potentialities, are also easily accessible and available in diverse forms and spaces – marketed in billboards, embodied in films and music, exchanged as gifts, sold as Gurkha training packages or consultation and agent fees to go to *bidesh* etc. and indeed through everyday interactions among people. Yet, such a proliferation of dreams about *bidesh* alongside hope in Nepal are also conditioned by other elements – from political stagnation to social and economic conditions in the country, which crop up as common referents in everyday migratory discourse. Hence, while endeavours to go to *bidesh* among Nepalis encompass ideas of hope and the imagination, these also exist alongside the intricacies of waiting alongside *bhagya* – all of which form crucial elements that not only co-exist together but also constantly work on one another to, make and unmake the very conditions towards realising the not-yet or hoped-for future.

I have emphasised strongly in my thesis that much of this research was shaped during a time of precarity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, where waiting and indeed hoping projected towards a future, had become a common facet of everyday life for all. The implicated condition of waiting due to COVID-19 is perhaps aptly captured by Crapanzano, who noted that "hope is the field of desire in waiting." (1985: 45). I have drawn inspiration in the work of Khosravi to examine the concept of waiting in my own research, which in many ways allowed me to recognise the paradoxes and ambiguities which arise in the of migration phenomenon in Nepal. As I have illustrated through the voices of my interlocutors and various ethnographic descriptions in this thesis, such multiple facets of ambiguities that characterise the migration phenomena in Nepal are strongly embedded within act of *waiting* – not simply as an experience of inactivity but a condition, which entail and allows various actions related to hope.

I have also argued that examining the social and economic realities associated with migratory comings and goings, within conditions of hope, waiting and dreams also offer fruitful ways to understand how people also deal with the future. The emic meanings and understandings of

bhagya plays a crucial role in the everyday experience of many Nepalis and carry strong implications in migratory undertakings and its ensuing trajectories. As I have elucidated, *bhagya* unfolds as both desirable and undesirable life conditions or circumstances in everyday life, which is constantly followed and assessed – often through creative acts in keeping with ideas and beliefs regarding the future. Hence, everyday actions pertaining to *bhagya* and its multiple meanings, are acts of engagement with the not-yet or hoped-for futures are also crucial aspects of the migratory experience and ideas relating to the decision making and existential well-being in the present and the future. As I have also emphasised strongly throughout my thesis, this research is also a reflection of my own condition as a Nepali individual – that of being in *bidesh* and sharing a part of the fortunate *bhagya* bestowed upon me by my father who managed to fulfil his own dreams of being a Gurkha. While one's *bhagya* alongside aspirations for *bidesh* are implicated in conditions of hope, the choices that people make are fraught with immense possibilities and dilemmas – which encompass, the past, the present and the future.

My thesis contributes to social and economic anthropology, and migration and Nepali studies. It also adds to the important body of work on native anthropology. More significantly, it adds to the emerging but growing literature on hope, waiting and studies relating to an anthropology of the future. I consider my research as a relevant starting point for examining the future alongside the anticipation of everyday life.

My research is a commitment and contribution to a scholarship of what Appadurai (2013:299) calls positive anthropology grounded in tension between "the ethics of possibility" (of hope, aspiration, desire) over the "ethics of probability" (of systematized rationalities, risk management, and costs/benefits). While positive anthropology focuses on ethnographically examining peoples' engagement with politics and economies, it is committed to understanding how people realise hoped for futures, and an affluence in all its multiple dimensions, not simply through political and economic ends. In many ways, Appadurai's call focused on human aspirations and futures also follows closely with an anthropology of the good (Robbins, 2013; Ortner, 2016; Laidlaw, 2016) and indeed the future (Crapanzano, 2003; Moore, 2011; Appadurai, 2013; Kleist and Jansen, 2016; Bryant and Knight, 2019) – areas of scholarship, which I emphasise strongly within my own work. Positive anthropology in many ways focuses on areas such as people's everyday engagement with imagination, hope and the future.

While my research does not explicitly unpack people's visions of what might be considered as 'a good life' and 'well-being' (See Fischer, 2014), I engage strongly with such subject matter.

