

NARRATIVES OF NEPALI EDUCATION RETURN MIGRANTS AND THEIR
REINTEGRATION

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Keren Maharjan* for the degree *Master of Philosophy in Development Studies*, presented on *30 January 2026*, entitled *Narratives of Nepali Education Return Migrants and their Reintegration*.

APPROVED BY

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This dissertation presents the experiences of education migrants who returned to their home country and adapted to life after return. The majority of the studies on migration in Nepal have mainly focused on labour migration and its reintegration. Furthermore, studies related to education migrants have been centered on understanding the reasons for students' international mobility and the pervasiveness of brain drain in the country. However, there is a paucity of research related to the return and reintegration of education migrants. Using narrative inquiry to research, this study presents and discusses narratives of eight return migrants who had initially moved overseas in pursuit of higher education and, after completing their studies, gained several years of work experience before returning home. These stories narrate participants' lived experiences of hope, despair, struggle, as well as successes and challenges faced in both the host and home countries. Drawing on Cassarino's Social Network Theory and Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory, this study explores how social structures in both the host and home countries influence the education migrant's decision-making regarding return and the strategic choices they make during reintegration. Participants' narratives reveal that they faced challenges in the host country and upon return, encountered further difficulties in adapting to life back home; however, in both cases, they used their agency to make decisions.

This research describes the original motivations of education migrants when they left their home country, including their hopes and plans for living abroad. With

time, these intentions gradually evolved when their expectations were not met as anticipated. Participants' narratives show that unfulfilled expectations related to financial and socio-cultural adjustment played a key role in shaping their decisions to return home. The study further explores how social structures of the home country challenged participants' dreams and hopes after their return but they actively used their agency to navigate these constraints, which played a major role in adjusting to the society. Participants' narratives illustrate that by exercising their agency, in many cases, they were able to turn constraints into opportunities.

This study challenges the tendency to understand return and reintegration simply in binary terms of success or failure. Rather, based on participants' narratives, the study suggests that reintegration is relational and contextual, and its meaning differs according to each individual's experiences and personal interpretations. Participants' stories of struggle and strategies they adopted to create space for themselves may offer insight and motivation to other education migrants as they navigate structural barriers and utilize skills, experiences, and knowledge they gained abroad. Finally, the study also highlights the need for policies that acknowledge and support education return migrants as they rebuild their lives after return.



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30 January 2026

शोधसार

विकास शिक्षामा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर डिग्रीका लागि केरेन महर्जनको शोधप्रबन्धको शिर्षक “नेपाली शिक्षा आप्रवासीहरूको पुनरागमन र पुनःएकीकरणका कथनहरू” १६ माघ २०८२ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो।

.....
प्रा. महेशनाथ पराजुली, पीएचडी
शोध निर्देशक

यस शोधप्रबन्धले विदेशमा शिक्षा हासिल गर्न गएका र अध्ययन सम्पन्न गरेपछि आफ्नो मातृदेशमा फर्किएका शिक्षा आप्रवासीहरूको अनुभव तथा उनीहरूको पुनःएकीकरण (reintegration) प्रक्रियालाई विश्लेषण गर्दछ। नेपालमा आप्रवासनसम्बन्धी अधिकांश अध्ययनहरू मुख्यतः श्रम आप्रवासन र त्यसको पुनःएकीकरणमा केन्द्रित रहेका छन्। साथै, शिक्षा आप्रवासीसम्बन्धी अध्ययनहरू प्रायः विद्यार्थीहरूको अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय आवागमनका कारणहरू तथा देशमा देखिएको मस्तिष्क पलायन (brain drain) को प्रवृत्तिमा केन्द्रित छन्। तर, शिक्षा आप्रवासीहरूको स्वदेश फर्काइ र पुनःएकीकरणसम्बन्धी अनुसन्धानमा स्पष्ट अभाव देखिन्छ।

संकथन (Narrative Inquiry) अनुसन्धान पद्धतिलाई प्रयोग गर्दै, यस अध्ययनले विदेशमा उच्च शिक्षा हासिल गर्ने उद्देश्यले गएका, अध्ययन सम्पन्न गरेपछि केही वर्ष कार्यानुभव समेत प्राप्त गरी स्वदेश फर्किएका आठ जना शिक्षा आप्रवासीहरूको जीवनकथात्मक अनुभवहरू प्रस्तुत तथा विश्लेषण गर्दछ। यी कथाहरूले सहभागीहरूको आशा, निराशा, संघर्ष, सफलता तथा चुनौतीपूर्ण अनुभवहरूलाई दुवै आप्रवास (host) देश र मातृदेशको सन्दर्भमा प्रतिबिम्बित गर्दछ।

कासारिनोको सामाजिक सञ्जाल सिद्धान्त (Social Network Theory) तथा एन्थोनी गिडेन्सको संरचनात्मकता सिद्धान्त (Structuration Theory) को आधारमा, यस अध्ययनले आतिथ्य तथा मातृदेशका सामाजिक संरचनाहरूले शिक्षा आप्रवासीहरूको स्वदेश फर्किने निर्णय तथा पुनःएकीकरणका क्रममा उनीहरूले अपनाउने रणनीतिक विकल्पहरूलाई कसरी प्रभाव पार्छन् भन्ने विषयको विश्लेषण गर्दछ। सहभागीहरूको कथनअनुसार, उनीहरूले आप्रवासी देशमा विभिन्न चुनौतीहरूको सामना गरे र स्वदेश फर्किएपछि पनि पुनःअनुकूलन (adaptation) प्रक्रियामा थप कठिनाइहरू भोगे। तथापि, दुवै अवस्थामा उनीहरूले आफ्ना निर्णयहरूमा सक्रिय ‘एजेन्सी’ प्रयोग गरेका थिए। यस अनुसन्धानले शिक्षा आप्रवासीहरूले विदेश जाँदाराखेका प्रारम्भिक उद्देश्य, आशा तथा योजनाहरूलाई पनि स्पष्ट रूपमा व्याख्या गर्दछ।

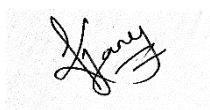
समयसँगै, उनीहरूका अपेक्षाहरू अपेक्षित रूपमा पूरा नभएपछि ती उद्देश्यहरू क्रमशः परिवर्तन हुँदै गए।

सहभागीहरूको कथनले आर्थिक तथा सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक अनुकूलनसम्बन्धी अपूर्ण अपेक्षाहरूले स्वदेश फर्किने निर्णयमा महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका खेलेको देखाउछ ।

यस अध्ययनले थप रूपमा मातृदेशको सामाजिक संरचनाले स्वदेश फर्किएपछि सहभागीहरूको आकांक्षा र सपनाहरूलाई कसरी चुनौती दियो भन्ने पक्षको विश्लेषण गर्दछ। यद्यपि, सहभागीहरूले ती संरचनात्मक सीमाहरूलाई पार गर्न सक्रिय रूपमा आफ्नो एजेन्सी प्रयोग गरेका थिए, जसले समाजमा पुनःस्थापना (adjustment) गर्न महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका खेलेको थियो। धेरै अवस्थामा, उनीहरूले आफ्ना सीमाहरूलाई अवसरमा रूपान्तरण गर्न सफल भएका थिए।

यस अध्ययनले पुनःएकीकरणलाई केवल सफलता वा असफलताको द्वैध (binary) दृष्टिकोणबाट बुझ्ने प्रवृत्तिलाई चुनौती दिन्छ। बरु, सहभागीहरूको अनुभवका आधारमा पुनःएकीकरणलाई सम्बन्धपरक (relational) र सन्दर्भपरक (contextual) प्रक्रिया मानिएको छ, जसको अर्थ प्रत्येक व्यक्तिको अनुभव र व्याख्याअनुसार फरक फरक हुन्छ। सहभागीहरूको संघर्षका कथाहरू तथा उनीहरूले आफ्नो स्थान निर्माण गर्न अपनाएका रणनीतिहरूले अन्य शिक्षा आप्रासीहरूलाई संरचनात्मक अवरोधहरूको सामना गर्दै आफूले विदेशमा आर्जन गरेका सीप, अनुभव तथा ज्ञानलाई उपयोग गर्न प्रेरणा प्रदान गर्न सक्छन्।

अन्ततः, यस अध्ययनले शिक्षा आप्रासीहरूलाई स्वदेश फर्किएपछि पुनःस्थापना गर्न सहयोग गर्ने नीतिगत पहलहरूको आवश्यकता औल्याएको छ।



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This dissertation entitled *Narratives of Nepali Education Return Migrants and their Reintegration* was presented by *Keren Maharjan* on 30 January 2026.

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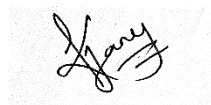
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I understand that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.



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30 January 2026

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Degree Candidate

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.



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30 January 2026

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DEDICATION

This work is immensely dedicated to all who supported me throughout my dissertation journey. My sincere appreciation goes to my facilitators at Kathmandu University School of Education, my beloved husband, my parents, family, and friends, as well as my research participants and everyone who contributed to making this study possible.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
IOM	International Organization for Migration
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoN	Government of Nepal
ISM	International Student Mobility
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoLESS	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security
NOC	No Objection Certificate
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

PROLOGUE

About fifteen years ago, on a cold December night, my entire family and I went to the airport to see off my second-oldest sister. She had made the bold decision to go abroad to pursue a Master's degree. Over the years, she became a great source of support for our family's finances, funding my education, purchasing many household appliances, buying a car for my father, and even a scooter for me, none of which would have been possible without her. However, at home, we were constantly reminded of her struggles abroad. Hearing that even when she was ill, she had to manage everything on her own was particularly painful for us. We often wished she had not had to leave, as she was the first in our family to go overseas. My mother would often insist that she return home.

Growing up with this background, I developed a conviction that I would never go abroad. I thought I would stay in Nepal despite the challenges and the trend of young people increasingly leaving the country. However, while I was completing my Bachelor's degree, nearly half of my friends began moving overseas. When I talked to my friends online, listened to their daily experiences, joys but also hardships and struggles, I held firmly to my decision not to move abroad. But during occasions and celebrations, I would often miss my friends and wished if they had stayed. It was during this time, mostly influenced by my sister, my interest in migration studies began to grow. I also remember my professor saying that our country needs to recognize the migrants who return home and contribute to state development. This perspective struck me deeply and encouraged me to study return migration.

The conviction I once held, to never go abroad, changed over time as I came to realize the economic realities of my own family. Eventually, I too migrated. As a migrant myself, I have been able to personally relate to the participants' experiences in this study. Their stories of hardship, adaptation, and resilience mirror many aspects of my own journey as well. In this dissertation, by focusing on education migrants who lived abroad, their decisions to return, and their processes of reintegration, I have sought to present the unique experiences of each participant and their lived reality.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is especially the return to less developed countries that puzzles
(neoclassical) economists in migration theory.

(Achenbach, 2016, p. 44)

International migration has played a phenomenal role in reshaping global markets and economies. The phrase “several hundred people leaving the country every day for employment or higher studies” has become common and an agenda for political debates in Nepal. Most media coverage tends to emphasize the volume of no-objection certificates and annual labor permits issued every year. Several reasons including political instability, unemployment, corruption, lack of quality education, and the country’s ranking as having one of the weakest passports in the world have been highlighted as some of the reasons why people are increasingly leaving every day for better opportunities abroad (Acharya, 2012; Maharjan et al., 2017; Shrestha & Tamang, 2021). As more Nepalis shift abroad, remittances have also grown significantly, a highlight for Nepal’s economy.

The migration of educated individuals to foreign countries and their return to their home country has been an area of interest to migration scholars. Many studies have highlighted the implications of migration of educated individuals for both origin and destination countries (Dustmann, 2001; Gibson & McKenzie, 2011). Although the trend of out-migration is not new in the Nepali context, the past few decades have witnessed a marked increase in the migration of educated individuals pursuing higher studies and career prospects abroad. While about 500,000 Nepali students had obtained No Objection Certificates (NOC) for foreign study between 2008 and 2022 (Government of Nepal [GoN], 2022), more than 50,000 students obtained NOC within the first six months of fiscal year 2023/24 alone. These data highlight the pervasiveness of this trend. Beyond general assumptions about brain drain and the increasing number of Nepali students going abroad for further studies, I have brought together two important concepts in migration studies in this dissertation: return migration of Nepali education migrants and their reintegration into their home country.

Return migration has been recognized as the process in which migrants return to their countries of origin after being international migrants with the intention of permanent settlement originally (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019). It is often viewed as one of the final stages of the migration process, in which migration is considered complete once individuals return from the host country. However, this understanding is not always definitive; rather, return is a dynamic process often shaped by uncertainties and unsettling events that may arise during and after return (Grabowska & Ryan, 2024). For education migrants, return migration involves students who moved abroad to pursue higher studies and then return to their home country after completing their studies or gaining some post-study work experiences. In many cases, such returns are often assumed to be voluntary and planned, since their primary purpose for moving abroad was education. Nonetheless, this is not always the case. The reasons, timings, and experiences of return migration vary across individuals, and process may be influenced by conditions in both the destination country and the context of the origin countries.

Educated Nepali migrants often encounter multifaceted challenges upon arrival in host countries. Navigating the transition from home to host country environments involves socio-cultural and economic adaptation, which are among the most significant areas of challenges (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015; Sijapati et al., 2015). Other challenges such as language barriers, high living costs, restricted work opportunities for international students, significant financial pressures and absence of familiar social support systems increase the vulnerability of migrants towards challenges. These challenges can prompt migrants to consider returning. Similarly, the pull factors from the home country can also play an equally important role. Strong family ties, bonds and networks play a significant role and education migrants may want to contribute by transferring their skills and knowledge back to their home country.

Return is not merely the physical act of going back to the home country. It involves going through transitions and adjusting to the multiple layers of realities in the home country. Reintegration, is defined as the process by which return migrants adjust and socialize themselves in their country of origin economically, socio-culturally, and psychologically, is a gradual process (IOM, 2024). Reintegration is often considered complex and challenging as returnees may experience reverse cultural shock when they return home after spending considerable amount of time

abroad (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). Although return migrants expect a smooth reintegration, the length of stay abroad, reasons for return, and their level of preparation for return influence the reintegration process. An easy transition has also been linked to the socio-economic and institutional context of the country of origin and the individual's resilience in managing such transitions (Carr, 2014). Although reintegration may appear to be an individual decision for migrants, well-supported and enabled reintegration can help prevent under-employment or social isolation (Kuschminder, 2017). Well-supported reintegration of education return migrants facilitates the effective use of their skills and knowledge they have gained abroad for innovative development and entrepreneurship in their home country.

In this dissertation, I analyse the return and reintegration narratives of eight education migrants from Kathmandu, Nepal. I begin by exploring what motivates migrants to return after studying and working abroad, and argue that these motivations emerge from both the host country's context as push factors and the home country's pull factors. My study highlights how different hindrances and setbacks encountered in the host country facilitate return migration, shedding light on the complex interplay of personal and socio-economic and institutional factors. Drawing on Cassarino's (2004) social network theory, I argue that ties, bonds and networks maintained by education migrants in their home country also served as key motivators of their return. I then explore the lived experiences of the education migrants after returning, analysing how returnees negotiate their lives in their country of origin. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory helped me observe how returnee education migrants exercised their agency to create opportunities amid the various socio-cultural, economic and institutional constraints they encountered during their reintegration.

My Experiences of Migration

The reason I approached this topic for my dissertation is significantly shaped by my personal and academic journey. Initially, my interest in the topic was driven by losing some of my close friends who had moved abroad and by others preparing to migrate for better education and career opportunities. In addition, the frequent media and news coverage of youth outmigration and the rising number of No Objection Certificates (NoCs) issued made the concept of brain drain feel both urgent and personal to me. This environment increased my curiosity about the long-term impacts

of such migration, especially in a developing country like Nepal, which is losing the very young generation that the country relies on for its future. However, as I engaged in deeper conversations with some of my friends and academic mentors about brain drain, my focus began to shift from outward migration to return migration. These discussions helped me see to a less-explored yet significant part of the migration cycle and the complex realities faced by those who come back home after years abroad. At the time, I was not a migrant myself and went for the data collection as a listener, but without any first-hand experience.

I was an outsider, more of an observer and interpreter without having migration experience. I often found myself imagining rather than knowing what it felt like to migrate, to return, and to try to reintegrate into a society that may have changed or felt different. But, this lack of lived experience at the time also made me listen to my participants' stories with humility and sensitivity.

However, while I was in the data analysis and interpretation stage, I myself had to move abroad which changed my initial positionality. Experiencing life abroad allowed me to relate more personally to many of the themes the participants described such as language difficulties, cultural dislocation, professional struggles, and emotional burdens like loneliness and missing family. This allowed me to view the data not just as stories I heard from the participants, but also to experience some of the aspects of their stories firsthand in real life situations, which enriched my interpretation of migration. My own feelings of nostalgia and desire to return home, along with the uncertainty around reintegration, mirrored the sentiments of many participants. This also made me to be critically aware of how my subjectivity could shape the narrative construction in my dissertation. This has also allowed me to make real-time comparisons between my experiences and those shared by participants.

Statement of the Problem

Existing studies asserts that return migration can play a crucial role in contributing to the nation, not only in terms of economic growth but also in social and community development, technological innovation and improve outcome in other sectors like health and education (Bucheli & Fontenla, 2025; Khadka et al., 2026). Return migrants invest their financial capital accumulated abroad in different ventures and entrepreneurial activities, engage in transfer of knowledge and expertise. The studies have claimed that return migrants, especially highly skilled are often perceived as actors of development and change in the origin countries (Ndreka, 2019). The state

and the society often expect return migrants to transfer knowledge and technologies, introduce new ideas and practices that benefits to the development agenda of the country, but the lack of adequate support mechanisms makes these human resources underutilized, or in many cases, unutilized.

The support of the state to the return migrants can make a huge impact on their process of return and reintegration however, the unknown data regarding return migration of education migrants in Nepal, their whereabouts and relatively less importance given to the reintegration processes reveal how return migration has been an overlooked issue. Though return migration remains relatively low compared to the flow of migrants leaving, there are minimal incentives provided to those considering coming back (Adhikari et al., 2025). Furthermore, migrants often face major difficulties when reintegrating upon their return, including social, economic, and political adaptation challenges. However, their reintegration struggles are often overlooked, and policies lack appropriate support mechanisms.

The Government of Nepal (GoN) introduced reintegration guidelines in 2022 for migrants returning from foreign employment (GoN, 2022). While these guidelines seek to make the reintegration process more systematic, their primary emphasis is on using the skills, knowledge, and experience of labor migrants to create further employment opportunities. However, the guidelines do not address education migrants and their reintegration. Likewise, some recent researches have concentrated on the return and reintegration of labor migrants (for e.g., Baniya, 2021; Bhattarai et al., 2023; Lohani, 2021), with insufficient attention paid to education migrants who possess different skill sets and face unique challenges. Limited focus has been given to understanding migrants who have pursued higher education abroad and gained valuable work experience and then chose to return home.

These issues have highlighted the urgent need to examine the experiences of educated returnees regarding their reintegration. In addressing this gap, my study centers on critical questions, including how education migrants describe their motivation to return home and what issues and challenges they encounter during reintegration. I also discuss strategies return migrants use in order to adapt in the home country after their return. Thus, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of experiences of education return migrants and their reintegration.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this narrative study is to explore the return and reintegration of education return migrants. Specifically, it explores the struggles and challenges migrants encountered in the host country and how they were motivated to return home. I also explore the challenges faced following return and how they negotiated as they tried to settle back at home.

Research Question

The following questions are formulated to carry out this research:

1. How do education migrants narrate their struggles and challenges faced in the host country?
2. How do they describe their aspirations in preparation to returning home?
3. How do education migrants narrate their experiences of the reintegration process upon returning home and their negotiation strategies to settle back?

Chapter Plan

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One introduces the study by situating it within the broader context of increasing global mobility of education migrants. In the context of Nepal, the growing focus on outward migration has often overshadowed the experiences of education return migrants and their reintegration. I also discussed the aims of my study that it sought to explore the lived experiences of education migrant returnees, focusing on the contexts influencing their decision to return home, the challenges they face during reintegration, and how they navigate these challenges.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature and presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. I outline the evolving definitions of return migration and examine various dimensions through which it has been analyzed. I then discuss the existing migration literature, especially in the context of Nepal. I also review relevant migration policies on return and reintegration. I then present the theoretical framework guiding my study which is informed by Cassarino's Social Network Theory (Cassarino, 2004) and Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984). These frameworks provide a lens to understand how return decisions are shaped over time and how migrants negotiate structural constraints during reintegration. I conclude the chapter by identifying research gaps and justifying the need for this study.

Chapter Three outlines my research methodology. This study adopts a qualitative design to foreground the lived experiences, meanings and perceptions of educational return migrants. I describe the data collection methods and approaches used for data analysis before discussing the ethical considerations undertaken throughout the research. This chapter concludes with my critical reflection regarding my positionality, including my values, experiences, background, and personal migration experiences.

Chapter Four and Five present the findings of the study. In this chapter, I examine participants' initial intention to live abroad and how these intentions shifted over time. It examines their experiences in the host countries, including socio-cultural, economic, and institutional challenges. In the midst of these challenges, participants often perceived home as a site of emotional and social support, particularly through family and social networks. The chapter highlights that host and home country conditions interact to shape participants' decisions to return.

Chapter Five turns to participants' experiences after returning to Nepal, focusing on the realities they faced and how they responded to them. In this chapter, I present participants' narratives of their experiences facing structural challenges within their social and institutional settings and their struggles in adjusting to local social norms after exposure to different cultures abroad. Despite these challenges, many demonstrated agency, by selectively blending new practices with local traditions, and gradually reshaping workplace and community dynamics. Family networks and social connections played a central role in supporting reintegration, providing both emotional and practical resources.

Chapter Six discusses key themes drawn from the narratives presented in Chapters Four and Five. I examine how education migrants decided to return home, showing that return migration is shaped by both host and home country contexts. Participants' choices to return home were often influenced by challenges abroad, family expectations, and enduring social ties. Participants encountered structural barriers, such as limited recognition of foreign qualifications, reverse cultural shock, and social expectations upon their return. However, they navigated these challenges using their agency, sometimes influencing local practices.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter, in which I present my findings in relation to the research questions. I highlight the contributions of this study, discuss limitations, and conclude with my final reflections.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL REFERENTS

Understanding of return migration remains hazy.

(Cassarino, 2004, p. 253)

In this chapter, I review existing research and theoretical perspectives on return migration and reintegration. It highlights return migration as a multifaceted phenomenon and that it emerges from diverse motivations. It is a complex decision-making process that involves individuals' aspirations to return, the influence of networks, socio-cultural and economic contexts in both origin and the destination countries. It highlights how education migrants have particular return and reintegration experiences. It also reveals that the success of reintegration depends on both the objectives of the return migrants such as financial stability and also their level of personal satisfaction. The policy review identifies significant gaps, particularly in Nepal's context, as the national frameworks at present predominantly address labor migrants.

Return Migration: Evolving Definitions and Different Dimensions

Return migration is considered one of the relatively overlooked domain of the migration process (Bilecen, 2022). However, in the last few decades, there have been extensive studies on return migration. There is significant interest among scholars studying return migration and different scholars have proposed different definitions over time. A systematic analysis of return migration conducted by Frank Bovenkerk in 1974, defined it as the movement of people returning to their country of origin for the first time as emigrants (Bovenkerk, 1974). However, this initial conceptualization was further developed by different other scholars. For example, Gmelch (1980) built upon Bovenkerk's framework arguing that return migrants should typically include those who have returned for resettlement instead of temporary visits or for vacation who lack intention to remain permanently. Similarly, DaVanzo and Morrison (1981) define return migration more broadly as the movement of people to where they have lived before, a place where they were born or raised. This definition differs from Bovenkerk's emphasis on first time return and Gmelch's permanent return. Further,

King et al. (1986) asserted that migrants should have spent a significant period abroad or in another region to qualify as return migrants.

While the term return migration may sound straightforward, it is actually layered with multiple complexities and intersects with numerous underlying themes. Researchers have studied this phenomenon from various perspectives and viewpoints. The study of gender and social class is one such area within return migration that scholars have examined, highlighting how these socio-cultural identities and patterns tend to shape individuals' return decisions (Bastia, 2014; Samari, 2021; Teerling, 2014). These studies collectively suggest that return migration is often influenced by the society and social structure. Similarly, return migration has been studied in relation with development and sustainability. Return is often argued as a potential pathway within the development nexus as they are expected to bring back skills, knowledge and capital acquired abroad (Sørensen et al., 2003). This development oriented perspective in return migration is echoed by Kleist (2015) and Sinatti (2011), who argue that return migration contributes to entrepreneurship and view country of origin as a land full of opportunities with a greater potential for development. However, Black and Gent (2006) when analyzed return through a more critical lens of sustainability, calling for examination of reintegration of return migrants and whether returnees eventually re-emigrate.

A set of other studies has tried to explore and understand the potential reasons for return migration. For example, Carling and Erdal (2014) found that transnational practices such as regular contact and visits to the home country and sustained social connections encourage migrants to return. These sustained transnational relationships and bonding often enable migrants to reassess their sense of belonging and identity which can encourage return migration. This finding aligns closely with Al-Ali and Koser (2002), those who contend that transnational migrants tend to maintain economic, political and social networks across multiple societies, particularly with their origin and ethnic communities which plays a significant role in upholding their transnational identities. Furthermore, return has also been studied with a focus on the mental and social well-being of migrants, addressing the psychosocial dimensions of migration that influence their experiences of return and reintegration (Vathi & King, 2017).

These past literatures on return migration across different dimensions collectively supports Cassarino's characterization of return migration as "a

multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomenon” (Cassarino, 2004, p. 253). Drawing on these heterogeneous understandings, many empirical studies have discussed different types of return migration, as outlined in the next section.

Categories of Return Migration

Given that scholars propose different definitions of return migration, the literature also identifies several types of return. Classifying return migration into different categories was necessary, as return migrants vary widely in their aspirations, experiences and levels of vulnerability (Kuschminder, 2017). Early scholarship categorized return migration based on the temporal settlement and the initial intention dimension. Bovenkerk (1974) categorized return migration into four types: first, migrants who initially intended to settle permanently but did not return, second, migrants who planned for permanent settlement but returned after a certain period of time, third, migrants who moved for temporarily for specific reasons and returned, and fourth, migrants who meant to stay temporarily but chose not to return.

Building upon Bovenkerk’s approach, Cerase (1974) identified a psychosocial framework in his case study of Southern Italian immigrants returning from the United States. Cerase’s classification of return migrants was based on returnees’ aspirations in their home country, with an emphasis on their expectations and socio-economic needs. He argues that return can occur when migrants fail to adapt to the host country, often driven by feelings of humiliation, hardship, or fear, leading them to return to the comfort of their familial environment. This is termed as *return of failure*. The second type of return included migrants who were influenced by social pressures to define success and decided to return to either spend or invest their savings, which is referred to as the *return of conservatism*. Cerase further argues that *return of innovation* occurs when migrants feel culturally alienated in the host country and, rather than assimilating, return home to pursue their personal aspirations. Likewise, migrant returning to their homeland to spend their later years have been termed as *return of retirement*.

Expanding on the foundational typologies, recent scholarship has categorized return migration by the motivations and circumstances surrounding it. The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2018) put forward various driving factors that influenced migrants’ decision to remain in the host country or return home. These factors include economic reasons like pursuit of better opportunities, or non-economic aspects, including legal residency status, family connections, and social

considerations. The presence of these motivators also determines whether the return is voluntary or forced.

Additionally, scholars have classified return based on their willingness to return or whether they feel prepared to return after acquiring the necessary resources (Cassarino, 2004). Among them, some migrants appear to return voluntarily but do so primarily because of the “inevitable consequence of failed migration and integration” in the host country, these are referred to as voluntary but unavoidable return migrants (Haase & Honerath, 2016, p. 6). They are often faced with imminent visa expirations and cannot bring their families to the host country, prompting their return to their home country. Migrants who decide to return due to their inability to remain in the host country and receive assistance, whether administrative, logistical, or financial are known as Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) defined by International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2018). Lastly, voluntary return migrants are those who intend to return to their country of origin from the outset after achieving their migration goals, such as higher education, employment, or business ventures abroad (Haase & Honerath, 2016).

Another category that previous literature has studied in relation to return is the duration of time spent by migrants in the destination country. The longer the migrants live away from their home country, the higher the probability of being exposed to the new culture, values and beliefs (Kuschminder, 2017). Also, the same author in 2022 explains return in relation to the level of development status of the country. The author posits that whether high or low-skilled migrants, they tend to move from less developed to more developed countries. However, there are also some exceptions, individuals from high-income countries may migrate to low-income countries to leverage investment opportunities. Further, when it comes to movement, often the level of distance can make a difference. The literature suggests, greater the physical distance, the harder to travel and making it less likely to have the emotional and social connections (King & Kuschminder, 2022).

This way scholars have categorized return into different types: based on temporal and initial intention, the aspiration of returnees in their home country, motivation and circumstances driving return, willingness to return, the duration of time spent abroad, and on the basis of geographical distance. Despite the several literatures proposing diverse typologies, these studies do not claim particular typology to prioritize in the study of return migration. Instead, the multidimensional approaches

adopted by scholars reflect the complex and layered nature of return migration. In the following section, I discuss various reasons why migrants' decisions to return to their home country.

Motives Shaping Return Migration Decisions

A growing body of literature has examined the motivations behind return migration and the reasons individuals choose to return to their countries of origin. Return migration has been highlighted as more than just a personal decision based on individual experiences, but importantly also facilitated by a complex interplay of social, economic and political factors (Cassarino, 2004). On the other hand, demographic variables such as age, gender, educational attainment, and socio-economic status have also been argued to be some of the key determinants for migrants' decision to return home (Alves, 2022).

Much of the academic discourse on return migration has centered around economic rationales. For example, a study among migrants in the context of Uganda and South Africa highlighted that many migrants chose to return home in order to invest their savings and enhance their household consumption (Thomas, 2012). Thomas's findings suggest that return migration results from achieving financial well-being and improved living standards, which, in turn, make returning a more attractive option. Similarly, debt is also considered a significant driver of both migration and return. Financial obligations often compel individuals to migrate and subsequently to return, aiming to repay debts and achieve greater financial security using remittances and accumulated savings (Bylander, 2019).

However, this success-oriented return contrasts with other literature suggesting that return migration may result from failure of migrants in the host country, often driven by uncertainty about economic conditions and unemployment as push factors (Borjas & Bratsberg, 1996; Wahba, 2022). The study conducted by De Haas et al. (2015) examining the main determinants of return intention among Moroccan migrants across Europe found that one of the motivating factors for migrants to return is their inability to earn as expected and dissatisfaction with their work in the host country. These literatures suggest how the success and failure experiences of migrants in the host country can significantly shape return decisions. Moreover, the literature also suggests that when migrants' expectations are not met as they thought, it can significantly influence their decision to return. However, these

studies do not consider the role of social networks and ties in facilitating their decision to return.

On the other hand, scholars like Tverdostup and Masso's finding suggests that return motivations are not purely based on income but on qualification and skill utilization. A study among young return migrants conducted by Tverdostup and Masso (2016) explored the return behavior and performance of young return migrants. The study revealed higher educated young migrants preferred to return due to an occupation-qualification mismatch in the foreign labor market. The study also discusses how economic crisis and fewer opportunities in the labor market affect migrants' decisions to return home. This study shows that dissatisfaction with professional and career development opportunities also serves as a significant motivator to return.

Socio-cultural dynamics and personal reasons often emerge as another significant factor in motivating return migration (Gillespie et al., 2021; Nedomysl, 2011). Gillespie et al. (2021) argue that kinship ties, familial responsibilities, and social networks can often play a key role in facilitating migrants' decisions to return. On the other hand, emotional drivers and relational factors such as the longing for one's spouse or family, and the need to provide support, also tend to contribute to return migration (Segal, 2016). Likewise, strong social bonds and attachment to parents are other key motivators for returning home, countering the emphasis on economic motives alone (Constant & Massey, 2002; Lancee, 2018; Reynolds, 2008).

Identity and culture dimensions are other important socio-cultural factors influencing return decisions. A qualitative study conducted using thematic analysis among Indian returnees found that some of the migrants have returned as they wanted to reconnect with their cultural roots and ethnic identity (Kurian, 2022). On the other hand, Stark (2018) argues that return motivations are not only driven by relational ties or maintaining identity but also by the social status associated with having lived abroad, particularly among highly skilled and education migrants.

The literature on negative experiences in host countries also shows that they play a significant role in the decision to return. In 2024, Ozola-Cirule and Martinsone conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-one return migrants and the study argues that the major contributors to migrants' decision to return were alienation, difficulties integrating socially and culturally, and homesickness (Ozola-Cirule & Martinsone, 2024). These findings align with other studies which emphasize the psychological

strain caused by difficulties in acculturation (Liem et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2019). Likewise, experiences of ethnic discrimination and workplace bias impacting mental well-being also motivate return migration (Wang & Sangalang, 2009). These workplace challenges reflect structural barriers that contribute to a negative experience in the host country.

Negotiation for Reintegration of Returned Migrants

Upon returning to their country of origin, migrants typically enter a phase of reintegration, which often begins with social adaptation. This often involves re-aligning with the established social norms, values, and structures of their home society (Cormoş, 2022). Gmelch (1980) describes reintegration as the process of readaptation of return migrants. Cassarino (2004) expanded Gmelch's conceptualization by arguing that reintegration involves multiple dimensions, including social, cultural, economic, and political life in their homeland. Kuschminder (2017) further elaborated on these broad dimensions and specified that social and cultural reintegration includes reconnecting with family and friends, participating in religious or cultural practices, and adapting to societal norms. He also explained that economic reintegration is measured through indicators such as employment, entrepreneurial ventures, financial investments, and overall living standards.

Gmelch's (1980) frameworks for understanding reintegration include an objective and subjective dimension. The objective dimension include factors such as employment and financial stability, whereas the subjective dimension focus on returnees' individual experiences and satisfaction levels. The first emphasizes on tangible outcomes influenced by local conditions, such as job availability and social networks. The second perspective, on the other hand, considers whether migrants felt their personal and emotional needs were being fulfilled. Gmelch's distinction between objective and subjective indicators shows that the success of reintegration cannot be measured solely by economic indicators. He further relates reintegration with satisfaction and argues that the greater the satisfaction, the greater the success of the reintegration, and the greater the dissatisfaction, the greater the risk of re-emigration (Gmelch, 1980). However, it does not fully capture the lived realities of those returnees who achieve financial stability but still experience dissatisfaction during the reintegration phase.

As with variations in satisfaction, return migrants also face diverse challenges during reintegration. A study by Ammassari (2012) identified four main difficulties

that return migrants experience. First, the challenges relating to the economy and finances; second, the struggles with adapting to the home country's work culture; third, changes in personal and social life, including gender role expectations; and finally, the dissatisfaction with the prompt-to-decision to re-emigrate or remain in the country. Ammassari explains that return migrants are vulnerable to finding employment or starting a business. Scholars have reported how an unfavourable labour market situation at home can make reintegration difficult (Lang & Nadler, 2014). Interestingly, while Cassarino (2004) emphasizes that returnees are expected to acquire innovative knowledge from overseas and be self-employed, Lang and Nadler (2014) recognizes the presence of the country's institutional structures like policy restrictions, that can often prevent returnees from utilizing their acquired skills.

Several scholars have identified difficulty in adjusting to the culture as a central reintegration challenge. For example, Gmelch (1980) noted that returnees do not fully realize how much they or their home communities have changed during their absence. With a series of constant changes in contextual factors, ranging from physical environment to social and economic circumstances on both sides (Preston, 1993), reintegration becomes challenging. Dzięglewski (2020) provides examples of cultural conflicts, particularly in workplace environments where returnees struggle with regulations, working hours, hierarchical leadership, and limited social interaction among colleagues. These studies suggest that returnees feel out of sync when moving from different cultural environments and changed perspectives.

The relationship between migration duration and reintegration success has generated interesting scholarly attention. Dustmann (2001) argues that migration duration should be ideally optimized to allow migrants to acquire and diversify their skills, increasing the likelihood that they will invest these skills upon returning home. Dustmann's argument of optimizing human skills can be viewed from the economic perspective but King and Gmelch (1986) posit that an optimal duration lies somewhere in between long enough for migrants to absorb new experiences, skills, and values, as well as short enough for them to retain the time, energy, and willingness to apply these gains upon returning. King observes that prolonged absence of returnees may result in disconnection from their home society and that their influence upon return becomes minimal. In the next section, I discuss what the previous research and empirical studies on the return of education migrants. However, the timeframe for the optimal duration remains hazy in both authors' discussions.

Nevertheless, one of the most significant factors influencing reintegration is how return migrants perceive their experience. As Gmelch (1980) emphasizes, satisfaction is closely tied to whether individuals feel their home country meets their self-defined needs and offers a sense of well-being. When returnees feel disillusioned with life at home frustrated by systems, expectations, or quality of life, they are more likely to consider re-emigrating (Ammassari, 2012).

Education Migrants and Return

There is a growing trend of student mobility across international borders and the motivations for migration differ in some ways from those of other migrant groups. Unlike labor migrants who migrate for employment and better employment opportunities, students often choose to migrate in pursuit of higher education, driven by aspirations to develop their skills, expand their knowledge, and enhance their professional prospects (Hercog & van de Laar, 2016). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data from 2019, approximately 6 million students were engaged in International Student Mobility (ISM). The majority of international students were hosted by North America and Europe in 2019, and Asian and Pacific students made up the highest percentage of international students (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2022).

With regards to education return migrants, studies show that individuals who have completed undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are more likely to return home than those with only primary or secondary education (Hazans & Philips, 2009; Tverdstup & Masso, 2016). These findings align with earlier research showing that migrants from developing nations who earn advanced degrees, including PhDs, abroad often choose to return (Niedomysl, 2011; Schroth, 2013). While education migrants can return home due to a range of personal issues and contexts, one of the reasons for their return has been associated with their intention to apply the knowledge and skills gained abroad in their home country (Alene, 2023; Barabuffi et al., 2025). The return decision of student migrants is greatly shaped by the background of their families as well. Students with strong familial support were more inclined to return as social support networks often facilitated their smoother reintegration upon return (Zhao, 2023).

However, returning education migrants often encounter challenges upon their return, particularly in employment and the recognition of their qualifications. Several

studies (for e.g., Quang & Tran-Nam, 2019; Chen & Li, 2019) have documented the difficulties faced by returnees in having their foreign degrees recognized or aligned with local job market demands. Quang and Tran-Nam (2019), examining the experiences of highly educated returnees in Vietnam, reported issues such as credit transfer problems and the undervaluation of international qualifications in domestic employment settings. Similarly, a qualitative study in 2019 involving 15 Chinese academics found that reintegration was hindered by institutional mismatches and an unsupportive academic culture in the home country (Chen & Li, 2019).

Another key issue for returning graduates is that they are often over-qualified, meaning their skills and qualifications exceed what the local labor market needs (David & Nordman, 2017). Despite educated returnees' higher education, valuable experience, and capital, many struggle with underemployment and limited opportunities, facing challenges similar to those faced by other categories of migrants. In the following section, I review the existing studies, and policies and regulatory framework in Nepal that guide return and reintegration processes.