By espousing dreams as a constitutive of a meaningful life alongside notions of hope, imagination, and the future within the context of migration to examine the everyday experience of people, my research makes small steps, albeit small, towards a positive anthropology. My research further augments this by also drawing on the critical aspects of both hope and misfortune as a way of dealing with the future to inform how people envision particular futures for themselves including the world they inhabit, and the agency to act upon such futures alongside meaningful obligations of family and kin networks.

While an engagement between aspects of *bhagya* (in an emic sense in Nepal) and hope are undoubtably critical, it deserves greater attention. This nonetheless offers scope for future scholarship, particularly in understanding migratory decision making within religious understandings of hope. Lastly, by engaging with hope as both a social phenomenon and an analytical framework to understand migration in Nepal, I strive to make space for further anthropological engagement with philosophy.

In the interplay of hope and waiting, migrants will continue to precariously navigate their futures towards greater (mis)fortunes, propelled by their dreams and aspirations for a better future. It is within the anticipation of *bidesh* that the contours of tomorrow are etched, forging narratives of resilience and determination amidst the flux of migration that shape the very fabric of human migration and the futures it engenders.

Figure 23. Lisbon, Portugal. Source: Author 2022

Figure 24. Almograve, Portugal. Source: Author 2022

List of References

Abu-Lughod, L. (1991) 'Writing Against Culture', in Fox, R. (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press. pp. 137-62.

Acharya, Y. N., Uprety, N.P., and Vishwakarma, S.B. (2015) *An Outline History of Nepal*. Ekta Books: Kathmandu.

Adhikari, K.P. (2012). *Nepalis in the United Kingdom: An Overview*. Reading: Centre for Nepal Studies UK.

Agamben, G. (1998) *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Al-Mohammad, H. and Peluso, D. (2012) 'Ethics and the "rough ground" of the everyday: the overlappings of life in post invasion Iraq', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2 (2), pp. 42-58.

Alexiades, M. and Peluso, D. M. (2002) 'Prior Informed Consent: the politics of cross cultural exchange', in Laird, S. A. (ed.), *Biodiversity and Traditional Knowledge: Equitable Partnerships in Practice*, London: Earthscan.

Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities.* London: Verso.

Appadurai, A. (2013) *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. London: Verso.

Appadurai, A. (1986) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Astuti, R. (1995). '"The Vezo Are Not a Kind of People": Identity, Difference, and "Ethnicity" among a Fishing People of Western Madagascar', *American Ethnologist*, *22* (3), pp. 464–482.

Auyero, J. (2012). *Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Battaglia, D. (1999), 'Towards an Ethics of the Open Subject: Writing Culture', in Moore, H. L. (ed.), Good Conscience', in *Anthropological Theory Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 114-50.

Battaglia, D. (2017) 'Aeroponic Gardens and Their Magic: Plants/Persons/Ethics in Suspension', *History and Anthropology,* 28 (3), pp. 263–292.

Baudrillard, J. (1988) *Jean Baudrillard: selected writings*, M. Poster (ed.) Cambridge: Polity Press.

Benson, M. and O'Reilly, K. (2022) 'Reflexive practice in live sociology: lessons from researching Brexit in the lives of British citizens living in the EU-27', *Qualitative Research*, 22 (2), pp. 177-193.

Berland, L. (2011) *Cruel Optimism.* Durhamn, NC: Duke University Press.

Bernard, H. R. (ed.) (2006). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Oxford: AltaMira Press.

Berreman, G. (1991) 'Ethics versus "Realism" in Anthropology', in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader,* Robben, A.C.G.M. and J.A. Sluka (ed.) pp. 298-315. Malden MA: Blackwell.

Biner, Z. Ö. and Biner, Ö. (2021) 'Introduction: On the politics of waiting', *Social Anthropology*, 29 (3), pp. 787–799.

Bloch, E. (1986) *The Principle of Hope.* London: Blackwell.

Bloeser, C. and Stahl, T. (2022) 'Hope', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* (Summer 2022 Edition) [Online] Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/hope/ (Accessed: 18/08/2023).

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical Reason.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. London: Polity Press.

Brickell, K. and Datta, A. (2011) *Translocal geographies: Spaces, places, connections*, London and New York: Routledge.

Broz, L. and Willerslev, R. (2012) 'When Good Luck Is Bad Fortune: Between Too Little and Too Much Hunting Success in Siberia', *Social Analysis*, 56(2), pp. 73-89.

Bruslé, T. (2006) 'The world upside-down: Nepalese migrants in Northern India, Martin Chautari, Kathmandu, October 29th 2006', *European bulletin of Himalayan research*, 2007, 31, pp. 173-184.

Bruslé, T. (2009) 'Nepalese migrations: Introduction', *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, 35- 36, pp. 16-23.

Bruslé, T. (2012) ‘What Kind of Place is this?: Daily Life, Privacy and the Inmate Metaphor in a Nepalese Workers’ Labour Camp (Qatar)’, *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Preprint], (6).

Bruslé, T. (2018) ‘No One Wants to go Abroad; It's all about Obligation': What Migration Means to Nepali Migrant Workers in Qatar’, in Gellner, D. N. and Hausner, S. L., *Global Nepalis: Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bruslé, T. and Varrel, A. (2012) ‘Introduction. Places on the Move: South Asian Migrations through a Spatial Lens’, *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Preprint], (6).

Bryant, R., and Knight, D. M. (2019) *The Anthropology of the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bullock, C. (2009) *Britain’s Gurkhas.* Cambridge: Third Millennium Publishing.

Caplan, L. (1991) ‘‘Bravest of the Brave': Representations of 'The Gurkha' in British Military Writings’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 25 (3), pp. 571-597.

Caplan, L. (1995) *Warrior Gentlemen: Gurkhas in the Western Imagination.* Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Chettri, M. (2017) *Ethnicity and Democracy in the Eastern Himalayan Borderland: Constructing Democracy*. Amsterdam University Press.

Clifford, J. (1988) *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Clifford, J. (1994) ‘Diasporas’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (3), pp. 302–338.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. E. (ed) (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cohen, R. (ed.) (2008) *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Col, G. D. (2012) ‘Natural Philosophies of Fortune: Luck, Vitality, and Uncontrolled Relatedness’, *Social Analysis*, 56 (1), pp. 1-23.

Craig, S. R. (2020). *The ends of kinship: Connecting Himalayan lives between Nepal and New York*. University of Washington Press.

Crapanzano, V. (1980) *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Crapanzano, V. (1985) *Waiting: the whites of South Africa*. New York: Random House.

Crapanzano, V. (2003) 'Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis', *Cultural Anthropology*, 18(1), pp. 3–32.

Crapanzano, V. (2003) *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cresswell, Tim. (2008). 'Place: Encountering geography as philosophy', *Geography.* 93, pp.132-139

Da Col, G. and Humphrey, C. (2012) 'Subjects of Luck: Contingency, Morality, and the Anticipation of Everyday Life', *Social Analysis*, 56(2), pp. 1-18.

Das, V. (2010) 'Engaging the life of the other: Love and everyday life', *Ordinary ethics: Anthropology, language, and action*, pp. 376-99.

De Haas, H. (2021) 'A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework', *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9(1), p. 8.

Deloria Jr, V. (1973) 'Custer Died for Your Sins', in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader,* Robben, A.C.G.M. and J.A. Sluka (ed.) pp.183-90. Malden MA: Blackwell.

Des Chene, M. K. (1991) *Relics of Empire: A cultural history of the Gurkhas, 1815-1987*. PhD, Stanford University.

Desjarlais, R. and Throop, C. J. (2011) 'Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology', *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 40, pp (11).87-102.

Devi, M. (2007) 'Economic History of Nepali Migration and Settlement in Assam', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 42 (29).

Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo,* London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Dumont, L. (1966) *Homo Hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dumont, L. (1980) *Homo Hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. and Shaw, L. (2011) (ed.) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Emmer, P. C. (ed.) (1986) *Colonialism and Migration; Indenture Labour Before and After Slavery*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

Enloe, C, H. (1980) Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided States. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fabian, J. (1983) 'Time and Writing about the Other,' In Fabian, J. Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object, Columbia University Press, pp.71-104.

Fabian, J. (1990) 'Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing', *Critical Inquiry,* 16(4) (summer), pp. 753-772.

Fassin, D. and Richard, R. (2009) *The empire of trauma: an inquiry into the condition of victimhood*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ferguson, J. (1999) *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian Copperbelt.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Fischer, E. F. (2014) *The good life: Aspiration, dignity, and the anthropology of wellbeing*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Foster, R. J. (2006) 'Tracking Globalisation: Commodities and Value in Motion', in Tilley, C., Keance, W., Kuchler, S., Rowlands, M. and Spyer, P. (ed) *Handbook of Material Culture.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Foucault, M. (1988) *Power Knowledge.* Random House.

Gardner, A. (2010). *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gellner E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gellner, D. N. (2018) 'Introduction: The Nepali/Gorkhali Diaspora since the Nineteenth Century', in Gellner, D. N. and Hausner, S. L., *Global Nepalis: Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press.

Gillion, K. L. (1962) *Fiji's Indian* Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920. Mebourne: Oxford University Press.

Gingrich, A. (2004) 'Conceptualising Identities: Anthropological alternatives to essentialising difference and moralising about Othering', in Baumann, G and Gingrich, A. (ed.) *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* New York: Anchor Books.

Gould, T. (1999) *Imperial Warriors: Britain and the Gurkhas*. London: Granta Books.

Gould, T. (1999) Imperial Warriors: Britain and the Gurkhas. London: Granta Books.

Graeber, D. (2012) 'The Sword, the Sponge, and the Paradox of Performativity Some Observations on Fate, Luck, Financial Chicanery, and the Limits of Human Knowledge', *Social Analysis*, 56(1), pp. 25-42.

Graw, K. (2012) 'On the Cause of Migration: Being and Nothingness in the African-European Borderzone', in Graw, K., and Schielke, S. (ed.) *The global horizon: expectations of migration in Africa and the Middle East*. Leuven University Press, pp. 23-42.

Graw, K., and Schielke, S. (ed.) (2012). *The global horizon: expectations of migration in Africa and the Middle East*. Leuven University Press.

Greene, P. D. (2003) 'Nepal's "Lok Pop" Music: Representations of the Folk, Tropes of Memory, and Studio Technologies,' *Asian Music*, 34 (1), pp. 43-65.

Grimshaw, A. (2001) *The Ethnographers Eye: Ways of seeing in Modern Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guenzi, C. (2012), 'The Allotted Share: Managing Fortune in Astrological Counselling in Contemporary India', *Social Analysis*, 56(2), pp. 39-55.

Guha, R. (1987) (ed.) *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Günel, G., Varma, S. and Watanabe, C. (2020) ‘A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography’, Member Voices, Fieldsights, 9 June. Available at: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography [Accessed: 26/09 2022].

Gupta, A. (2012) *Red tape: Bureaucracy, structural violence, and poverty in India*. Dur- ham, NC: Duke University Press.

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (1992) Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference, *Cultural Anthropology,* 7(1), pp. 6-23.

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (1997) *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and grounds of a field science*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (2001) *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Durham: Duke University Press. Gurung, C. B. (1998) *British Medals and Gurkhas.* Kathmandu: Jeevan Printing Support Press.

Guyer, J. L. (2007) ‘Prophecy and the near future: thoughts on macroeconomic, evangelical and punctuated time’, *American Ethnologist,* 33 (3), pp. 409-421.

Gyawali, G.P. (2018) ‘Federalism: Challenges and Opportunities in Nepal’, *Molung Educational Frontier*, 8, pp. 37–48.

Hage, G. (2003) *Against paranoid nationalism: searching for hope in a shrinking society*. Annandale: Pluto Press Australia.