Existing Study on Return Migration in Nepal

Return migration, particularly that of educated individuals has historically received limited scholarly attention in Nepal (Ghimire & Maharjan, 2015). The existing extensive body of literature mostly focuses on outward migration, exploring its drivers through the push-pull framework and its broader impacts, particularly the contribution of remittances to the national economy (Deubler et al., 2013; Gautam, 1970; Shrestha, 2017; Subedi, 1991). Researchers have also examined out migration from sociological dimension arguing that migration is often socially perceived as a strategy to escape domestic socio-economic and familial constraints (Sharma, 2008). Studies have also explored adversities faced by Nepali migrants abroad, including challenges related to socio-cultural adjustments, language barriers, employment contract violations, and inadequate mental health support (Joshi et al., 2011; Puvar, 2015; Valentin, 2018).

Increasing outflow of Nepali youth pursuing higher education abroad has been one of the major focus of studies related to education migration in the Nepali context (Acharya, 2012; Bhattarai, 2009; Karki, 2023; Maharjan et al., 2012; Shrestha & Tamang, 2021). The role of education consultancies and recruitment agencies have been critically examined as well, many of which are accused of misleading students with false promises, often observed from the neoliberal trends of marketisation of

education. (Adhikari, 2010; Kern & Müller-Böker, 2015). However, within this milieu of education migration related studies, there is paucity of research that has focused on the return and reintegration of education migrants in Nepal.

Although migration literature in Nepal is vast, return migration has only emerged as a significant area of study in the last few decades. In other words, return migration has largely been an overlooked phenomenon in the Nepali migration context. This is reflected in the analysis of the 2011 National Census and 2009 Nepal Migration Survey where only marginal references have been made about return migrants (Sharma et al., 2014). More recent efforts, such as the Nepal Labour Force Survey (2017/18) and the analysis by Bhattarai et al. (2023) have documented reasons for return and occupational patterns among labor returnees, education return migrants still largely remains overlooked within migration studies in the Nepali context.

In relation to labor migrants in Nepal, studies focusing on their return have mainly focused on the motivations behind their return and challenges in reintegration. Contract expiration, investment opportunities, health issues, or family obligations have been discussed as some of the primary reasons for their return (Bhattarai et al., 2023; IOM, 2018; Sapkota, 2013; Sijapati et al., 2015). In regard to student return migrants, Ghimire and Maharjan (2015), in a qualitative study of Nepali students returning from Europe, identified systemic challenges that hinder skill application, including inadequate institutional support, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient access to legal or economic resources. Despite these constraints, their study showed how returnee students were motivated towards applying acquired knowledge and skills in Nepal.

Several studies have highlighted returnees' interest and aspirations to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Mishra et al. (2023) found that foreign employment had a positive effect on entrepreneurship skills among returnees, helping them generate employment. However, Devkota (2016) reported that remittances were largely used for land purchases, debt repayment, or consumption, with limited allocation to productive investments. On the other hand, Lohani (2021) offered a more critical view, arguing that low-skilled migrants are often unable to accumulate enough capital or transferable skills to pursue entrepreneurship, unlike their more educated counterparts. Similarly, gender has also emerged as a critical lens through which return migration is being examined. Studies by Valentin and Dhungel (2016) found that highly skilled female returnees faced significant challenges reconciling the

autonomy gained abroad with the gendered expectations prevalent in Nepalese society. Dhungel (2019) further asserts that return migration in Nepal both reinforces and contests traditional gender norms, depending on individual experiences and contexts.

While many studies emphasize the barriers faced by returnees, there is limited empirical work exists on reintegration and adjustment processes. Some studies addressed the economic reintegration of migrants returning during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the agricultural sector (Paudel & Paudel, 2022; Thapa et al., 2020). Other scholars have focused on ex-combatants and refugees, exploring the broader socio-political dynamics of reintegration and reconciliation (Bhandari, 2015; Lietaert et al., 2013; Subedi, 2014; Subedi & Jenkins, 2018). Among the various aspects of return migration, researchers in their study have also increasingly highlighted the need for the Nepal government to develop effective policies addressing the reintegration of return migrants.

Policy Review

Return migration is viewed as an effective strategy to reverse the brain drain caused by the permanent migration of skilled and educated persons abroad. Multiple studies and media coverage even consider ‘brain drain’ as a potential national problem and recommend that the government to prepare the economic, along with political and social environment that would facilitate the return of migrants to the country (Baral & Neupane, 2023; Maharjan, 2024; Pokharel et al., 2024). Favourable government policies, plans and guidelines that support return of educated and skilled migrants have been considered as one of the major levers that can encourage and facilitate migrants’ return and reintegration (Battistella, 2018; IOM, 2017). In this light, I review the existing government policies and legal provisions in Nepal that centre on migration to understand the government’s stance and support for return migration.

Article 51 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015, under the directive principle, policies, and responsibilities of the State, encourages the utilization of migrants’ knowledge, skill, technology and capital for national development (Constituent Assembly Secretariat [CAS], (2015). This Article highlights the importance of mobilising the knowledge, skills and experiences that migrants gain abroad to help in the economic development of the nation. The Foreign Employment Act, 2007 of Nepal is also mainly centered on labor return migrants, utilizing these migrants' skills

and experiences but does not concern itself with utilizing the knowledge and skills of education returnees. Further, this Act does not account for students who may have changed their visa status to work after completing their studies.

In relation to the national policy documents, most policies on foreign migration concern labour migrants. Concerning the return and reintegration of migrants from foreign employment, the Foreign Employment Policy 2012 specially focuses on utilising the skills and experiences gained by returnees and aims to develop a database of Nepali workers who have returned after foreign employment (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security [MoLESS], 2012). Regarding reintegration, while the policy mentions the introduction of an effective social and economic reintegration package for foreign employment returnees but does not specifically describe the details of the package and the needs of foreign reemployment returnees. The National Employment Policy, 2015 itself recognizes migration as an intermediate strategy and outlines provisions relating to safe foreign employment. But it also has provisions for creating opportunities like social and economic entrepreneurship, targeting the capabilities of young returnees. The current Sixteenth Plan 2024/25-2028/29 also has the policy to promote entrepreneurship among returnee migrant workers by offering support such as access to technology, technical skills and providing subsidized loans which enable them to contribute in productive areas.

There is no separate policy that reinforces laws and regulations for returnees. However, recently, the guidelines for the reintegration of migrants returned from foreign employment have been published in 2022. This guideline has outlined the operation of programs to reintegrate returnees from foreign employment socially and economically by promoting their capital, skills, technology and experiences gained from foreign employment. It has also emphasized providing socio-psychological counselling so that returnees can create their secure network for appropriate reintegration. This guideline has recognized the need to conduct such programs that make the lives of returnees living smooth. However, the guidelines do not provide clarity on what kind of programs will be organised toward this goal and the timeline for such programs as well.

The guideline includes the pertinent issue of keeping records or profiles of returnees. It includes all the information of migrants, such as data on immigrant countries, the nature of work involved abroad, and gained skills, knowledge and

experiences. It further explains that this database will enable tracking and utilizing returnees' skills for creating employment opportunities. The central focus of the guideline is directed toward the economy and economic development by utilizing returnees' skills and experiences, rather than providing social and economic environment, benefits and effective financial and legal support for investment, business and entrepreneurship. This policy review highlighted that there is a huge gap in policies in Nepal that aim to recognise, effectively utilise and develop the skills and experiences learned and earned by education migrant returnee. In addition, this policy reveals a gap in addressing specific provisions on socio-cultural and economic reintegration challenges encountered by education migrant returnees in Nepal. In the following section, I review the previous research conducted on return migration in Nepal.

Theoretical Referent

The migration phenomenon requires an appropriate theoretical approach, grounded in the specific context in which it occurs to explain its complexities (Massey et al., 1998). In this section, I discuss the two theoretical perspectives I have used in this study to understand and explore the return and reintegration processes of education migrants: Cassarino's (2004) social network theory and Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. Social network theory emphasizes how networks of relationships influence and facilitate migrants' decisions to return to their home country. Structuration theory provides insights into the challenges return migrants face during reintegration and into their agency in responding to them.

Social Network and Return Decision

Cassarino (2004) proposed the theory of social networks in the context of return migration. Cassarino views returnees as migrants who maintain strong linkages with their former places of settlement. He highlights the significance of personal and emotional ties, particularly with family and broader social networks. A society consists of networks of interpersonal relationships and linkages that are manifested in the form of social relations, such as friends, relatives as well as kinship (Bhattarai & Paudel, 2020). Social structures also include the resources and information that stem from patterns of interpersonal relationship through which migrants secure the effective initiatives of return (Cassarino, 2004, p. 265).

The concept of social network has been approached from multiple theoretical perspectives. Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualization of social capital emphasizes

connections and networks of relationships that provide an individual access to resources, opportunities, and advantages. Bourdieu argues that social capital enables individuals to mobilize their connections and network resources for personal benefit, with the volume of networks determining an individual's capacity to access various forms of capital. (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu posits that cultural capital reproduces existing class structures and social hierarchies. He views it through a critical lens that focus on understanding conflict, social inequality, and power relations (Siisiainen, 2003). Similarly, Robert Putnam's (1993) approach discussed the connections among individuals considered as social capital. Putnam focuses on social capital and network largely from political dimensions. He emphasized how networks build trust and cooperation and they strengthen democratic institutions and community participation (Putnam, 1993).

While both theorists recognize social networks and connections as important resources that influence action, their emphasis is different. Bourdieu highlights social and cultural capital and Putnam emphasizes collective benefits (Siisiainen, 2003). Social network theory, on the other hand, looks into social capital, but it centers on relationships and how these relationships influence behaviour. This theory emphasizes the social structures that consist of nodes and ties. Nodes are understood as individuals or actors, and ties are taken as relationships between these actors (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The individuals are embedded within networks of relationships that shape their behaviour and opportunities.

Within the migration context, migrants function as nodes in a network and their relationships with family and friends are ties. Ties vary in strength, which can be strong or weak, often close family or family members are taken as strong and acquaintances as weak (Liu et al., 2017). Social network theory can be used to explain many aspects of return migration, such as the decision to return and reintegration (Cassarino, 2004). It views returnees as social actors and they are capable of making individual decisions however, they are connected to various organizations and networks that shape their behavior, decision-making, and opportunities (Cassarino, 2004). Cassarino argues that the interpersonal relationships or networks migrants have serve as resources that work as a security to return back home (Cassarino, 2004)

A key insight of this approach is that migration decisions are made not by isolated individual actors but within larger units of interrelated people, families, households, friends and sometimes entire communities (Massey et al., 1998). Within

these large units of influencers of social networks, the two groups of networks play a significant role, the communal network and the associate network. Communal network is formed through long-standing relationships between members, where exchanges are shaped by deeply rooted social bonds (Cassarino, 2004). These are typically formed through enduring interpersonal ties and involve the regular exchange of mutually valued resources. Associative networks, by contrast, consist of selected individuals whose relationships are defined by shared group membership or common interests. However, both groups of networks interplay to provide resources to the migrants, resources which also can be viewed as social capital, required for migrants to return and following their return (Cassarino, 2004).

Several studies emphasize that social relationships and networks provide physical, emotional and holistic support, which are vital when navigating uncertainties in life (Langović et al., 2024). Others claim that networks provide proximity to loved ones and having familiar environments which is required for a social being (Gillespie et al., 2021). While some other studies claim that migrants with robust familial and local community ties help to reintegrate more smoothly. The social network, family ties and bond make the idea of return more feasible and appealing to those migrants' facing challenges in the host country as well as to those who have a strong intention to connect with their networks back home.

I used social network theory in this study to explain how migrants make decisions of returning home. Migrants are not isolated being but they interact and maintain interpersonal relationships with colleagues, friends, family members, professional contacts and community members. Migrants' actions, behaviors and the decisions they make about migration are constantly influenced by the people they are connected with. The theory helped to explain that networks, in which migrants are situated, are a source of information to access opportunities and provide emotional support, influencing the return. Together with emotional support, networks also create an obligation to return, such as fulfilling moral responsibility towards family members. Drawing on social network theory, I have argued that participants' decisions to return home are not entirely individual choices but are shaped and facilitated by their networks and interpersonal connections with their home.

Structure, Agency and Structuration in Return Migration

This study also draws on Giddens' theory of structuration which explores the relationship between structure and agency. Structure encompasses societal elements

such as norms, traditions, institutions, and shared expectations. Structure is understood as a system of rules and resources that tend to reproduce social systems over time (Giddens, 1984). Within return migration studies, structural factors refer to every social, cultural, political, and institutional element that significantly influence the reintegration process of migrants. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals, social actors, to make autonomous decisions. To achieve the desires, agency is capable to devise strategies and exercise power to act to bring change within their environments (Bakewell, 2010).

Agents are capable of exerting control over social relations and sometimes can have the power to transform those relations (Sewell Jr, 1992). They are knowledgeable and their actions are intentional (Giddens, 1984). Accordingly, return migrants have agency and are capable of exerting some control over their social relations. Agent can impact its environment by having control over resources. Resources are advantages that agents have capacity to influence (Wolfel, 2005). Returnees have their different resources, such as remittances and savings from abroad, international networks and other previous social networks, along with their education and international exposure. These resources are employed as power used in the routine course of social action (Giddens, 1984) as they go through the challenges posed by structure. Giddens' concept of structuration embodies mutual dependence of structure and agency (Whittington, 2010). Structuration happens as agents draw on various rules and resources of the systems. In this process, they either reproduce or amend the structural rules. This is what Giddens calls the concept "duality of structure," wherein individuals simultaneously shape and are shaped by the structures in which they operate (Giddens, 1984). On the one hand, returnees bring skills and knowledge they aim to use to meet their personal and professional aspirations. On the other hand, social and cultural practices, and economic policies can constrain return migrants as they navigate the process of relocating back to the country.

I aimed to understand how education migrants narrate their experiences abroad that influence migrants to return and the reintegration process after return by utilizing structuration theory. I applied structuration theory to explain migrants' encounter with socio-cultural and institutional challenges in both the host and home countries and their actions to navigate those structural barriers. As informed by the theory, the presence of social structures such as market demands, immigration policies and socio-cultural conditions of the host country constrain migrants, which made them

reconsider their living abroad and prepare for returning home. The decision to return home demonstrates migrants using their agency. Upon return, the social structure of the home country also imposed limitation during the reintegration process.

Structuration theory provided insight in understanding how existing social structures limited migrants' actions however, return migrants as agents exercised their power, having control over their resources, used them as negotiating strategies to influence their surrounding environment. Thus, this phenomenon supports the dynamics of the duality of structure, indicating that people operate within structures, but at the same time people's actions reproduce or change structure.

Research Gap

The review of existing literature and empirical studies on the return and reintegration of migrants shows that most studies have focused on returnee labor migrants, particularly low-skilled and unskilled workers and a majority of these are quantitative studies. These studies (for e.g., Alene, 2023; Baniya, 2021; Bhattarai et al., 2023; Bylander, 2019; Haase & Honerath, 2016; Kleist, 2015; Lohani, 2021; Sharma et al., 2014; Thomas, 2012; Tverdostup & Masso, 2016) have largely focused on labor migrants returning due to contract termination, visa expiration, or workplace abuse. Issues such as transferability of skills acquired abroad, the mismatch between foreign experience and local labor market demands, institutional barriers, and lack of support for effective reintegration for labor migrants have been the major focus of these studies. In addition, these studies have largely focused on remittances and the economic gain by mobilizing skills and knowledge gained abroad, particularly of labor migrants. The uneven scholarly attention has created a gap in understanding aspiration of education migrants to return home and the impediments that undermine their ability to contribute effectively. It is important to address this gap because education migrants possess valuable knowledge, skills and experience that contribute not only to economic development but also promote social cohesion, enhance knowledge development and foster cross-cultural landscape.

There is a paucity of research that specifically addresses the return experiences of education migrants. Few studies (such as Chen & Li, 2019; David & Nordman, 2017; Dhungel, 2019; Quang & Tran-Nam, 2019; Valentin, 2018; Valentin & Dhungel, 2016) have shed light on the use of transnational capital and resources, as well as the institutional, political, and socio-cultural barriers encountered by education returnees in applying their skills and knowledge. Nonetheless, these studies offer

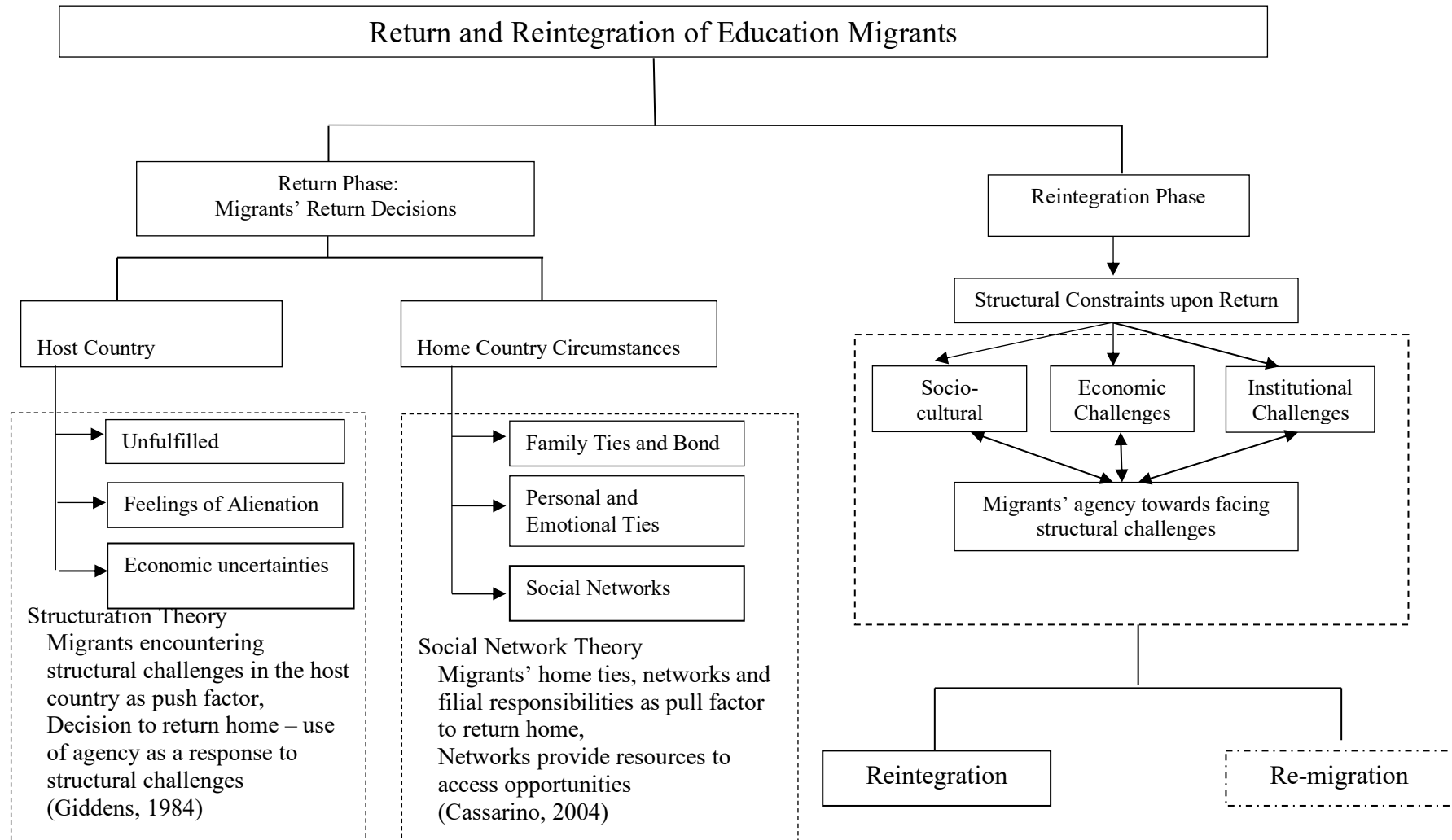
limited insight regarding challenges faced by education migrants in the host countries prior to return, and key factors influencing their decision to return home. Furthermore, there is a need for research to further explore how education return migrants navigate and negotiate reintegration upon their return, particularly the strategies they employ to reintegrate successfully into their home societies, which my study seeks to explore in depth. While some studies (Bakewell, 2010; Rai, 2024; Wolfel, 2005) have explored the interplay between structure and agency in outward migration, little attention has been paid to how this dynamic affects the education return migrants. Without understanding these gaps, several aspects of return and reintegration may remain unaddressed and policies regarding return and reintegration remain far from lived realities.