Hage, G. (2005) ‘A not so multi-sited ethnography of a not so imagined community’, *Anthropological Theory,* 5 (4), pp. 463–475.

Hage, G. (2009) *Waiting*. Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hannerz, U. (2003) ‘Being There ... and There . . . and There! Reflections on Multi- site Ethnography’, in A.C.G.M. Robben & J.A. Sluka (ed.) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader.* Malden MA, Blackwell, pp. 359-367.

Harvey, D. (2000) *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Herzfeld, M. (1993) *The Social Production of Indifference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Holland, D., Lachicotte Jr, W., Skinner, D. and Cain, C. (1998) *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hoskins, J. (2006) 'Agency, Biography and Objects,' in Tilley, C., Keance, W., Kuchler, S., Rowlands, M. and Spyer, P. (ed) *Handbook of Material Culture.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hutt, M. (1996) *Devkota's Muna-Madan: Translation and Analysis.* Kathmandu: Sajha Publishers.

Hutt, M. (1997) 'Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora', in Gellner, D., Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. and Whelpton, J. (ed.) *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom,* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, pp. 101-144.

Hutt, M. (1998). Going to Mugalan: Nepali literary representations of migration to India and Bhutan. *South Asia Research*, 18 (2), pp.195-214.

Hutt, M. (2005) 'The Bhutanese Refugees: Between Verification, Repatriation and Royal Realpolitik', *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 1 (1), pp. 44–56.

Hutt, M. J., and Onta, P. (ed.) (2017). *Political change and public culture in post-1990 Nepal*. Cambridge University Press.

Jackson, M. (2000) *At Home in the World.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Janeja, M. K. and Bandak, A. (2018) (ed.), *Ethnographies of waiting: doubt, hope and uncertainty*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Jansen, S. (2016) 'For a Relational, Historical Ethnography of Hope: Indeterminacy and Determination in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Meantime', *History and Anthropology,* 27(4), pp. 447-464.

Jeffrey, C. (2010) *Timepass: youth, class, and the politics of waiting in India*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.

Jeffrey, C. and Young, S. (2012) 'Waiting for change: youth, caste and politics in India', *Economy and Society,* 41, pp. 638–61.

Karthak, P. J. (2012) An Other Rubicon called the Brigade of Gurkhas. Republica, [online] 14 December. Available at: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=46501 [Accessed: 02/02/ 2023].

Keane, W. (2003) 'Self-interpretation, agency, and the objects of anthropology: Reflections on a genealogy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2), pp. 222–48.

Kelly, J. D. (2003) 'Gordon was no Amateur: Imperial Legal Strategies in the Colonization of Fji', in Merry, S. E. and Brenneis, D. (ed.) *Law and Empire in the Pacific: Fiji and Hawai'i.* Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp. 61-100.

Khadka, U. (2018) 'The lottery of migration', in Panneerselvan, A.S. (ed.) *Uncertain Joureys: Labour migration from South Asia*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing, pp. 57-70.

Khosravi, S. (2014) 'Waiting', in Anderson, B. and Keith, M. (eds.), *Migration: The COMPAS Anthology*. Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy and Society.

Khosravi, S. (2017) *Precarious lives: waiting and hope in Iran*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Khosravi, S. (2020) 'Afterword: Waiting, a state of consciousness,' in C. M. Jacobsen, M. A. Karlsen and S. Khosravi (ed.), *Waiting and the temporalities of irregular migration*. New York: Routledge

Khosravi, S. (ed.) (2021) *Waiting - A Project in Conversation*. Bielefeld, Germany: transcript Verlag (Edition Kulturwissenschaft).

Kleist, N. (2017) 'Introduction', in Kleist, N. and Thorsen, D., *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*. (ed.) New York: Routledge, pp. 1–20.

Kleist, N. and Jansen, S. (2016) 'Introduction: Hope over Time—Crisis, Immobility and Future-Making', *History and Anthropology*, 27(4), pp. 373–392.

Kraut, R. (2022) 'Aristotle's Ethics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022)[Online] Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/aristotle-ethics/ (Accessed: 18/08/2023).

Kuan, T. (2015) *Love's uncertainty: The politics and ethics of child rearing in contemporary China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Laidlaw, J. (2016) ‘Through a glass, darkly’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 6 (2), pp. 17–24.

Lal, B. V. (1992) *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

Lal, B. V. (2002) ‘Making History, Becoming History: Reflections on Fijian Coups and Constitutions’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 14 (1), pp. 148-68.

Lal, B. V. (2003) 'Heartbreak Islands: Reflections on Fiji in Transition', in Merry, S. E. and Brenneis, D. (ed.), *Law and Empire in the Pacific: Fiji and Hawai’i*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press. pp. 261-80.

Lal, B.V. (2012) *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.

Lambek, M. (2018) *Island in the Stream: An Ethnographic History of Mayotte*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Lefebvre H. (1991). *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lehmann, H. (2008) ‘Max weber and the dialectics of disenchantment and re-enchantment in Modern History’, *Max Weber in the 21st Century: Transdisciplinarity within the Social Sciences*, pp.73-80.

Levine, N. E. (1987) ‘Caste, State and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal,’ *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 46 (1) (Feb), pp. 71-88.

Lim, F. K. G. (2008) *Imagining the good life: negotiating culture and development in Nepal Himalaya.* Leiden: Brill.

Lindquist, G. (2006) *Conjuring Hope. Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Malinowski, B. (1939) ‘The group and the individual in functional analysis’, *American Journal of Sociology* 44(6), pp. 938–964.

Mar, P. (2005) ‘Unsettling Potentialities: Topographies of Hope in Transnational Migration’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 26 (4), pp. 361-378.

Marcel, G. (1967) ‘Desire and Hope’, in Lawrence, N., O’Connor, D. and Englewood, C. (ed) *Readings in Existential Phenomenology,* NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc. pp.277-285.

Marcus, G. E. (1995). ‘Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (24), pp. 95-117.

Marcus, G. E. and Saka, E. (2006) ‘Assemblage’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23 (2-3), pp. 101–106.

Mauss, M. (1954) *The Gift*. London: Cohen and West.

Mayer, A. C. (1963) *Indians in Fiji*. London: Oxford University Press.

Mezzenzana, F. and Peluso, D. (2023) ‘“Introduction,” Conversations on empathy: Interdisciplinary perspectives on empathy, imagination and othering’, in F. Mezzenzana & D. Peluso (ed.), *Conversations on empathy: Interdisciplinary perspectives on imagination and radical othering*. Oxford and New York: Routledge. pp. 1–24

Mishra, S. R. (2012) ‘Bending Closer to the Ground: Girmit as Minor History,’ *Australian Humanities Review*, (52), pp. 5-17.

Miyazaki, H. (2004) *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian knowledge*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Miyazaki, H. (2005) ‘FROM SUGAR CANE TO “SWORDS”: HOPE AND THE EXTENSIBILITY OF THE GIFT IN FIJI’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11(2), pp. 277-295.

Miyazaki, H. (2006) ‘Economy of Dreams: Hope in Global Capitalism and its Critiques’, *Cultural Anthropology* 21(2), pp.147-172.

Mookherjee, N. (2011) ‘The aesthetics of nations: anthropological and historical approaches’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, pp. S1-S20.

Moore, H. L. (2011) *Still Life: Hopes, Desires and Satisfactions.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mulhall, S. (2005). *Routledge philosophy guidebook to Heidegger and being and time*. London: Routledge.

Muller-Boker, U. (1988) ‘Spatial Organization of a Caste Society: The Example of the Newar in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal’, *Mountain Research and Development*, 8 (1) (Feb), pp. 23-31.

Myerhoff, B. and Ruby, J. (1982) ‘Introduction’, *A Crack in the Mirror,* Ruby, J. (ed). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Myers, F. (2004) ‘Ontologies of the Image and Economics of Exchange’, *American Ethnologist*. 31 (1), pp. 1-20.

Narayan. K. (1993) ‘How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist?’, *American Anthropologist,* 95 (3) (Sep), pp. 671-86.