Therefore, despite extensive studies on migration, there remains a gap in empirical studies that explore return experiences of migrants who moved abroad for further studies. Many scholars have studied return migration by using quantitative method leaving a methodological gap in understanding the lived experiences of returnees. Also, at the policy level, there is a gap in the existing framework as it has not been able to fully reflect the complexity of return and reintegration. So, as a response to addressing these gaps, my study seeks to explore the lived experiences of migrants who moved overseas for educational purposes and later returned home country by adopting narrative inquiry approach. By bringing the story of education migrants, I explore several circumstances that evolved during their stay in the host country, challenges and difficulties, and the role of networks that affected their intention to remain. Further, I seek to understand the complexities of the reintegration process, highlighting the response of society and the people when attempting to re-establish themselves which could guide policymakers in addressing return and reintegration issue of education migrants. The focus of the study particularly on what hindered and facilitated their living, brings into light the specific challenges that education return migrants are experiencing contrary to labour migrants.

Essence of the Chapter

The literature review presented in this chapter highlighted that return migration is actually a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. Return decisions are often shaped by migrants' initial intentions and personal goals, transnational ties, and the social structures of both host and home countries. Moreover, reintegration is conceptualized as both an objective and subjective process, encompassing economic

outcomes as well as personal satisfaction and the capacity to navigate socio-cultural and institutional challenges. Further, existing research on Nepal has largely focused on the return of labor migrants, with comparatively limited attention given to the return experiences of education migrants. Based on the literature review and theoretical referents discussed in this chapter, I presented a conceptual framework underpinning my study in figure 1. This framework represents the complex phenomena of return and reintegration of education migrants within the structural and societal context. In the following chapter, I outline the methodological framework guiding this study.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework*

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I reflect on the philosophical and ontological assumptions that underpin this study and outline my approach to the dissertation. I discuss the research design of my study and then describe how I selected participants, why I chose a specific research site, and how I gathered narratives. Likewise, in this chapter, I also discuss ethical considerations and how I sought to honor participants' experiences with respect and integrity throughout the research process.

Research Paradigm

I have adopted an interpretivist research paradigm to understand the subjective meaning and lived experiences of the migrants who have returned home after living abroad and the challenges they faced during reintegration. This interpretivist paradigm is particularly appropriate for exploring complex phenomena involving diverse experiences, perceptions and participant views. I believe participants have multiple experiences, and, as such, using interpretivism as my philosophical consideration, it has guided me to understand multiple viewpoints of education migrant returnees through their experiences.

My ontological position is based on an interpretivist view of reality, which is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed. I believe that the challenges faced by education migrants and their diverse motivations for returning home and reintegration are not fixed but are constructed through individuals' experiences, each representing a unique reality. My understanding is that every participant has different realities and unique experiences. I seek to capture those diverse and dynamic realities of the participants which are context-bound and are continuously recreated by participants based on their own understanding of it (Slevitch, 2011).

Subjective evidence in my study is drawn from individual views and lived experiences of participants gathered from the field (Creswell & Poth, 2013). My epistemological orientation assumes that knowledge is constructed through the individual's experiences and the meaning they attach to them. In this study, knowledge is generated by uncovering deeply rooted meanings embedded in the stories, experiences, and interpretations of education migrants concerning their return from the host country and their processes of reintegration in their homeland. My

approach is to understand and generate knowledge by exploring participants' underlying perceptions and examining patterns of behavior, language, and culture within their natural settings.

The ingrained mindsets and beliefs of researchers bring certain values to the study. In my study, I acknowledge that my research is value-based through my personal experience as a migrant and prior observation with respect to the education migrants who have returned and their experience in the reintegration process. But this prior knowledge will only enrich the qualitative research by adding more insights and not manipulating research results in different orientations (Ma, 2012). Being a higher educated graduate, my preconception towards education migrants and the findings from the field may vary however, I have attempted to interpret and explain the data that concords more with the subject and information collected rather than the possibility of data fabrication or my intentional omission.

Research Design

Preparing a research design involves developing an outline for conducting the research, selecting participants and methods used for data collection and analysis and interpretation. Within the qualitative research approach, I used narrative inquiry, which concerns itself with exploring human experiences by understanding the meanings people assign to their lived experiences through the stories and narratives they share (Creswell & Poth, 2013). The narrative inquiry is particularly suited in my study because the narrative approach allowed the participants to share their migration stories in their own words, expressing their emotional depth and social context with respect to the decision they made to return and challenges they faced after return. This mode of inquiry also enabled me to situate migrants' personal experiences within broader socio-cultural contexts, and offered a layered understanding of how they make their migration decision, both personally and socially.

The synonym of the term narrative is a story or account of events. In narrative inquiry, the researcher collects stories, retells these narrated stories, and describes participants' experiences along with the researcher's interpretation based on observation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This approach provides the researcher with access to personal experiences and offers a way to generate knowledge through analyzing these lived stories (Creswell & Poth, 2013). It allows to study subjects in their natural environment and gain a holistic understanding of their behaviors, actions, and feelings (Kara et al., 2020). By using narrative inquiry in my study, I aimed to

uncover meaningful life stories that reflect the complexities of the lived experiences of return migrants, which inspired their decision to return to their homeland. Narrative inquiry was more appropriate in contrast to other approaches as this study aims to bring lived experiences and personal stories of return migrants. Narrative inquiry allowed me to capture how return migrants' stories unfolded over time, beginning from moving abroad to returning home and reestablishing lives after return. Therefore, narrative inquiry helped me interpret migrants' past experiences during the return process, as well as their recollections of significant, emotional, and sometimes traumatic events (De Fina & Tseng, 2017) that they faced in their daily lives after returning.

Research Site/Study Area

In this study, I purposefully selected participants based on their experience of migrating abroad for study, working there for some years, and subsequently returning to their home country. I have selected the participants residing in the capital city Kathmandu after their return from the host country. The purpose of selecting Kathmandu valley is that, as the capital city, it offers migrants multiple opportunities, government institutions, comparative access to advanced technologies and increased living standards. The urban settlement has unique reintegration challenges, such as competition in employment, social expectations and high cost of living, which is critical to understand. In addition to that, the capital city is economic hub of the country and the presence of ministries and institutions, researching the returnees residing in such a context helped to examine how return and reintegration have been aided by national policies. This made it a relevant location for my study to explore the experiences of returnees. I have purposefully selected returnees who have completed at least Bachelor's degree abroad and worked for at least 2 years in the host country.

Meeting my Participants

After receiving ethical approval for my study, I initially consulted colleagues and asked them to inform me if they had anyone in their circle who might be interested in sharing their experiences of return migration and reintegration. I contacted four participants with the help of my relatives and colleagues, and three of these participants subsequently introduced me to additional participants. In several cases, participants themselves offered to assist with recruitment and were eager to introduce other return migrants within their networks. Of the two individuals I initially contacted, both expressed interest in participating, but one was unable to

commit due to time constraints, while the other had planned to travel. However, both referred me to their friends instead, who had returned around the same period. In total, eight participants took part in this research.

In the first meeting with each participant, I introduced my name and where I am from and explained my interest in the topic. I stated that I'm an MPhil scholar and this research is a part of my study. Further, I explained to them that my interest in studying return migration stemmed from observing increasing outward migration among my peers and family and everyday news on brain drain, while less talked about return migration. Also, explaining to the participants how their participation and their stories will add value to my study and my understanding regarding migration, helped to gain their trust. They felt more comfortable, willing to participate, and motivated to share their experiences. I was surprised when a couple of participants mentioned that I was the first person to approach them to interview about their return. I was glad, as some of them appreciated me for coming to study their stories and experiences. All individuals who expressed interest in participating were provided with a consent form. After receiving informed consent, I arranged interview dates and a place with them. I interviewed all the participants in the year 2023. I have presented a brief profile of my participants as follows:

Prajit KC

Prajit is a 36-year-old man, who migrated to Korea in 2017. He completed his Bachelor's degree in Nepal and went to Korea to pursue a second Bachelor's degree. After completing his studies, he worked at an IT company in Korea for five years and returned home in 2022. After returning, he was working at one of his friend's IT companies. He was also planning to start an entrepreneurship venture with his friends.

Aarati Dangol

Aarati is a 42-year-old woman who migrated to the United Kingdom in 2012. She held a Master's degree and worked for a UN organisation before moving to the UK. She went to the UK to pursue a second Master's degree and worked there as a cashier. After staying for five years, she returned to Nepal in 2017 and began working as a lecturer at a college in Kathmandu.

Ravin Chettri

Ravin is a 46-year-old man who went to the UK in 2008 to study accounting after completing his Bachelor's degree in Nepal. While in the UK, he worked as a waiter at a restaurant and later as an accountant. He returned to Nepal in 2015 after

seven years abroad. After returning, he worked at different colleges and served as a lecturer at a college in Kathmandu.

Deepak Rajbhandari

Deepak is a 47-year-old man and he went to the UK to pursue a second bachelor's degree in 2011 after completing his Bachelor's degree in Nepal. But after staying there for two years, he moved to Germany. He completed both his Bachelor's and Master's degree in Germany and worked as a business development officer. He returned to Nepal in 2018 after seven years. He was working as a lecturer at a college in Kathmandu.

Suman Pradhan

Suman is a 44-year-old man and in 2007, he went to Japan to study in a Bachelor's programme. After completing his study, he worked as an English teacher in a school and also worked as a social worker. He stayed in Japan for thirteen years and decided to return to Nepal in 2020. After returning, he was working as an English teacher in a school in Kathmandu. He was also working as a social worker working in his community.

Pritam Manandhar

Pritam is a 37-year-old man who returned from Australia in 2020 after staying there for four years. He went to Australia in 2016 to pursue a Master's degree and he worked in a construction and design company as an architect. After returning to Nepal, he was working as a consultant architect for an outsourced company.

Manita Shrestha

Manita is a 40-year-old woman who completed her Bachelor's degree in Nepal before going to the UK in 2011. She went to pursue a double Bachelor's degree and returned to Nepal after three years. Later, she went to Korea in 2015 to pursue a Master's degree. She worked as a sports coach and as a trainer while studying. After three years in Korea, she returned to Nepal and she was working as a sportsperson.

Manjil Thapa

Manjil is a 44-year-old man and he went to Australia in 2008 to study for a diploma and later enrolled in a Bachelor's programme. He spent his eight years in Australia, working in a restaurant and doing other part-time jobs. He returned to Nepal in 2016 and worked as a school coordinator. He was then working as a freelancer in an architectural company.

Collecting Records of Lived Experiences

To gather records of the lived experience of the participants, I conducted in-depth interviews, informal conversations and follow-up discussions with each participant. Before interview, I prepared guiding points and some probing points to facilitate storytelling. During the initial meetings, I shared about myself and responded to the participants' queries so that it would create an environment of trust. I also shared stories of migration from my own family and those I had witnessed among friends, which helped participants feel at ease and comfortable sharing their own stories with me. With participants' permission, I audio-recorded the interviews and I noted down in details that I saw and experienced during the interactions. Each interview lasted for an hour to one and a half hours. I ended each interview asking if they had any final thoughts or comments to share, and with that, I ended the audio recordings as well. After each interview, I also took notes on challenges I encountered and areas for improvement in subsequent interview sessions. I used these field notes to reflect upon the participants' experiences and narratives, and these also provided me with prompts to explore in the follow-up meeting. I went through the recordings, attending to how these narratives were situated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality (past, present, future), sociality (personal and social conditions), and spatiality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It allowed me to engage more deeply with the meaning of the lived experiences and understand that human experiences are complex, situated in context and evolves over time. As I engaged with each participant's narrative as a whole and moved from field texts to interim research texts, I identified recurring concerns, tensions and plotlines across stories. I noted down these recurring patterns that emerged across the narratives, which helped me to create a basis for my research text.

Presentation and Interpretation of Research Text through Thematic Narrative Analysis

I drew on Catherine Kohler Riessman's (2008) narrative thematic analysis while developing my research text. As mentioned earlier, I identified common thematic elements in what participants reported about events they experienced and the actions they took in response to those events (Riessman, 2008). For example, when describing their departure for overseas study, participants shared similar narrative reasons for going abroad. Likewise, in accounts of life abroad, participants described recurring struggles, although these were experienced and interpreted differently across

participants' stories. The occurrence of events, plotlines, and their turning points within the narratives allowed me to organize participants' stories into themes that reflected shared narratives while keeping the story intact in which the narratives were shared (Riessman, 2008). From the common thematic elements that I identified, I developed narrative themes.

I used Butina's (2015) five-stage approach suggested for narrative thematic analysis: (a) organization and preparation of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e) interpretation of the data. I organized and prepared the data by translating and transcribing audio recordings after the interview. I replaced them with fictitious names for any names or locations that could potentially identify participants. I repeatedly listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts, which helped me to familiarize myself with the narratives and obtain a general sense of the information. In the next stage, I coded the data manually. In this process, I re-read the transcripts and identified the recurring words, ideas and patterns generated from the narratives. These recurring words and ideas became codes for my study (Patton, 2002). I created a codebook where all the codes were stored (Saldana, 2021). Then, I grouped the codes into categories, identifying overarching narrative themes. For each narrative theme, I kept together the segments of narratives from across participants. I used themes as lenses to interpret the narratives and I connected with theories to make meaning out of the data.

Quality Standards

In qualitative research, understanding individual lived experiences requires an approach that emphasizes depth, context and meaning over generalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study, to maintain rigor in interpretations and to ensure fidelity to participants' lived experiences, I have focused on using reflexivity and temporality, sociality and spatiality (Creswell & Poth, 2013).

Reflexivity

Throughout this study, I recognized that my own background, perspective and experiences influenced how I engaged with the participants. Rather than attempting to set aside these influences, I actively engaged in critical self-reflection during interviews with participants and during analysing and interpreting the stories (Chase, 2011; Finlay, 2002). During interviews, I took notes, and after each meeting, I noted my reflections and questions, which helped me stay on track with what participants meant and remain attentive to their own ways of making sense of their experiences. I

also considered how my positionality shaped what and how participants shared their stories. As a migrant myself, in particular moments, I have felt a strong resonance with stories of participants. But being mindful of this, I also paid careful attention to what participants shared.

Credibility

Credibility is concerned with interpreting and meaning making that an individual attributes to their existence and their world (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). To ensure credibility, I conducted in-depth interviews allowing participants to share their detailed accounts of their lived experiences and encouraged them to elaborate further which helped to clarify the meanings that they were trying to convey. During the data analysis and interpretation, I engaged closely with the stories by repeatedly listening audio recordings, reading the notes and transcription to see if I had missed anything and rechecking their meanings. Engaging back and forth with the data helped me to ensure that the interpretations are aligned with the participants' narratives rather than presenting my assumptions.

Temporality, Sociality and Spatiality

In line with narrative inquiry, I interpreted participants' experiences across past, present and anticipated futures within their places and social contexts following narrative inquiry's three-dimensional space of temporality, sociality and spatiality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants narrated their stories describing their past experiences abroad, the time of returning with their expectations and the current living. While working with the thematic narratives, I presented participants' experiences unfolding over time, showing lived experiences in the host country, the imagined futures when preparing to return home and the realities they are living with in the home country. Participants described their interactions with different people such as family, friends, peers, professors, government officials and other wider community members. In retelling the stories, I interpreted how personal emotions and beliefs, societal values and norms, family expectations influenced participants experiences. The experiences shared by the participants were located in various settings, they shared about their workplace, educational institutions and across the host country and the home country. In analysing and retelling stories, I analyzed how different locations affected participants' migration decisions. For example, the host country had its particular social and institutional context as well as the home country. However, they offered different challenges and opportunities to the participants.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics comprises a set of principles, norms, and values that guide researchers in conducting studies in morally acceptable ways. In narrative research, researchers place particular ethical emphasis on protecting participants' confidentiality and privacy (Josselson, 2007). Adherence to ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity strengthened the ethical integrity of this study and ensured that participants felt respected throughout the research process.

I obtained informed consent from the participants and also informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the study. I audio-recorded the interviews with participants' consent and deleted the recordings after the transcription process. I used pseudonyms for the participants to protect their identity and also changed some personal information that might have otherwise potentially revealed who they are. For example, I purposefully did not disclose full details of some of the participants' professions and workplaces, as that could have potentially helped identify them. Further, as ethnicity in Nepal is considered a significant socio-cultural identity, I have changed participants' castes, though I was careful to place them within the same ethnicity, so that they would not be identifiable. I interviewed participants at their convenient time, respecting their schedules. To set a meeting, I discussed with the participants and asked their availability day and time beforehand. In this study, I have frequently drawn on verbatim quotes of participants when presenting the narratives and tried my best to retain the originality of what the participants had shared with me.

Essence of the Chapter

This chapter outlined the philosophical foundation, research design and methodological approach of my study. The chapter described how participants were selected and explained how they were approached for data collection. It also highlighted that by adopting a narrative inquiry approach, participants were interviewed to explore their stories and these stories were retold by attending to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality and spatiality. The five stages of Butina's narrative thematic analysis were used to analyze and interpret the data. In addition, the chapter reflected on how research credibility was ensured and ethical responsibility was maintained throughout the research process. In the next chapter, I present the stories of how participants came to the state of returning home while they were living in the host country.

CHAPTER IV

MIGRANTS' ASPIRATIONS TO RETURN HOME

The key findings of this dissertation are discussed in two chapters. This chapter addresses the first and second research question, which examines the aspirations of migrants (migrants and education migrants are used synonymously) to return to their home country. Drawing on temporality, this chapter presents the past intentions of return migrants (return migrants and education return migrants are used synonymously), present experiences of living in the host country and the circumstances that led them to their decision to return home. I begin by outlining their original intentions and plans, whether they envisioned returning to their home country after spending a few years abroad or intended to settle abroad permanently. This chapter presents how their original plans changed over time (temporality), largely shaped by the challenges they encountered in the host country context (spatiality), and personal, social and emotional circumstances (sociality) ultimately motivating their decision to return. For ease of reference, henceforth, I have provided identifier of the participants (their gender and age) after their pseudonyms. For example, *Prajit (M, 36)* signifies a male participant aged 36 at the time of the interview. This format is used when participants are first introduced in this chapter and in chapter five, thereafter, only the pseudonym is used.

Original Intention - 'I Will Never Return Home'

The process of migration often begins well before departure, whether migrants intend to return (Tabor et al., 2015). While the participants in this study are all return migrants, almost all of them did not have any intentions to return to Nepal when they migrated abroad. Most of the participants in my study had mentioned that while they had all migrated for higher education, they had plans to settle in the host country from the beginning eventually. For example, Manita (F, 40) who had migrated to the UK with her husband, shared her plan for not returning to Nepal:

I was so excited when my husband and I got our visas that I quickly resigned from my job, left all the organizations I was involved in, and informed all my friends, colleagues, and family that we would be returning to Nepal for visits only. Even though I had migrated as a student, the student visa was only the first step towards securing permanent residency in the UK.

Manita's remark on visiting Nepal occasionally reflects her prior commitment to settling permanently abroad. Another participant, Manjil (M, 44) had asked his parents not to bother him about returning once he moved abroad, as his intention was not to return to his home country anytime soon.

Before I moved to Australia, I asked my parents not to expect me to return soon and not to keep bothering me asking when I'll be coming home. I explained to them it would take some time to get permanent residency, and once I do, I'll invite them as well to stay with me there. I told them not to worry too much as my younger sister and brother are with them.

Manjil asked his parents not to expect his return anytime soon, indicating an intention to settle permanently overseas. Both Manita and Manjil had viewed their student visas as first steps toward obtaining residency in the host country.

Another participant, Aarati (F, 42) shared her struggle to obtain the visa, and she had described how she had spent a year preparing documents for her visa application. She expressed her intentions for permanent settlement in the UK as:

I was given a student visa for three years. At the time I left Nepal, I planned to either pursue a PhD in the same country or move to the USA, but I didn't intend to return to Nepal. Although I bought a two-way ticket, it was only for immigration purposes, I expected to stay longer. That time securing the visa was challenging because my visa was rejected twice and I had been trying for almost two years. When I had my visa in my hand I thought now that I have it, I plan to make the most of it. I dream to get stronger passport that will give freedom to travel.

Aarati believed that acquiring residency in another country would ease her to move globally without having visa hassles, showing intention to leave her home country. Other participants also shared various reasons for their desire to leave their home country. For example, Ravin (M, 46), Aarati, Suman (M, 44) and Manita shared their frustrations about unemployment, very low levels of earnings, inefficient bureaucracy and lack of quality public services in Nepal as some of the primary push factors in their decision to permanently migrate to developed countries. Various studies have shown that, along with economic consideration, factors such as the pursuit of better career and educational opportunities, low paying jobs in the home country, poverty, political instability, bureaucratic issues, and the ability to afford desired lifestyle are some of the common push factors driving migration overseas

(Acharya, 2012; Karki, 2023; Šlibar et al., 2023). Similarly, Aarati and Deepak (M, 47) mentioned the higher value ascribed to academic qualifications gained abroad from foreign universities had also attracted them to foreign migration. Some of the participants also had aspirations to migrate abroad due to the attraction of economic and technological developments in these countries and they sought new experiences and exposure to new cultures.

In addition to the above push and pull factors, Manita and Aarati both expressed their desire to migrate in the hope of greater autonomy and personal freedom. Manita mentioned that after marriage, she wanted to live separately with her partner, away from her in-laws. However, this was not possible while she was in Nepal, as her in-laws strongly opposed her decision, which was one of the reasons she moved overseas. In the same way, Aarati moved overseas to live independently, without societal constraints. She said, *“I want to move mostly to escape from cultural and traditional boundaries.”* These gender roles highlight how Manita and Aarati had a personal desire to leave the country, viewing migration as a pathway for personal autonomy, which would have been difficult to attain otherwise.

Manita, Ravin, Suman, Manjil and Aarati who had initially planned to stay abroad permanently, returned to their home country. However, their narratives revealed that their return was unintended and not part of their initial plan.

Manita shared,

Even after trying so hard not to return, my husband and I eventually had to return. We were both so sad at that moment, and we didn't even have enough savings to buy gifts for our family back home. When we found now we must return, we had no other option than returning home, I was remembering my friends to whom we said we were not returning.

And Aarati also expressed her feelings by saying,

Surely, my parents were happy to see me back, and I, too was glad to see them happy. But honestly, I wasn't excited at all. I had no other choice but to return. I couldn't sleep well for a couple of days, constantly thinking about what I would do after going back. My mind was filled with so many questions, constantly thinking why these things were happening to me.

These narratives demonstrate that return was not initially intended rather, participants' plans shifted over time as they lived in the host country. This highlights that migration is not solely the result of individual decision-making but is also shaped

by broader contextual forces across time, relationships and personal conditions, and place. The following section shows how different circumstances influenced participants to return to their home country.

The Cost of Living Far from Home – What it Meant to Live and Work Abroad

While the participants moved to host countries with the hope of studying, working, and establishing long-term lives, they encountered layered systemic barriers and personal hardships, particularly within the economic, socio-cultural, and institutional spheres. Recognizing these multifaceted challenges helped explain why skilled and education migrants ultimately find themselves reconsidering their place abroad and think about a return to their home country. In the sub-section, I have presented different challenges experienced in the host country by the participants below.

‘Bidesh Ma Paisa Kamauna Teti Sajilo Chaina’- Employment Challenges

Participants shared a number of situations that constrain them from getting the jobs they expected in the host country. The diverse backgrounds of migrants such as their skills and knowledge not being recognized in the host country, lack of local experience, visa status, limited language proficiency, cultural differences and in addition, the economic and job market policies of the host country, elevates the challenges that migrants face in securing a job (Leschke & Weiss, 2017; Ramsay et al., 2008). All the participants described their struggles in accessing employment, and those who found work were mostly engaged in menial and laborious roles that did not reflect their capabilities. For instance, I asked Aarati to share about the time she was living abroad and she started to describe the moment when she was disappointed with the labor market in the UK. Aarati had migrated to the UK as a student to study another Master’s programme. She had a Master’s degree from the University of Nepal and she worked in an international organization before flying abroad for studies. Having work experience in an international organization and holding a Master’s degree, she stated that before moving abroad, she wasn’t much worried about living in a foreign country, but was confident instead. She explained the time when she started looking for a job in the UK imagining she would get a job related to Environmental Science, the qualification she had, or as a consultant but ended up working first as a cashier in the supermarket. When Aarati shared,

I kept on searching for a job till I didn’t find a job that matched my field of study and experience. Day after day I kept waiting for email responses from

the places I had applied, 1 month passed, 2 months passed and after 5 months I gave up as I was running out of my savings and didn't have money to pay rent, I decided to work on whatever I could find. My friends were already working as cleaners in train stations and they would tell me to join them but I would resist saying that if a person keeps on trying, then it will pay well. But eventually, I had to listen to my friends I ended up working as a cashier.

Despite Aarati's academic credentials, she was forced to settle for a job far below her qualification level, reflecting the employment challenges migrants face within the host country's labor market. This story of Aarati mirrors another participant, Ravin, who completed Chartered Accountancy in the UK. Ravin explained to me that his bachelor's degree, which he studied in Nepal was major in accountancy and he has a great interest in accounting and financial management. He wanted to follow his passion and hence he chose to study Chartered Accountancy. Ravin described after completing the study in the UK, he started to apply to multiple accountancy positions, ranging from service-oriented institutions like hospitals to private businesses. Then he said he began his first job as a waiter in a restaurant. Ravin remarked,

I had different sorts of job experiences in the UK that I didn't have when I was in Nepal. First, I started as a waiter while I was studying, then as a chef. In Nepal, I could afford my living costs even without working, but it's impossible to do so in the UK. I had to do whatever I found, otherwise I would be a jobless person and it's impossible to live in such a country without a job.

Ravin's experience illustrated that, despite holding a certificate of Chartered Accountancy, he had to accept any kind of work that is not related to his study to sustain in a foreign country. The experience of Aarati and Ravin's resonates with other studies which argue that migrants make every effort to find a job that matches their qualifications, but they end up accepting positions that are below their pre-migration skills and capabilities, or they might have to remain unemployed (Li & Campbell, 2009; Treuren et al., 2019). Similarly, Prajit (M, 36), Suman and Pritam (M, 37) who migrated to Korea, Japan and Australia also explained what had happened when they are searching for a job. All three of them mentioned that linguistic knowledge became one of the major barriers for them to work overseas. Prajit took one-year course in Korean culture and language before beginning his formal studies at the university. Suman was an English teacher in Nepal but moving

to Japan, he stated the lack of knowledge of local language became a barrier for him. Prajit shared an incident about difficulty in understanding the questions during a job interview, he said,

During the interviews, I would understand the questions clearly and I knew the answers but just didn't know how to tell them in the right way in Korean. I would struggle to express myself accurately. I had to be extremely cautious that even a single word in my response could unintentionally offend their culture. Despite making it to the final stages of recruitment, I would lose several opportunities. I found that the interviewers took language proficiency, cultural understanding, and adhering to their norms and values quite seriously. Communication skills is often the key requirement for foreign migrants in order to secure good job. Bidesh ma paisa kamauna teti sajilo chaina (It's not that easy to get a job abroad)...

The language barrier and communication challenges were significant challenges in the recruitment process for Prajit. Although he considered himself a deserving candidate, navigating the language and cultural norms were key challenges that he recalled. Interestingly, one of the participants, Pritam, managed to land a decent job in Australia. With the help of one of his relatives, who had a close connection with a renowned native architect, he was able to secure a job in one of architect's large companies. Pritam said that it was his one of the relatives who helped him to get a job.

I was on the verge of working as a service desk worker in a warehouse. My relative introduced me to an Australian architect, he reviewed by skills and competencies and he was very impressed with my skills, then I got a job.

Pritam's story shows social networks can benefit in overcoming systemic barriers. Unlike other participants who relied solely on formal applications, Pritam's access to a personal network proved crucial for him. Through social connections and network, he was able to bridge the gap between his skills and job market access. Pritam was able to gain trust through referrals within his social network.

'It's difficult to make abroad My Home' - Visa Challenges

Many participants described having to go through visa challenges in the host countries. Having a permanent residency in the country not only grants the right to live permanently but also unlocks access to several services and benefits, equivocal to those available to citizens. However, the pathway to getting permanent residency for

migrants is challenging as many countries have complex trajectories for offering permanent residency to migrants. In this regard, the participants, Manjil, Ravin, Aarati and Manita mentioned they highly desired to be permanent residents of the destination country, but they found the journey far from easy. The narratives of these participants that their road to permanent visa is difficult emerged as they were planning to work out on their visas so they could live for a longer period. However, as they began to realise that the visa criteria and the eligibility requirements were even more complex to achieve. Representing the participants, Manjil, an undergraduate and working full time wanted to apply for residency, and with a sad face, he shared:

I didn't have enough points to apply for residency in Australia. I would need higher qualifications and more work experiences. It wasn't easy for me to study post-graduate as I had to move to another city to study. I would have to find a job in the new city which was even more difficult.

Most countries require evaluating migrant's eligibility for permanent residency, which includes duration of stay in the country, education, stable employment to show a steady income, financial stability to check if they can support themselves, and having specialized skills. The point based system of immigration to apply for residency demanded Manjil's additional investments of time, money and energy that made him hard to afford. Manjil found it more challenging to be a resident when he failed to meet multiple requirements like a stable job, a strong financial status and the right qualifications. Along similar lines, Ravin, who had already lived in the UK for seven years, frequently used the word '*technical job*' as a pathway to apply for residency in the UK, but he didn't have one. His emphasis on securing a technical job highlights how certain types of employment earn more points, simultaneously presenting greater challenges for migrants. Similarly, for Manita also, it was her field of study that would provide fewer points to apply for residency and it was clear that she was even ready to change the field of study when she stated,

I even planned to study Bachelor in Nursing when I came to know one of my friends, who was an aged care worker, already received their offer of residency from the immigration office. I realized there isn't much scope for the course I'm studying and wouldn't contribute in expediting my eligibility for residency but I didn't study nursing as fee was high.

Previous study reveals there is an interlink between migrants applying for permanent residency and their skilled abilities and migrants who are highly skilled

and have technical jobs are more likely to apply for permanent residency (Khoo et al., 2018). Another participant mentioned uncertainty in visa rules disrupted their living conditions and invited unanticipated hurdles. For Manita, visa policy changes became a stumbling block restricting her spouse from working. She was enraged when she talked about the changed policy as:

All of a sudden, my husband lost a job. The government made such a ridiculous policy during my last year of Master's program. I didn't imagine they could be so annoying to migrants and make their lives more miserable. They didn't allow student partners to do full-time jobs and only students were allowed to work part-time. What a ridiculous policy they made! Studying while working is really hard. A part-time job isn't enough to cover living expenses for two people and pay rent.

Unexpected policy changes and frequent changes in laws and regulations invited unexpected hurdles to Manita. While migrants continue to pursue permanent residency and until they do not get such status, the requirement for visa renewal and extension of visa become a regular challenge in the host country. Their capacity to stay, work or study may be severely impacted if they are unable to renew or extend visas. Non-compliance to the rules and regulations on visa policies can also cost migrants legal penalties, detention, or being banned from the country. All the participants in this study mentioned the need for regular visa renewal was a hassle and costly. Particularly, Prajit, Ravin and Manita reported that the lengthy and complicated process of renewing visas was one big hassle and need for frequent visa renewal often added financial burden.

The narratives of participants reveal that the immigration policies of the host country placed them in challenging situations. Frequent changes in immigration regulations, the constant need for visa renewals, and the complexities of the point-based system affected their work and residency rights and even impacted on their financial stability. To the participants, these bureaucratic hurdles created ongoing stress and a sense of uncertainty about the future. This situation also disrupted their initial plans of settling abroad permanently. Instead, it became one reason to consider returning home.

‘Alienated’ – Living with Loneliness and Disconnection

The concept of interdependence, communal interactions and interpersonal ties with family, friends and society are core qualities that define Nepali society.

However, most of the participants mentioned that they noticed differences in the culture of the host country and found it challenging to adapt to these foreign cultures. Six participants in this study, Prajit, Manita, Aarati, Suman, Manjil and Ravin said they were challenged while living in the culture of the host country, while two participants, Pritam and Deepak found themselves comfortably enjoying the diverse and cultural differences compared to Nepal.

For example, one of the participants, Prajit had a cultural shock when moving to South Korea to study Computer Engineering. It was his first year in the country and he stated he was surprised to see everyday lives. He had mentioned that one of the reasons for moving to another country was that he wanted to experience some variety in life and desired for change. When he reached South Korea, he explained it was beyond his understanding. Before starting his studies at university, he had to spend a year learning the Korean language and culture first. Taking this course for a year, Prajit had a wholesome glimpse of the history of the country, what the people of country believe, how they dress or behave and what they value most in their lives. He observed that the people were most likely behaving being consciously of preserving their tradition, language and culture. He said:

I was surprised when most of the people I met in Korea were inward and very reserved. They feel comfortable being alone and they were limited just to work and room. I didn't see physical gatherings, get-togethers and hangouts much. Most of their lifestyle was living in solitude limiting any social engagement and don't seek out for any kind of special attention.

Prajit found South Korean culture to be quite individualistic compared to Nepali culture, which values collectivism, family gatherings, and communal celebrations of feasts and festivals. His observation reveals the disorientation that occurs when migrants encounter cultural values that differ from their own social values. A study by van Tonder and Soontiens (2014) also argues that when moving to an individualistic culture from one rooted in collectivism, migrants often experience tension that can affect their mental well-being as they learn new cultures while unlearning their long-followed, ground-rooted culture.

Interestingly, Aarati on the other hand, shared that it was not only foreigners whom she found to be individualistic, but even some of the Nepali people living abroad exhibited similar behaviour. She speculated several reasons for Nepali behaving as strangers. The first reason that she mentioned was the probability that

they were also in similar cultural shock, feeling confused and disoriented with the new surroundings. Secondly, most of them would be struggling in some way either with their study, getting a job, managing living expenses or earning money except for some of them who had already migrated abroad for several years. *'They wouldn't have enough resources even if they desire to help others,'* Aarati said. But she expressed her outrage, remembering the time when one of the Nepali women refused to help her when she had no money to buy food. In another instance, she asked one of her Nepali brothers to help her get a job in their workplace but was surprised after getting misleading information from him. She shared her frustration and advised me, *"If you ever meet Nepali abroad, don't make them friends, Nepali don't help to another Nepali overseas."* Another participant, Rita, also mentioned that her Scottish friends were more helpful than her Nepali friends in terms of *"helping with tutoring and academic support, connecting with community networks and helping with financial resources."*

Similarly, Prajit also shared different cultural challenges in their work at host country. As a student, he found it satisfying to meet and interact with new friends from a different country. Soon after completing his studies, he started working in an IT company in South Korea. However, he became overwhelmed learning the work culture of Koreans when he said,

I worked for a month, then I felt like this one was not for me because the work culture of South Korea is quite different. They prefer to work alone and get it done by themselves. They expect their employees to figure out the solution to the problem by themselves rather than seeking help from others. On top of that, I didn't like it when they asked me work more than my working hours, even during weekends. They are habituated to working 13-14 hours a day and on weekends continuously without taking any breaks. For a month, I tried, but I was already drained ...

Likewise, another participant, Manita also shared the work culture she experienced in the UK. She commented on employers being ruthless and inconsiderate of personal lives but work being the highest priority. She worked as a part time waiter in an Italian restaurant and she didn't appreciate the attitude and behavior of her manager and colleagues. Being a migrant, she was hesitant to speak with native employers and despite the negative vibes she had in her heart, she kept her voice low. Manita confessed:

I had to stand continuously for 4 hours, I wouldn't get a chance to sit for a while, they would say you can't sit, it won't make you look smart. Once, I had to leave early as my baby was sick. I asked my manager if I could go half an hour early that day but the obvious answer was a straight 'No'. People there just don't care, they don't care about your personal life, or your health, they just need their job done. I don't know why people are so rude at work, why can't they be kind to their employees.

Manita's account suggests she was positioned within a workplace that had rigid practices and that focused on productivity. Although she recognises workplace being rude and unfair, she was not seen challenging the culture, possibly it was only her she found culture not fitting to her. Furthermore, when moving to a new culture and linguistic environment, the inability to speak the native language and fluently impacts significantly in different ways. Though most of the participants went to Anglophone countries, they struggled to understand the local language most of the time as English was their second language. All of the participants shared that initially, as a student, they had difficulty in understanding lectures and teachings clearly, leading to lower academic performance and missing learning opportunities and two of them had to attend a year long compulsory language course. Aarati said "*Google was my best friend*" where she would spend her most time. This is similar to previous studies, which suggest language has become an educational barrier for migrants and such students show a lack of expected progress in the class (Free et al., 2014; ÜNsal & Baskan, 2021). This became one of the reasons for Suman to feel "*alienated*" as he would have trouble talking with friends and engaging in any group activities or projects. Though he was a good performing student in Nepal, he became just a "*mediocre*" in the class as he couldn't express his thoughts freely in their local language.

The feeling of incompetence, low self-esteem to ask questions openly and exclusion from social gatherings was what Manjil also experienced at his university. Moving from student to professional life, language became a barrier to getting a job as well. Many employers look for candidates who are fluent and proficient in the local language, which results in immigrants being confined to low-paying jobs or not getting jobs that they want (Bloemen, 2013). Prajit found himself in a similar situation as he ended up getting job in an SME though he was highly competent for a multinational company. He reminisced about the time speaking with his immediate

manager, when the conversation took an uneasy turn after he used a word that meant different in their local language. He realized that his opportunities for professional development and timely promotion were limited also due to language barriers.

Similarly, Manita had to pay double the amount to the bank because she didn't clearly understand the instructions given by bank staff. She also noticed discriminatory behavior from various personnel like shop vendors, internet service providers, uber drivers and even immigration officers.

This wide range of social, economic and personal challenges confronted each day by the participants living in the host country were some of the aspects motivating their return to the home country which I discuss in the next section.

Return as Reimagined Beginning - When Elsewhere Became no Longer Enough

The hardship migrants faced in the host country made them rethink their stay and thoughts of returning home were further compounded by the personal networks and socio-cultural dynamics of their home country which created a strong incentive for return. While hardships abroad pushed many migrants to consider going back, several compelling circumstances actively pulled them homeward. With the hope of new opportunities, the wish to be closer to family, and the presence of strong social and professional networks emerged as key pull motivators, which I have elaborated below.

Search for New Opportunities, New Hopes and Dreams

After spending much time in a foreign country, confronting and responding to every circumstance that came along the way, participants have now reached a point where they begin to feel they can invest something meaningful at home instead. They were no longer the same person who first left their home but they had now seen how things work differently in different places. The thoughts of new possibilities started to ring in participants' minds. Driven by diverse aspirations, migrants dream of enhancing their home country's socio-economic landscape, introducing innovative technology, establishing new systems within their communities, exploring investment opportunities, advancing in new professional fields, or simply embracing the excitement of new life experiences. Most of the participants shared their desire to seek new opportunities and improve their livelihood in the home country.