Nash, J. (1976) ‘Ethnology in a Revolutionary Setting’, In: A.C.G.M. Robben & J.A. Sluka (ed.) (2011) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader.* Malden MA, Blackwell: 223-233.

Nietzsche, F. (1984). *Human, All Too Human*. London: Penguin Books.

Northey, W. B. and Morris, C. J. (1928) *The Gurkhas: Their Manners, Customs and Country.* London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd.

O’ Reilly, K. (ed.) (2012) *Ethnographic Methods*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ong, A. (1987) *Spirits of resistance and Capitalist discipline: Factory women in Malaysia*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as exception: Mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*. Duke University Press.

Ortner, S.B. (2016) ‘Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties’, HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 6(1), pp. 47–73.

Osella, F., and Osella, C. (1999) ‘From Transience to Immanence: Consumption, Life-Cycle and Social Mobility in Kerala, South India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 33(4), pp. 989–1020.

Parker, J. (1999) *The Gurkhas: The Inside Story of the World’s Most Feared Soldiers.* London: Headline Book Publishing.

Pedersen, E. O and Liisberg, S. (2015) ‘Introduction: Trust and Hope’, in Liisberg, S., Pedersen, E.O. and Dalsgard, A.L. (ed.) *Anthropology & philosophy: dialogues on trust and hope*. New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 1-20.

Peluso, D. (2014) ‘Shajaó – Histories of an Invented Savage’, *History and Anthropology,* Vol. 25 (1), pp. 102-122.

Peluso, D. (2015) ‘Circulating between rural and urban communities: Multisited dwellings in Amazonian frontiers’, *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 20 (1), pp. 57-79.

Peluso, D. (2018) ‘Traversing the margins of corruption amidst informal economies in Amazonia’, *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 59(4), pp. 400-418.

Peluso, D. (2022) ‘Starting-up during COVID-19’, *Journal of Business Anthropology,* 11 (1), pp. 31-37.

Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. (1997) ‘Vestiges and Visions: Cultural Change in the Process of Nation-Building in Nepal’, in Gellner, D., Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. and Whelpton, J. (ed.) *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom,* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers. pp. 419–470.

Phillimore, P. (2014) ‘“That Used to be a Famous Village”: Shedding the past in rural north India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 48(1), pp. 159–187.

Pigg, S. L. (1992) ‘Inventing Social Categories Through Place: Social Representations and Development in Nepal’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34(3), pp. 491–513.

Pine, F. (2014) ‘Migration as Hope: Space, Time, and Imagining the Future’, *Current Anthropology*, 55(S9), pp. S95–S104.

Procupez, V. (2015) ‘The Need for Patience: The Politics of Housing Emergency in Buenos Aires’, *Current Anthropology,* 56 (S11), pp. S55–S65.

Purthi, R. K. (2001) The Gurkhas: A study of Manner, Customs and Country. New Delhi: Sumit Enterprises.

Rabinow, P. (1977) *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco.* California: University of California Press.

Regmi, M. C. (2011) *Imperial Gorkha: An Account of Gorkhali rule in Kumaun (1791-1815).* Delhi: Adroit Publishers.

Richardson, J. G. (1986). ‘*Bourdieu, Pierre: The forms of capital’, in John G. Richardson (ed.) Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258.*

Rigg, J. (2007). An Everyday Geography of the Global South. London: Routledge.

Robben, A.C.G.M. and Sluka, J.A. (ed.) (2011) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader,* Malden MA: Blackwell.

Robbins, J. (2013) ‘Beyond the suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19(3), pp. 447–462.

Rorty, R. (1999) *Philosophy and Social Hope.* London: Penguin.

Rosaldo, R. (1989) *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rose, L. E. (2001) The national political culture and institutions in Nepal. *The Post-Colonial States of South Asia: Democracy, Development and Identity*, pp.114-138.

Rubenstein, S. (2002) *Alejandro Tsakimp: A Shuar Healer in the Margins of History*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Scheper-Hughes, N. (1979) 'Ire in Ireland', in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader,* Robben, A.C.G.M. and Sluka, J. A. (ed.) pp.202-16. Malden MA: Blackwell.