Suman, one of the participants, was always fascinated by Japan's education system. He taught English to Japanese children in Juku, an after-school program in Japan, for a year. He then worked as a full-time teacher at one of the companies in

Japan for almost seven years. This years of teaching in Japan allowed him to gain a new perspective on the education system. He was confident when he said,

Japan is only 5-6 hours flight distance from Nepal and I used to feel that if an effective plan and implementation is made then Nepal too can be like Japan. Everything is systematic, you can find anything you want in Japan and I used to think it won't take too much time for Nepal to have such developments, it will happen very soon. And I used to think if I get an opportunity to share and tell people the things that I have seen and experienced in Japan then it wouldn't take much time to change. If similar approach to projects and plans could be implemented across different levels of government, local authorities, private sector and civil society, there is no doubt Nepal begin to steep high.

Most of the education migrants, like Suman, often dream of having an advanced education system similar to those abroad established in Nepal as well (Dhungel, 2019). During the eight years that Suman lived in Japan working as a teacher, he constantly dreamed of starting a similar structure of teaching and learning in Nepal. He became enthusiastic about the possibility of bringing meaningful impact by changing the education system in his community. Referring to Suman, education migrants are convinced and believe that if they have the opportunity and connect with the right people, it wouldn't take long to bring about this change.

In a similar vein, Manjil also visualized himself starting a business of his own, as an entrepreneur in Nepal. With a reasonable amount of savings from his time in Australia, he began to plan to invest in some small-scale businesses. It started with just a thought of using the money he sent through remittance to his family members at home to gradually become an ambitious plan to start a business. This thought became more prominent as he started to compare the worth of struggling in a foreign country and working in his own home land. Manjil had no one in his immediate family members who were associated with business, nor had anyone ever started a business. But he was convinced that if he started one, he would get unwavering support from his family members. He continued sharing his idea of business as,

Instead of struggling and working for the country of unknown people, I felt I would rather invest my time and money where I belong, where my people are. You see we Nepali are highly dependent on India for everything. I thought of doing urban farming, like doing terrace farming, or vertical farming. So, I did quite a lot of research about hydroponics and aquaponics. I did some sort of

market analysis, pen down a rough financial plan, spoke with some of my friends and took their ideas. I had planned to open a small restaurant for which all food supplies would come from my urban farming. I was sure my family would be my backbone, they have never said no to any decision I've made, and they probably won't as well.

Unlike Manjil and Suman, Aarati didn't have her own intention to do anything in Nepal. She was determined to settle in the host country for the long term whatever the circumstances she was going through, but she never thought of exploring better opportunities back home. However, it was her few friends and some brothers from the Nepali community who suggested starting something new back home. Looking at Aarati's situation in the UK, people encouraged her to return as they thought it would be better for her. She said that a question asked by one of her brothers shook her deeply and provoked her to make one of the important decisions of her life. She shared:

I was dissatisfied and kind of frustrated at one moment. One of my brothers used to ask me about my goal, about my long-term plan. He said you will work as a cashier for a year, or two, or three, then what will you do then? How long will you keep on working as a cashier in a restaurant with a degree of Master in your hand? You are a well educated person, make wise decisions, make good use of your degree. Don't waste your time working as a cashier instead, go to Nepal, you will get a respectful job, either as lecturer or professor or in a project related to your study background.

The people surrounding Aarati played a central role in shaping her confidence and motivating her to consider returning home. Though initially, Aarati confessed that she couldn't persuade herself and was clueless about her future back home, her expectations regarding job prospects, and the possibility of opportunities for growth gradually increased as her friends and senior brother made her believe in her capability. She also stated that speaking to her family and friends back home and discussing potential opportunities for where she could fit in also helped her reflect on better options, she could pursue in her home country. The above narratives also highlight how participants imagined their return as a way to apply their skills, knowledge and experiences acquired abroad in ways to address gaps they perceived at home.

Strong Economic Capital and Social Cultural Capital

Financial stability and strong socio-cultural capital have played a crucial role in facilitating participants' motives to return to their home country. Out of eight participants, three of them shared they had strong financial background and their positions in society back home helped them to think about returning. Similar to other participants, these three participants first went to the host country to study, but they didn't have the compulsion to sweat blood and tears like others. It was their choice to either take that struggle and willingly face hardship in life or live under the support of family back home. Their interest was first to complete the study, explore and experience modern life, then after looking for probability of living permanently or returning to their homeland without having a second thought.

Pritam is one of them who belongs to a family with strong economic background. He shared that his father is a well-known social entrepreneur had good connections with renowned personalities. He went to Australia to learn the different design techniques, algorithms, and advanced computer-aided designs used worldwide. He was unworried about his economic situation as he already had a word from his manager, who had worked before in Nepal, that he would continue to employ him in the company as soon as he returned. He explained the confidence that guided motivation to return home,

While I was in Nepal, I was working for other foreign countries as well, I knew some expats too. While I was still in Australia, my previous office was offering me a job so I had kind of secured a job in Nepal. I was confident that I would not have any problem with unemployment. Undeniably, I was having better growth and good earnings in one of the Australian companies but then the Covid broke out and my job was like hanging by the last thread. I asked myself, do I risk staying there without a decent job and paying money for my living and rent or do I come home with that job secured in Nepal? I chose not to take risks as I know and had already seen my finances secured in Nepal.

Economic security enabled Pritam to view his homeland as a fallback option. Having an economic safety net back home enabled him to take a pragmatic approach to returning. He further shared that if he can afford a comfortable lifestyle in his/her own country, there is actually no need to go through a complicated migrating experience in foreign lands. This was one of the motivating aspects for him to return home country. Another participant, Manita, was a sportsperson who had played

international games representing Nepal. She wanted to achieve a Master's degree in Sports and aspired to play on greater platforms. She was looking for more international tournaments and pushing herself to improve her skills to be able to compete at a higher level of competition. She aspired to be the champion and dreamed of creating a legacy in sports history. While studying in the UK, when she had difficulty with her visa requirements and the employment policy restricting her partner from working, she began to seek alternatives. She remembered the life she was living back home and described what motivated her to return homeland,

I was living in Nepal as a very established sportsperson. I was working in different organizations and representing different clubs. I had friends who were working in high positions and I knew some people who had strong political connections. I had confidence in myself that if I returned Nepal, then I would certainly get a job again. Before going to the UK, my coach and my guide in Nepal used to say if you ever return Nepal, come to play with us again. While I was still in the UK, I used to chat with my coach and my friends over phone and through social media, and they would insist that I return. They used to say we need players like you in our country and you are an asset for us.

Manita's narrative suggested that her established professional identity and social recognition in her home country served as a significant source of support, both in terms of psychological and employment prospects. This also helped her to counter several barriers she was facing in the UK. With this confidence, she was in a calm frame of mind, which helped her make the decision to return home. Similarly, Deepak had a good relationship with the vice principal of the college where he had studied before in Nepal. He shared that he had been an exceptional student in the Bachelor's program. Even after graduating from college, he was regularly in touch with his principal. He worked in an international organization and he made good connections with foreigners. In Germany, after completing his studies, He worked as a business development officer and had good earnings as well. Even while living in Germany, he stayed in the loop with his vice principal, through whom he was motivated to return to Nepal. He excitedly shared about that moment,

He used to dearly adore me and always encouraged me to achieve better. I used to send messages to him occasionally, even though I was not in Nepal. It was that one day when I was in Germany and he told me if you decide to

return, I'm happy for you to associate with us. I became assured that I will get the opportunity to do something if I return to Nepal because I knew my vice principal would keep his word. Also, I worked in an international organization before moving overseas, so I was confident in that term as well that after having an international degree it would be a plus point and I can easily get into such jobs again.

Deepak maintained personal connections with his professor despite the geographical distance. His confidence to return stemmed not only from this professional relationship but also from the assurance that his qualifications would be recognized and valued in his home country. All three participants, Pritam, Manita and Deepak mentioned that an extended social network in the home country motivated them to return to Nepal. They had been assured that they would receive support from their social networks (family, coach, teachers) when they returned, which gave them hope and courage to decide to return home. In other words, participants gained access to resources through their stable networks and ongoing social relationships (Bourdieu, 1986). In the above narratives shared by participants, their confidence in their social networks and more specifically that their acquaintances can help them secure jobs in Nepal, primary reason for their return to Nepal which became influential in their decision to return. This also points towards the sad reality that migrants with weaker social networks might have challenges in returning home.

Family Ties and Bond Calling Home

Family and familial obligations played a pivotal role in influencing motives to leave the host country and return to country of origin. Responsibilities towards family members, caring for aging parents and moral and financial commitments to their family had shaped participants' migration decisions. The expectations of family members, the participants' bond with their family and the emotional attachment to the family's homeland were the important rationales that the participants prominently narrated when talking about their reasons to return home. One of the participants, Prajit had experienced an isolated, lonely and unsociable migration. Prajit belonged to an indigenous community, was born and raised in a communal society. He was able to deeply sense mutual responsibility, care and concern among his community members, but relocating from such place to self-reliant society led him to emotional collapse and psychological exhaustion. It had become a complete opposite value for him and

his inability to accept these differences made him yearn for home. The longing for familial support, love and care catalyzed his decision to return.

Ravin is the eldest son in his family. He was living together with his younger brother and elder sister in UK. His elder sister first moved to the UK with her husband and Ravin and his younger brother joined her after couple of years. Learning about the difficulties in getting permanent residency with the job he was doing; Ravin was unsure if he would continue to live in the UK. On the other hand, being the eldest son in the family, he was always mindful of his elderly parents back home. While Ravin was working in a restaurant and was thinking of switching his career to technical sector which would make him eligible for permanent residency, his family suggested him to return. It was during that period he chose to return when he heard his father saying, “*There is no one to help us, no one even to buy a medicine.*” He added:

My parents told me and my brother that now it's time to come back. You already have had enough, we will support you for your further needs but it would be better for you to come home. My parents always supported us in our every decision but they also wanted us to stay beside them as they were aging and if we weren't to return it was going to be just two of them only. Not to mention, my brother always had a busy brain thinking of doing something different and something new in Nepal. My parents believed that our international experience would be beneficial in generating innovative ideas and businesses we could start upon our return. They always encouraged and motivated us when we were in dilemma.

The cultural expectations and the sense of filial duty expressed by Ravin's parents reflected their desire to maintain strong family bonds. Their willingness to offer support and share various ideas further demonstrated the strong familial connection. Like Ravin, another participant, Aarati had also decided to return home because of her mother who was severely sick and going through a life-threatening condition. Even though Aarati had her two brothers looking after her mother in Nepal, her mother doted on her more than her brothers for being the youngest child. She shared even just talking to her mother on a video call made her mother incredibly happy. Her mother often expressed how much she was desperately waiting to meet her in person. “*It would be worse for me if I couldn't see my mum's face for the last time, so I decided to leave everything I was doing and return*” said Aarati. It was a

difficult moment for her to leave the host country but not being able to see her mother was even harder. *“Being with my mother, the one who gave me life and everything I’ve ever needed, standing by her side at such a time, was more important to me than anything else”* Aarati said in an emotional voice.

The above examples highlight how gender roles and responsibility of taking care of elderly family members, particularly parents, influence migrants to return. This was also similar to Suman’s experience, who was going through a tough moment as his father had been bedridden with illness for a long time. His father was suffering from a chronic illness and had been undergoing treatment for quite a while. Learning about the degrading health condition of father, his younger brother returned home, who had also been living abroad for some years. He used to often find himself thinking about returning, being with family and bringing positive changes to his hometown to improve living conditions, but no circumstances ever came up that would prompt him to return immediately. He knew the moment had come for him to make a decision to return after living in Japan for 13 years when he said, *“No more hide and seek, I’m carrying my yoke, carrying my load.”*

Suman’s use of the metaphor “carrying his yoke” pointed towards a sense of duty and acceptance of responsibility, highlighting how family crises can drive migrants to return, regardless of their original intentions. Conversely, for Manjil, his parents had arranged his marriage and it was one of the exciting moments of his life. His to-be fiancé was waiting to meet him in person. His family arranged his marriage, which became the turning point and source of motivation for him to return home, especially when he was overwhelmed by several circumstances, such as the change in visa policies, not meeting the points required to apply for residency, needing to move another state to continue his studies and lacking the financial abilities to cover the moving cost and living expense. He said:

A lot was unfolding at the same time in my life at that time, so much taking place at once and exciting at the same time. My parents fixed my marriage right when I was trying to comprehend what steps I should take next. It was clear for me that I needed to return. I thought that, even if I had to move to another country again, the first thing I would do at that time would be to go home and get married.

Manjil's narrative demonstrated how significant life events, can function as comfort during periods of institutional uncertainty abroad. The timing of his marriage provided practical support at a time he was facing potential failure in the host country.

The above narratives shared by the participants indicate that family relationships and bonding played powerful role in shaping return migration decisions. Scholars like Hautaniemi et al. (2013) and Limbu and Yu (2023) argue that most of the migrants' decision to return is often influenced by their strong family ties and desire for family reunification together with other major life events in the family, such as marriage, receiving an inheritance, illness or death of a parent, or due to their children. Though the initial intention of participants was not to return home, their emotional bonds with parents, cultural expectations, and key life events acted as strong motivators for return.

Essence of the Chapter

In this chapter, I explored the initial intentions of participants to settle permanently abroad and how these plans were gradually reconsidered by the participants as they faced several challenges. Participants' experiences included inability to secure good jobs despite their academic qualifications. Language barriers, unfamiliar work cultures, and complex immigration policies further contributed to their emotional and financial stress. Additionally, cultural differences also led participants to feelings of isolation and loneliness, which discouraged their long-term settlement. These challenges, combined with strong family ties and significant life events such as illness or marriage, played a key role in motivating participants to return home. For those with a strong economic and social capital in Nepal, the return was seen as a better option, underscoring how such resources can facilitate reintegration. Viewing these stories through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, these narratives reveal how participants' experiences were shaped by temporality, sociality and spatiality as their understanding of living abroad shifted over time in response to the social, institutional and personal circumstances participants experienced in the host and home countries. The following chapter unfolds the stories of participants' lives after their return and the ways they carved out their places at home.

CHAPTER V

LIVING THROUGH THE AFTERMATH OF RETURN – HOME, BUT NOT AT EASE

During the interview, I asked participants to share what their lives looked like after returning to their home country. I invited them to narrate how they continued to live and make sense of their everyday realities thereafter. The very process of migrant's return and their subsequent resettlement presented similar difficulties and challenges as in the case of their going and living life abroad (Vaculovschi & Dogaru, 2023). Although the nature of these difficulties differed, their level of intensity remained largely similar. In this chapter, I address the third research question: How do education migrants narrate their experiences of the reintegration process upon returning home and their negotiation strategies to settle back? I explore how participants navigated the complexities of return, managed the difficulties they encountered, and negotiated their place in their home country.

Coming Home to New Struggles

The participants in this study approached their return with an optimistic mindset, hoping to tap into new opportunities, new hopes and dreams. They anticipated that their enhanced skills and global perspectives would be welcomed by both society and government institutions, while hoping to rebuild meaningful relationships that had been strained by distance and time. This moment reflected temporality, as participants imagined a hopeful future after return, sociality as they sought to renew relationships and spatiality as they went through the social and institutional environment of their home country. The stories below revealed what participants encountered upon returning home and how their imagined return was reshaped by the social structures influencing their lives. The participants' stories are structured in terms of the themes illustrating challenges faced in economic and social landscape.

Wrestling with Empty Pockets

The participants in this study reported experiencing various economic and financial challenges after they returned. Participants reported that these challenges arose from multiple factors, including limited employment opportunities, financial insecurity, the high cost of living, and institutional barriers to business and

investment. Participants elaborated on specific economic and financial challenges they had faced. Ravin (M, 46) recalled his financial struggle, stating:

... I struggled to find a job. I applied to numerous places, checking vacancies in newspapers and online, and even reached out to people who might help me. Despite having work experience in the UK as an accountant, I found that Nepal's job market is highly influenced by nepotism. The job market is rigid and people who had political or social affiliations would easily secure a job.

Ravin shared that personal networks and social connections played a more decisive role in the job market, while his lack of access to such networks had placed him at a disadvantage. He had noted that referrals and connections were quite important to get recruited in the Nepali context. This also raises questions about recruitment practices in Nepal and provides a basis for speculation that hiring is often conducted through informal networks rather than on merit or qualifications. Further, while education return migrants often return with the expectation of new opportunities, Ravin's experience also invites reflection on the assumption that international degrees easily lead to employment.

Three of the participants, Aarati (F, 42), Suman (M, 44) and Ravin expressed their frustrations over challenges in securing jobs with good income. They were concerned that their income was quite insufficient to sustain them. Aarati expressed her dissatisfaction with the payment offered by many of the organizations where she was likely to receive a job offer. She commented on the pay for these jobs, saying:

I have gained advanced degrees and I'm eligible for higher paid jobs. The payments for most of the jobs are so meagre that they aren't even enough to cover my expenses for a whole month. What can I do with these earnings in Nepal?" How will I have savings for the future?

Aarati's narratives provides a base to suppose that returnees expect higher paying and higher status jobs, believing they are entitled to them due to the work experience they've gained in more advanced and competitive markets. Aarati had hoped that her foreign qualifications and exposure to international work environments had a comparative advantage, qualifying her for better job opportunities with decent salaries. But there was an instance when one participant, Manjil (M, 44), mentioned that his international degree was not recognized in Nepal, forcing him to work in a different sector.

Another participant, Suman said he was financially challenged because he couldn't "afford" to pay his son's school fees. Along the same line, Ravin also confessed his difficulties in supporting his family and himself, given the high cost of living in Kathmandu. He shared how the sudden drop in his income from a "seven-figure" salary abroad to a "five-figure" in his home country was overwhelming.

Returnees who returned to their home country often intends to start a new business or seek investment opportunities found it difficult because of lack of capital. Suman, Prajit (M, 36) and Manjil shared their stories of attempting to become business entrepreneurs post return, only to encounter significant obstacles. Manjil had wanted to start vertical farming, which is quite new to the Nepali farming context. However, he realized that it would require a large investment and he also discovered that people were not interested in his model. People often asked him, "*The quality of food is good and it's much cheaper, why would we switch to yours?*" His major challenge was securing capital needed to start his business. Launching a completely new business in the market requires not only intellectual resources but also robust financial and human resources, which he lacked. Returnee migrant entrepreneurs, when provided with the necessary capital to cover startup costs and initial investments, access to essential market resources like suppliers and vendors, and support from the government through favorable economic policies and laws, are more likely to succeed in their entrepreneurial ventures (Naudé et al., 2017). Further, Manjil was financially challenged when he couldn't do the job related to his educational background as his qualification achieved abroad was not credited to the same level back home. Likewise, Suman had to abandon his new model of business after only a trial run on teaching classes. He shared why he had to stop his business model:

Just as I learned in Japan, I planned to offer online courses with instructors mainly from foreign countries. I was aiming to provide a course taught by international lecturers, similar to earning an international degree while studying from home. However, the biggest challenge was paying the lecturers. There are strict regulations and limits on sending money from Nepal overseas. This would probably have worked if I had a larger business. Hiring Nepali teachers was an alternative, but that was not part of my business model.

Suman's experience of a barrier in his business idea due to restrictive financial policy challenges Nepal's monetary policy that could limit innovative

entrepreneurship ideas. This points to a broader question regarding such policies, on one hand they are assumed to strengthen the national economy, and on the other, they appear to hinder aspiring entrepreneurs. Suman ultimately abandoning his business plans prompts to reflect on the importance of supportive and business-friendly government policies in promoting individual enterprise and broader economic development. New ideas and international experience appear to be underutilized in Suman's case however, it also highlights that having an understanding of current national or local policies is significant before starting any business.

The participants' narratives revealed that economic and financial challenges played a significant role in hindering their reintegration process. Many participants complained that they needed to struggle to secure employment in a job market, as they claimed informal networks and nepotism often prevailed over merit-based recruitment. They also narrated that their low earnings, wrestling with empty pockets, made it hard for them to cover basic living expenses and those who attempted entrepreneurship came across restrictive government policies instead, they had to come up with alternative ideas. However, these experiences made me rethink on the assumptions held by the education return migrants that through their international degree and experience, they can easily get jobs or succeed with creative ideas they bring.

In the Midst of Reweaving the Social Fabric

Return migrants might have adopted various aspects of the culture and societal norms of the destination country. They might have adjusted themselves to the lifestyle, customs, values, and culture of their host country. Participants also recalled how they felt a sense of discomfort due to conflicting values and aspirations. For example, Aarati shared that she was shocked by how frustrating her daily activities became as she began adapting to home society. She recalled those first few days when she returned. She shared that it was as if she were caught between two worlds. She had the feeling as though her physical presence was in one place, but her mind still being tuned to the place she had been living a few days ago. She continued to elaborate with an example of how her particular day looked as:

Buying groceries was daunting, I wouldn't find them all things in one place. Crossing the road was difficult, no zebra crossings, and no one following traffic rules. Eating and dining out was another disappointment for me, the quality of food was poor. Public services were even worse, every time they

would delay the process claiming the software was down. Hospitals and clinics always had long queues. It was like this before and nothing had changed, nothing had developed. Some people in my family and society always passed comments on the outfit I wore which annoyed me.

Aarati returned home country after staying in the UK for seven years. Re-adjusting to the home culture became exhausting for her especially after living abroad for an extended period. Her remark on situation being the same as before suggests that although she had once lived this lifestyle, returning to it had become challenging and uncomfortable, leading to a feeling of culture shock. This gives a reflection that migrants may feel disoriented not so much because local practices have changed, but because they themselves might have changed.

Another participant, Suman shared his experience after returning from Japan, where he had lived for 13 years. He had expressed his frustration over not being able to implement what he had learnt from his work experiences abroad when trying to start a new business. His ideas had been met with suspicion and discouragement as he felt that his friends were quite hesitant to adopt new ideas. This was evident when he uttered, *“I tried many times, many weren’t interested, except for a few. People are crazy, they don’t understand what I mean, and they can’t see the bigger picture, they can’t see the benefits of the system.”*

Suman’s experience highlights the difficulties of returnees to adapt to the established norms, while they may want to implement new ideas or bring out changes to the long-standing traditions. His narration also shows how long-established beliefs practiced for many years, continue to hold meaning for many locals, while return migrants often draw their perspectives and thoughts shaped by their experience and time abroad.

Another participant, Manita (F, 40) experienced quite differently from Suman and Aarati. She shared how she did not want to be confined to rigid gender roles upon her return, especially after experiencing greater freedom and more equal gender roles abroad. She had enjoyed a life free from cultural restrictions while living overseas. However, upon returning home and living with her in-laws, Manita found herself solely responsible for all the household chores. She explained:

We used to cook, do the dishes, and handle all the household chores together while we were in the UK. But as soon as we returned, we moved in with my mother-in-law and father-in-law, and I was the only one who had to do all the

work. When I asked my husband for help with washing clothes or mopping the floors, they would not allow my husband to do it. They wouldn't listen to me, nor allow me to speak up. I couldn't stand their behavior, so after a few months of living together, my husband and I decided to live separately.

Living abroad had possibly opened up new ways of thinking about gender roles for Manita, which she hoped to bring into her life back home. However, the gap between these expectations and reality became challenging to fill in.

Another participant, Ravin shared his frustration with the "*Nepali time*" culture, which he found quite bothersome after living abroad. He expressed his frustration as:

I used to arrive at the office 10 minutes early to start work at 9 and leave at 5. But no one else comes on time; they always start late. I'm always the one waiting, whether it's for a meeting, catching up with friends, or even a doctor's appointment. I'm the only one who seems to view lateness as a problem, while everyone else just ignores it as 'Nepali time'. But I understand why people behave in this way and I look for ideas on how I can bring change in my office.

Ravin's sharing indicates how working in a more punctual and structured environment abroad shaped his expectations about time management. He highlighted about professionalism and work ethics he had learnt abroad, which he felt something that could be emulated in Nepali context as well. These narratives reflect that return migrants often faced reverse culture shock as they struggled to readjust to the lifestyle, social norms, and cultural expectations of their home country after living abroad for extended periods.

'Yo Bidesh Hoina' - Conflicting Views and Differing Perspectives

One of the difficulties that participants shared was related to communicating their ideas or aligning their thinking with that of their friends, families, or colleagues upon their return. This divergence in worldview was due to their exposure to different technologies, ways of work cultures, and life abroad. Such experiences had reshaped their ideology and it led participants to have clashes in values, expectations, and practical understandings of how things should work. For instance, Manjil described his enthusiasm for introducing vertical farming into the Nepali agricultural market. However, he recalled how most of his friends and family members dismissed his idea: "*People were asking, 'How can you grow plants on water only? It's*

ridiculous.” He also reflected that perhaps his idea needed some more time to be accepted in his community, as the concept of hydroponics was relatively new. Similarly, Suman shared how people responded differently when he tried to bring new systems into his community. When he had approached higher level government officials to discuss his plans about possibility of outsourcing foreign courses online, he was told that the current regulations did not allow for such provisions. This discouraged Suman who had returned with a vision to start a business with an idea which was common in Japan. He said, *“I often heard comments like, ‘This is Nepal, not Japan’. Yo bidesh hoina (This is not a foreign country).”*

Such remarks made Suman feel unsupported and discouraged. However, this incident also made him realize that he needed to contextualize his ideas as suited to local scenario, needs and regulations. In another case, Pritam (M, 37) introduced software he had used in Australia to his workplace in Nepal, believing it would improve efficiency. But it was evident that his idea got dismissed when he explained, *“My colleagues didn’t take my thoughts seriously as they were comfortable with the way things are, even though it takes more time.”* This again shows the clash between the perspectives of Pritam being as a returnee migrant and other people.

Differences in thinking also affected personal relationships. Prajit spoke about feeling distanced from his old friends. He shared:

My old friends, whom I used to hang out with before, I no longer hang out with them. I always have conflicting discussions when I meet them... They often say I try to look smart in front of them because I’ve been abroad and studied abroad.

Prajit was seen having social isolation because he had different views that no longer match with his friends. His friends perceived his perspectives as showing off but instead, it was his experience in different contexts and cultures that shaped his mindset.

These stories reflect the deeper challenges that return migrants face when trying to reintegrate into their communities. However, though most of the return migrants claimed their ideas were viewed differently by the people, this suggests not only the resistance from the society but also perhaps participants’ inability to explain their ideas in ways that were understandable to people. Participants often brought ideas of improvement to make existing processes efficient, but encountered differences in local priorities and values. On the other hand, participants often made

comparisons which led them to see their work experiences, international qualifications and skills as relatively more favorable compared to their home context.

Returnees' Strategies – Ways of Finding Paths

While interviewing, participants not only discussed the challenges they faced but also shared how they attempted to overcome them. Despite encountering several economic, political, and social constraints that hindered their reintegration, they also highlighted various dimensions that facilitated their transition. All participants agreed that their individual efforts alone were not enough, the collective support from different agencies helped them during the transition. Some emphasized that support from family and parents played a crucial role in their reintegration. The reintegrating and adapting process for return migrants was influenced by a combination of individual efforts and external circumstances.

Bringing Knowledge Home for Economic Stability

Economic reintegration was one of the major challenges return migrants experienced in their home country. Many participants shared their struggle for securing good employment opportunities. Several participants mentioned that their skills and knowledge were not always aligned with local market needs, causing a disconnect in their professional reintegration. As a result, many faced financial instability after returning. The education they received in foreign universities differed significantly from what was valued in Nepal. However, some participants managed to turn these challenges into opportunities. For example, Pritam, an architect who had worked in Australia, initially found it difficult to implement the advanced techniques he had learned, as they did not align with local architectural practices. He would find himself in a position where he would be the only person with different ideas and plans. Over time, he slowly implemented his knowledge from the places where he could, He shared:

I was supervising a Master's student whose drawings followed the old traditional methods. I suggested that he could simplify the design process by using fewer drawings to convey multiple ideas, a method I had learned in Australia. In my team also, I suggested different ideas. Though the team was uncertain at first, they were eventually convinced of the efficiency it offered. Slowly, my colleagues started adopting this approach.

Return migrants, having been exposed to innovative ways of working, often introduce new methods that could be missing in the local context. Introducing their

international expertise in developing markets, participants believed it would bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern techniques. Though returnees face constraints such as limited opportunities, they use their skills, education and experience gained abroad as their resources to overcome those constraints (Hajro et al., 2019) created in society. When exhibiting such abilities, it not only enabled them to contribute their skills to society but also benefited the community by creating ample opportunities for economic growth.

Entrepreneurship was another way return migrants utilized their international knowledge. Deepak (M, 47), with his background in management and economics, saw an opportunity in the local market for an online vegetable business. He had a better understanding of emerging business trends and markets. Although the market was not initially ready for such a concept, Deepak said he was one of the first to pioneer the online vegetable market, a move that proved more successful than he anticipated. He established connections with local retailers, creating a profitable venture that promoted local industry. Deepak entered entrepreneurship by leveraging his international expertise, while also creating opportunities to support local industries.

In a similar vein, Ravin used his international qualifications to enter the academic sector in Nepal. Though initially unsure of his teaching abilities, he quickly gained popularity among students due to his engaging and innovative teaching style. Ravin mentioned how his students appreciated the interactive and real-world examples he brought into the classroom:

I often felt glad when students acknowledged that they enjoyed my classes. They appreciated how I included games, quizzes, videos, and group presentations in my lessons. They specially enjoyed powerpoint slides and real-life examples and mentioned that these helped make complex topics easier to understand. I tried to bring some changes to the paper-based assignment which they found interesting.

Ravin leveraged his international exposure in the academic sector by introducing pedagogical innovations. He realized his students appreciated the way he taught by integrating multimedia technology, interactive methods, and real-world applications. While his other colleagues continued using existing approaches, he introduced new teaching methods that were later enthusiastically embraced by his students. This indicates Ravin despite having challenges, he was able to gain social recognition and credibility utilizing his skills and knowledge learnt abroad.

Negotiating Conflicting Values

To counter the reverse culture shock, return migrants employed various tactics to adapt to their home culture. While interviewing the participants, they shared how challenging it was to completely change their thoughts and behaviors. They found it difficult to unlearn the culture they had experienced while living abroad and suddenly adjust to their home culture. In this context, return migrants often managed to find a middle ground, which became a strategy to quickly address the challenges they faced. For example, Aarati mentioned how her family voiced concerns about her clothing choices. She was accustomed to wearing what she used to wear abroad. She discussed this with her family and began wearing outfits that honored societal expectations while still retaining her personal style. She adopted clothing blending traditional styles with modern fashion. She said:

On social media, I once came across one of the fashion designer's posts. I was inspired by her creativity and people were appreciating her unique designs. They had beautifully silhouetted the attire using traditional embroidery, but was designed for cotemporary settings. They even had used traditional fabrics and textiles. I was inspired and then thought I can also do something like this. Then I began to design my own outfit, a fusion between global style and local culture. After that, no one who used to pass comments on my outfit complained, instead people started appreciating the way I carried myself and being a fashion icon in the society.

The way Aarati influenced the social expectations allowed her to respect the cultural boundaries significant to her family and society, while also remaining true to the global fashion trends she appreciated. Her strategy of blending styles eased her reintegration and also, she was able to turn the potential conflict into acceptance by the society.

Similarly, Manita, who began to live with her in-laws after returning home, began to feel that her family members are gradually pushing her towards the rigid gender roles. She initially felt helpless, getting trapped in her gender role expected by society. She explained saying:

The tradition of my society demands me to be submissive towards my husband and family members. They expect me to do the house chores all by myself, caretake of home, children, and every member in the family. I used to live with in-laws before going to the UK and used to compromise my dreams and

desires. But now I have learned this needs to be changed, and if I don't do it now, it will never happen in the future. So, we decided to separate from my parents. Even though we live separately, we sometimes go to meet them.

Though Manita experienced great pressure for carrying out gender roles viewing it as cultural practices, she and her husband made a decisive choice. Her act of living separately from her in-laws challenged the structures that were constraining her, but also maintaining relationships with the family represents her strategy of negotiating with the norms.

Another participant, Ravin had expressed dissatisfaction with his colleagues and co-workers regarding office time. He discussed with his colleagues for starting the office on time and maintaining consistency to provide timely service to customers. However, despite several attempts, he was unable to entirely change the office hour culture. As a result, he and his colleagues agreed on flexible working hours. This adjustment led to a successful outcome, where employees began taking office hours seriously, and work was limited to those hours. The institutional structure and practices initially constrained his actions, but he adapted and compromised at some stages and eventually invited change. This aligns with Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984), which suggests that individuals' actions and knowledge are shaped by social forces. However, with the resources available to them, individuals can recreate existing social structures (Lamsal, 2012) and bring about needed change.

Building Connections and Anchoring Relationships

One significant challenge return migrants reported after spending years abroad was the loss of connection with their home society. To overcome this, some of the participants took steps to rebuild relationships and reconnect with social networks within their communities. For instance, Ravin took a practical approach to reconnecting with others by frequently visiting a local tea shop where a group of men gathered every morning. He found their daily discussions on political, economic, and social issues helpful and saw it as a chance to engage with local issues as well as building networks. He shared:

I was able to make strong connections and gain valuable insights into current events. We often exchanged stories about life abroad, and in return, they asked about my experiences. One of the men eventually referred me for a job, which made a significant difference. Without that referral, I might not have secured the job.

By leveraging these connections, Ravin eventually was able to secure employment through a local network. In a society where relationships, community and family are highly valued, people trust in recommendations that come from familiar sources more than strangers. Similarly, Manita, a former sports player, reached out to her previous teammates and influential figures within the sports fraternity to explore opportunities for rejoining her former team.

Deepak and Pritam had both maintained relationships with some of their social networks when they were abroad. This continuous connection provided them with valuable information about developments in Nepal, particularly in their professional sectors, which helped them to be prepared when they returned. Networking not only aided in preparing them in advance but also making the transition smoother. Another participant Ranjana shared she used her family and friends as her strong emotional support system. She felt isolated and alienated from the culture of her home country, but her connection with close friends and family offered comfort. She mentioned how grateful she was to her mother when her mother patiently listened to all her struggle stories experienced abroad and advised her with life lessons. The emotional support from close friends and family helped ease her reintegration.

Connections play a significant role in shaping one's mindset and influencing the decisions of return migrants when they are in the process of adapting to the home culture. For example, Ravin had considered remigrating due to the challenges he faced during reintegration. However, when he shared his plan to migrate again, his family and some relatives offered crucial support during his difficult times. He reflected on the support he had received from them,

If my parents hadn't encouraged me at that time, I would have already applied for a visa to another country. They highlighted me some areas in the Nepali market with growth potential, and identified my strengths, showing where I could excel. They even said, 'If you need money for initial investment, we'll provide whatever you need.' I felt more secure, thenafter I was less inclined to leave.

After hearing his parents' response to his plan of remigrating, Ravin not only felt a deep sense of belonging with his family but also found a sense of financial security. With the support he received from his family, he was able to reconsider his decision to remigrate. Returnees on receiving unwavering support from parents, relatives, friends, and other connections, are provided with a strong foundation that

instils confidence and stability. The confidence to decide not to remigrate and the sense of security to continue living in their home country.

Referring to stories shared by the participants, it can be said that return migrants used their social networks to navigate different dynamics of their reintegration, from economic and socio-cultural to emotional and psychological. Through networks, return migrants reconnect with the people, rebuild their relationships, and reacquaint with the culture norms and values.

Essence of the Chapter

This chapter narrates the lived experiences of participants after they returned to their home country. Participants described often ending up in jobs that did not match their international qualifications, obstacles in pursuing entrepreneurship and many shared the difficulties they faced in readjusting to social norms and cultural expectations. This often led to clashes in values and perspectives showed how participants' earlier expectations were gradually unmet over time as they began to settle in. Participants narrated their experiences of resilience as they negotiated between societal practices and their personal values. Over time, they were seen gradually reshaping existing practices in both the workplace and the community. Participants also relied on family networks to overcome challenges. In the following chapter, I engage in reflective analysis and present the interpretation of the narratives shared by the participants.

CHAPTER VI

TALES OF STRAYING AND RETURNING: A JOURNEY HOME

Gothka Bastubhau Dui Char Din Haraye Pani Aakhir Kila Mai Pharkinchhan
(Even if the cattle stray for a few days, they eventually return to their pen)
- A Nepali Proverb

The above saying in Nepali conveys the expectation that no matter how far people wander, they will eventually return home. As I sat pondering the stories of the participants, this proverb began to echo repeatedly. No matter how far they had travelled or how long they had spent time abroad, they eventually took shelter back to their home as they wandered far. Their stories reminded me that return migration is indeed not a linear process but is a complex interplay of struggle, obligation and negotiation. In this chapter, I engage participants' narratives to understand how meanings emerge and are re-storied across past, present and social contexts through their experiences of leaving, living abroad and coming back home.

Between What was Expected and What Unfolded...A Disconnect Between Anticipation and Reality

While rethinking the participants' experiences of living abroad, I reflected on my own, recognizing that narrative inquirers enter into the midst of lived and retold stories of experiences, attending to place, people and time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My journey to New Zealand began with the hope of securing a better future. I envisioned better professional development, a higher earning potential, and that my global exposure would help me grow both personally and professionally. I too hoped and expected that I would easily find a decent job with my past work experience and qualifications. As I reflected on my feelings, hopes, and aspirations when I first moved overseas, I realized my experiences resonated with many stories shared by the participants.

Many participants perceived their moving overseas for higher education as a pathway to achieve higher living standard, better job opportunities and greater earning. These expectations of participants before moving abroad emerged from their past experiences that shaped their current decisions (Clandinin, 2013). Participants such as Ravin, Aarati, Suman, Prajit, and Manita shared their intention to leave the

country due to frustration with unemployment, low earnings, political instability, and inefficient bureaucracy, hoping for better socioeconomic and political environments in developed countries. More specifically, Aarati raised the idea of living in the UK and holding a UK passport when she shared, *“I dream to get a stronger passport.”* She expected to change her citizenship, imagining life would be much easier and offer greater opportunities with a strong passport.

During one interview with Manita, she shared that she was extremely excited when her visa was accepted and that she immediately resigned from her job and left everything behind. In another instance, I remember Deepak explaining that his international degree would provide him with recognition and prestige. Ravin similarly shared that his parents told him, *“international qualification will benefit in being an entrepreneur.”* Those narratives highlight how social expectations and relational influences shape individual aspirations, illustrating the sociality dimension of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This echoes with previous study by Stark (2018) which notes that society often positions migrants who have lived, worked, or studied abroad as holding high social prestige and greater status. The expectations migrants carry before migrating are rarely individual, rather, they are shaped by dominant social discourses surrounding migration and international education (O'Reilly, 2014).

When migrants arrived at the host country with all these expectations and hopes for a better future, however, they had to confront the hard realities of everyday life. For example, Aarati, who expected greater opportunities, struggled to secure the type of job she had anticipated. For Manita, changes in visa policies and regulations made it difficult to live in the UK and even complete her studies. I could almost feel her frustration when she said, *“I didn't imagine they could be so annoying to migrants...make their lives more miserable”*. Ravin, Suman and Prajit, who had once imagined the international degree as prestigious, felt differently when they encountered language barriers, lack of local experience, limited networks to get a job after study. Prajit's reflection on the individualistic workplace culture in Korea, where he felt alienated and disoriented due to his different cultural background, illustrates how the environment where people live shapes experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Reflecting on these narratives, I observed a gap between what participants had expected before migration and what they encountered after arrival.