Schielke, S. (2020) *Migrant dreams: Egyptian workers in the Gulf States*. Cairo New York: The American University in Cairo Press.

Scholte, B. (1974) 'Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology', In Hymes, D. Reinventing Anthropology, Vintage Books, pp. 430-457.

Seddon, D., Adhikari, J., and Gurung. G. (2002) 'Foreign Labour Migration and the Remittance Economy of Nepal', *Critical Asian Studies*, pp. 19–40.

Sharma, J. R. (2018) 'Marginal Migrants? Migrant Associations and the Lived Experience of Nepali Migrant Workers in India', in Gellner, D. N. and Hausner, S. L., *Global Nepalis: Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Smith, M. (2023) 'Foreword: Empathy redux.', in F. Mezzenzana and D. Peluso (ed.), Conversations on empathy: Interdisciplinary perspectives on imagination and radical othering. pp. x–xvii. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

Sneath, D., Holbraad, M. and Pedersen, M. (2009) 'Technologies of the Imagination: An Introduction', *Ethnos.* 74: pp. 5-30.

Srinivas, M. N. (1965) *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India.* London: Asia Publishing House.

Stafford, C. (2007) 'What is going to happen next?', in Astuti, R., Parry, J., & Stafford, C. (ed.) *Questions of anthropology*. London: Routledge, pp. 55-75.

Stafford, C. (2012) ‘Misfortune and What Can Be Done About It: A Taiwanese Case Study’, *Social Analysis*, 56(2), pp. 90-102.

Stewart, C. (2012) *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Strassler, K. (2010) *Refracted Visions. Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Streets, H. (2004) *Martial Races: The military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Subba, T. B. (2003) ‘Being a Nepali in North-East India: Predicament of a ‘Privileged Nation’, in Subba, T. B., and A.C Sinha, A. C. (ed.) *The Nepalis in North-East India: A Community in Search of Indian Identity.* New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company.

Taussig, K. S., Hoeyer, K.,and Helmreich, S. (2013) ‘The anthropology of potentiality in biomedicine: an introduction to supplement 7’, *Current Anthropology*, *54* (S7), pp. S3-S14.

Thompson, P. (2013) ‘Introduction’, in Thompson, P., and Zizek, S. (ed.) *The Privatization of Hope: Ernst Bloch and the Future of Utopia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 1–20.

Thompson, P., and Zizek, S. (ed.) (2013) *The Privatization of Hope: Ernst Bloch and the Future of Utopia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Tsing, A. L. (2005) *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Tsing, A. L. (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.

Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.

Valenta, M. (2022) ‘The drivers and trajectories of Nepalese multiple migrations to the Arab Gulf’, *South Asian Diaspora*, 14(1), pp. 21–37.

Van der Veer, P. (ed.) (1995) *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Van Manen, M. (2nd ed.) (1997). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. London, Canada: The Althouse Press.

Varrel, A. (2020) ‘A Job in Dubai and an Apartment in Bangalore: Transnational dynamics of migrant property in globalizing cities’, *City,* 24 (5-6), pp. 818-829.

Vertovec, S. (2009) *Transnationalism*. London: Routledge.

Webb, D. (2007) ‘Modes of hoping’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 20(3), pp. 65–83.

Whelpton, J. (2005) *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Who will be a Gurkha. (2012) (Documentary) Directed by *Kesang Tsetan*. Nepal: Shunyata Film Production.

Wolf, E. R. (1982) *Europe and the People without History*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Zigon, J. (2009) ‘Hope Dies Last: Two Aspects of Hope in Contemporary Moscow’, *Anthropological Theory,* 9 (3), pp. 253-271.

Zigon, J. (2015) ‘What is a Situation?: An Assemblic Ethnography of the Drug War’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 30 (3), pp. 501–524.

Zigon, J. (2018) *Disappointment: toward a critical hermeneutics of worldbuilding*. New York: Fordham University press.