As time progressed, participants became increasingly aware that they were unable to achieve what they had initially imagined. Even with continuous effort, their dreams felt distant and unattainable. It brought huge disappointment and dissatisfaction to the participants and I could vividly sense it when Prajit shared, “*bidesh ma paisa kamauna teti sajilo chaina*” reflecting on the difficulty of sustaining abroad despite his earlier expectations. Similarly, Manita strongly expressed her dissatisfaction with immigration policies when she said, “*what a ridiculous policy they made!*”

Listening to these stories, I observed that dissatisfaction emerged for different reasons, some related to individual limitations, others to social discourses in the host country, and some to broader structural and political domains in which they lived in. This layered interaction between personal emotions, social forces and institutional environments makes the three dimensions of the inquiry space, temporality, sociality and spatiality visible, unfolding their complex storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). I believe it was this growing discontentment unfolded over time that brought thoughts of return to the surface of the minds of the participants. These experiences are similar to the findings of past studies which asserts one of the motivating factors for returning home is the dissatisfaction accumulated over time in the host country (Borjas & Bratsberg, 1996; De Haas et al., 2015). However, the return is not solely the outcome of host country circumstances but the other landscapes of the home country plays pivotal role which I discuss next.

When Struggle Turned Their Gaze Homeward...

Now with all those small unfulfilled expectations accumulated day by day and hopes that had fallen short, participants started to remember their home, their family and friends and their society. They began to weave new hopes, new expectations, looking back to the place where they had started their journey and where they felt they belonged. While moving from field text to final research text, each individual's narrative reflects ambiguities, difficulties and uncertainties (Clandinin & Caine, 2013), but I present below three anecdotes on how the participants' psychology shifted towards returning home.

The Pull of Home - Home Becoming Responsibility

I asked all the participants what the main reason was for their return, and almost all responses centered on family responsibility and caring for aging parents. At first, I thought the return was indeed because of their family ties and bonds. However,

as I revisited the participants' narratives, I noticed a common pattern. While participants were facing a difficult time in the host country and were in a dilemma about their living, family members often became participants' first point of contact for sharing hardships. Participants such as Ravin and Aarati described maintaining regular conversations with their families, sharing daily life experiences and struggles. Manjil, Prajit and Pritam similarly remained closely connected to their families despite physical distance. These ongoing interactions became a source of reassurance and comfort amid adversities that participants were experiencing in the host country. But I perceive that, alongside receiving support from family, participants in those communications gradually developed a deepened sense of attachment, belonging and filial responsibilities. It brings to my mind what Ravin said, "*my parents want me to stay beside them as they were aging,*" and he expressed a willingness to honor that wish. Aarati and Suman similarly described their desire to care for sick parents who also wished for their presence. These narratives reveal understanding the lived experiences shaped by moral dispositions and social relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants then decided to return!

The stories of participants may provide a sense that they return because of their love towards their family or familial attachment. Filial duties and looking after elderly parents stem from culture and values. Nepali culture emphasizes on the responsibility of children to care for their aging parents (Acharya et al., 2023). Children are expected to care for their elderly parents, and the inability to do so is perceived as a breach of filial duty or moral failure within Nepali society (Simkhada et al., 2024). Even when children have attained higher education and prestigious careers abroad, failing to fulfill culturally expected familial duties is often viewed as an inability to perform one's social roles. In Nepali society, fulfilling these roles, particularly within the family, brings respect and honor. Previous studies (for e.g. Bhattarai et al., 2023; Limbu & Yu, 2023; Valentin & Dhungel, 2016) have also found that return migration in the Nepali context is facilitated by family dynamics.

These ties reflect the relational aspect of Social Network Theory, which emphasizes the significance of interpersonal relations and linkages in influencing migrants' behavior and decisions to return (Cassarino, 2004). While returnees may appear to be making independent decisions, their actions were often embedded within broader social structures. Despite having lived and worked overseas for several years, migrants remained closely connected to their families in Nepal. For example, Rajan

and Ranjana described regular conversations that they had with their family back home where their families often insisted on their return to take care of their elderly and sick parents. These sustained and persistent familial ties also served to reinforce their sense of filial responsibilities. The participants had the intention to settle for long term in the host country however, their strong ties and responsibility towards their family influenced their initial plan and motivated them to return. As informed by the social network theory, participants were embedded within the relationship, their connection with family and parents, mediated in the choices they took for return migration.

After All What Really Mattered...

One afternoon during the interview, I was sitting beside Ravin with cups of milk tea on the table between us, listening to his return story. He spoke calmly about his years abroad and the universities he attended in the UK. However, when he began talking about his return, I noticed a sudden change in his expression. His face softened, and with a broad smile, he said, *"I'm glad to be back home."* That moment stayed with me and prompted reflection on what particular thing he rediscovered at home that his academic achievements and international exposure had not fulfilled, something he had been unable to find in the foreign country.

Like other participants, Ravin had initially viewed Western societies through a lens of aspiration and prestige. Modern infrastructure, advanced technology, renowned universities, economic development would represent not only opportunity but also success. Participants perceived studying abroad as a pathway to pride, achievement and a better life. Having such expectations definitely makes sense and is understandable for students migrating, especially from a developing country to a developed country. Although all the participants completed their studies and gained professional experience abroad, their narratives gradually revealed another story marked by isolation and emotional strain. Participants, including Ravin, repeatedly shared about loneliness, exclusion from social circles, and a persistent sense of being an outsider in the host society. Prajit said, *"I felt like this one was not for me"* referring to difficulties adapting to the host country's culture. Suman described alienation from friends and Manita commented about conflicting values in workplaces where work was prioritized over relationships.

Over time, these experiences often led participants to have emotional stress. They began to reflect on what mattered them most. Beyond education and economic

stability, the need of emotional fulfillment and belonging started to feel more important. The existing literature supports this pattern, suggesting that isolation and acculturation difficulties in the host country also facilitate return migration (Liem et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2019; Wang & Sangalang, 2009). Several studies emphasize that social relationships support physical, emotional, and holistic well-being, which are vital when navigating life's uncertainties (Langović et al., 2024). The Social Network Theory posits that individuals exist within relational webs that provide not only resources but also emotional and psychological support (Wellman, 1997). Such networks offer a counterbalance to the alienation, lack of belonging, and feelings of being undervalued or overlooked that participants were experiencing abroad.

Participants were struggling with cultural assimilation, belongingness and integration in the destination country but they realized their home is the place where they can experience that belonging and connectedness. Participants often mentioned their home as physical and emotional anchors. Ravin quoted his parents as his *“motivator and encourager during dilemma”*, Manjil referred his family as a *“backbone”* and Aarati wished to be with her mother because *“she gave her life”* illustrates participants sought their home as their psychological and physical support. The desire of being emotionally fulfilled facilitated by participants networks at home made them gradually reorient themselves toward home.

When Return Began to Feel Possible Through Network

Above, I presented two stories that facilitated participants' return home. Here I bring another story on how the idea of returning home slowly took shape in a couple of participants. Participants such as Deepak and Manita began considering return once they recalled professional and social connections that could support them. Deepak shared, *“my previous professor said he will help me to find a job”* which gave him confidence that opportunities would be available upon return. Similarly, Manita recalled, *“my coach told me he will give me space if I return”*. This provided her assurance that life after return would not need to start from scratch. From the networks maintained through professional ties, and long-standing relationships, participants gathered confidence that they could access employment prospects and resources aligned with their qualifications and aspirations. These stories highlight how return began to feel real to participants as they believed their return would be more stable. For some, it was financial security or the promise of employment either secured in advance or shortly after return. Pritam, for instance, remained in contact

with his former employer in Nepal, who encouraged him to return and promise to offer him work. These narratives suggest how participants' experience were shaped by where opportunities, networks and support were located, which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as the three dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality and space to understand the lived experiences.

These processes can be understood through Social Network Theory, which argues that individuals make decisions within structured webs of relationships and perceived social positions (Liu et al., 2017). These networks not only influence in behaviors and decision making but they also work as a source of resources. Cassarino (2004) emphasizes that pre-existing social capital, such as professional networks, provides the resources that facilitate migrants' return. Participants mentioned that they were able to gather other resources such as information, advice and support from their networks. Deepak, Pritam and Manjil gathered information about employment opportunities, political conditions, and business prospects through interpersonal ties beforehand. Participants maintained their contacts with former professors, mentors, or industry peers, which potentially led to job offers or entrepreneurial opportunities upon return. Two of the participants, Pritam and Deepak, remained in regular contact with former academic advisors. One was promised a job upon return, while another had already been working remotely on projects from abroad and was invited to return to continue the work in person. These resources exchanged between social actors help in the transition from higher education to finding jobs (De Schepper et al., 2023). Participants who had access to this kind of knowledge capital reported that it served as a foundation for planning and preparing their return.

When Return Meets Resistance...Navigating Life After Homecoming

The familiar story of expectation versus reality continued to unfold during the return. The participants encountered a mismatch between anticipation and lived experience not only in the host country but also after they returned home. While return was imagined as a moment of fulfilment and renewed opportunity, the narrative of participants reveals a disruption in how they understood their professional identities, social roles and sense of belonging. These stories highlight how individuals make meaning of experience by re-storying their lives in response to moments of uncertainty (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The path of reintegration for participants didn't appear as a straightforward transition.

I reflected on moments when participants' experiences of skepticism, indifference and non-recognition after return. For example, Manjil, expected that his international qualification would enhance his professional standing, yet his undergraduate degree from abroad was not recognized as equivalent to a local university degree. Pritam believed that the advanced architectural tools and research methods he learned abroad would improve his professional career, but his attempts to introduce new ideas were dismissed by his colleagues in favor of local approach. Suman thought he would start an educational institution hiring foreign teachers, but his plan failed due to restrictive financial policies in Nepal. He also found it challenging to initiate any ventures that he planned due to differences in thoughts and values. Aarati, who returned to care for her sick mother, struggled with the expectations around ritual practices, behavior and values. The expectation of support from social and national levels was distorted when Deepak expressed, *"I did everything by myself, and I had nothing from the government"* pointing to the absence of state-level support.

Reintegration as a Layered Structural Constraint and Negotiating Through Agency

Returning home did not simply appear as a relocation or transition for the participants but multiple layers of constraint shaped their reintegration. Participants' stories of unrecognizing overseas education, encountering regulatory and policy framework not supportive for business ideas brought forward, workplace and community cultures preferring local professional norms rather than new techniques and methods signifies how institutional structures played a significant role in shaping participants' experiences. Beyond institutional constraints, participants such as Aarati and Manita experienced socio-cultural structures. For them, the expectation of society around gender roles and stereotypes appeared as a greater structural barrier. And for Suman, his difficulty in connecting with former friends and resistance from the community to his new ideas challenged his living back home and this also reflects the structural barrier.

But as I listened to the participants' stories, I realised that despite these layered constraints, they did not appear as passive recipients of their circumstances. In line with Giddens' notion of duality of structure (1984), the narratives of participants reveal that they reinforced structure that constrained them by leveraging the resources they had. They strategically navigate structures to create opportunities. In some way,

participants did exercise their agency in deciding to return to their home country. While in the host country, they encountered structural challenges, but participants chose not to stay, reflecting their disagreement with the system of the host country. Following their return, they continued to exercise their agency as they settled back into life. For example, Manjil and Pritam transitioned to international organizations or outsourcing companies where their qualifications were more readily valued. Deepak's decision to become an entrepreneur understanding global business trends and local market created a space where their global education could be applied more freely and independently. Participants such as Suman and Manita demonstrated agency by strategically utilising skills and knowledge acquired abroad and their strong network as resources to navigate labour market barriers. This aligns with existing studies which argue migrants who return seek ways to apply their knowledge and skills, as they may bring new perspectives into local contexts (Bhattarai et al., 2023; Schroth, 2013). Some participants like Aarati, adopted strategies of compromise rather than fully resisting local norms to navigate cultural constraints. From Giddens' structuration theory (1984), these actions of participants illustrate how individuals respond within constraining structures while simultaneously modifying or subtly reshaping them. Participants used their agency that played a key role in adjusting back to the society and eventually helped in navigating the limitations imposed by the structure.

However, after reflecting on and comparing some of the participants' narratives, I understand that these constraints were unevenly experienced. Some participants had access to resources, and their ability to navigate structural constraints was strongly supported by social position, class, and strong networks. Participants such as Pritam and Deepak described greater flexibility in navigating constraints due to strong professional and social connections. This indicates that reintegration trajectories are embedded within pre-existing social contexts rather than individuals creating a new return. Further, it suggests that the reintegration process can reproduce existing power hierarchies within Nepali society.

Essence of the Chapter

I revisited the storied journeys of participants as they moved between departure, life abroad, return and reintegration. By engaging with participants' lived experiences, in this chapter I presented return as a meaning-making process shaped across time, place and social relationships. I started with a Nepali proverb which

suggests no matter how far people wander, at the end they look back to their home. As stated by proverb, the narratives of participants reveal that they moved overseas with many anticipations and expectations but as they struggled and began to reflect on their lived realities, they eventually decided to shelter back at home. These adverse conditions made participants difficult to cope and over time, growing dissatisfaction led them to reassess their intention of living abroad, provoking thoughts of return. Participants increasingly felt that they could get better emotional and social support from their family and friends back home. Cultural values, moral responsibilities and a sense of belonging further intensified these thoughts of return. Drawing on Cassarino's social network theory, I discussed how relational networks and social ties provided reassurance to participants for return. Further, I discussed how participants' lives after return did not unfold as expected, highlighting their encounters with multiple structural constraints. However, drawing on Giddens' duality of structure, participants reinforced these structures through their actions. In the next chapter, I present my reflections and the conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER VII

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER – CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The aim of this dissertation was to inquire into the lived experiences of education migrants as they narrate their return and reintegration. To capture these lived experiences, I made three research questions. The first explored how education migrants narrate their story of struggles and challenges in host countries. The second examined how participants narrate the influences shaping their decision to return home. The third focused on life after return, how participants narrate their reintegration process and the negotiating strategies they adopt to settle back home. To address these questions, I adopted a qualitative approach situated within an interpretivist paradigm, allowing for exploration of multiple meanings embedded in participants' narratives. I interviewed eight participants, all of whom had travelled abroad for higher study, worked for some years after completing their studies, and eventually chose to return home.

By grounding in narrative inquiry, I approached experiences of participants as storied and viewed meaning as constructed through telling and retelling lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In line with narrative inquiry methodology, I involved in the process of composing field texts, moving from field texts to research text, composing interim texts and composing a research text (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I composed field texts with deliberate attention to three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, considering temporality, sociality and spatiality. In the process of developing research text, I engaged extensively with existing literature on return migration, challenges experienced in the host country and motivations for return, post-return reintegration, with particular emphasis on studies of education migrants globally and in especially within the context of Nepal.

To understand deeply the meaning and complexity of participants' narratives, I used mainly two theories, Cassarino's Social Network Theory and Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory. Cassarino's framework supported an understanding of what shaped participants' return and how aspirations of returning home developed. Giddens' Structuration Theory enabled me to understand the reintegration challenges by highlighting the dynamic interplay between structure and agency. In this study, I argue that education migrants' return is not solely an individual choice but is shaped

by conditions in both host and home countries. Furthermore, I also argue that following return, while structural constraints often limit opportunities, education return migrants actively exercise agency to negotiate, reshape and create opportunities during the process of reintegration.

Key Insights Emerging from the Study

Drawing on participants' narratives of their experiences of return and reintegration, I bring their stories together, which I present them below as three key insights that emerged from the study. The participants' stories reveal that the process of return and reintegration are shaped by structural conditions and individual agency. It is a complex process and it involves negotiation.

Return is Shaped by Host-Country Conditions

The return of education migrants is driven by different circumstances they experience in the host country. Education migrants initially moved overseas for their higher education and to gain international knowledge and work experience. They migrated hoping that their international exposure would help them enhance greater opportunities. However, as they settled into life in the host country, they encountered multiple challenges. Some found it extremely difficult to find suitable employment and had to take positions below their qualifications due to financial pressures to support their daily living. Others saw their dreams of long-term residence fade as visa policies changed and complex pathway to secure permanent residency. Still others felt culturally incompatible, experiencing social and emotional isolation, being treated as outsiders, and facing language and communication barriers that limited their confidence and social participation. Over time, these experiences of displacement, uncertainty, and unmet expectations produced emotional exhaustion and prompted participants to look back toward home and consider return.

Return is Facilitated by Home-Country Circumstances

The narratives of the participants reveal that their return was facilitated by the home country's circumstances. As participants became disoriented by the socio-cultural and political environments of the host country, for them, home came to be imagined as a source of support and stability. Regular connections with family and friends back home fostered a sense of emotional support and family calls to return home in order to fulfil filial responsibilities began to carry greater significance. Participants made their prior and ongoing professional and social networks back home a source of reassurance, believing these networks could be mobilised to access

opportunities upon return. Further, as they experienced unmet expectations in the host country, they began to consider whether they could leverage their skills, knowledge and experiences acquired abroad more effectively at home. In this way, return intentions shaped by host country were further facilitated by home country conditions, ultimately leading participants to decide to return. Drawing on Cassarino's Social Network Theory (2004), the participants were embedded in web of relationships and are connected to different networks and linkages. Participants were capable of making individual decision, however their networks shape their behavior, decision-making, and opportunities. The participants' narratives suggest that their return choices were influenced by social bond, family ties and connections in the home country.

Return is a Space of Negotiation

Upon returning to the home country, returnees face multiple structural constraints however, they actively exercised their agency to negotiate space within these conditions. Participants narrated they struggled in securing jobs as they found the employment market was influenced by nepotism and informal networks. They came to realize that international qualifications may not always recognize by local institutions, which in turn impacted on their profession and career pathway. Some participants struggled to reconnect with colleagues and friends as their experiences abroad had influenced their personal values. Further, I also recall participants describing difficulties navigating rigid cultural and social norms. Participants in this study shared their frustrations with bureaucracy and institutional systems, which they perceived them as inefficient and unsupportive. These dynamics of the society and the institutions, which Giddens term as social structure, limited the opportunities participants had expected at home. However, education return migrants explored possible strategies to respond these challenges. They mobilized the resources they had as a strategy such as, applying skills and knowledge gained abroad, international exposure, professional networks and connections. This is what Giddens view as education return migrants using their agency. So, drawing from the lens of Giddens' Structuration Theory, this analysis illustrates how social structure constrains individual's behavior but at the same time this behavior also challenges structure through their agency, reflecting the duality of structure.

Reflecting on the stories of the participants' narratives of return and reintegration offered a different perspective that reintegration is not captured in a single, universal definition, rather, it is contextual and relational. Each participant's

experience of return was unique, socially constructed and shaped by the settings where they were situated. For some, reestablishing after return means securing employment and achieving financial stability. Economic stability provided them a sense of legitimacy after their return, which took the form of reintegrating into society. For others, reintegration was framed through relationships rather than economic stability. Being physically close to the family, fulfilling familial responsibilities and rebuilding social bonds sounded like a legitimate reintegration. While for some participants, reintegration was defined in terms of autonomy. For them, reintegration was understood as the ability to make independent life choices and regain control over personal choices after return. These narratives highlight that reintegration extends far beyond the narrow framing of policy, which often takes it as a measurable endpoint. Instead, reintegration is as an ongoing and negotiated process.

Contribution and Avenue for Future Research

This study highlights that return is shaped by a range of structural and contextual challenges encountered in the host country. The host country circumstances such as social networks, family ties, and professional connections further helps to return home. Having strong financial background back at home and knowing that employment is guaranteed after return facilitated by professional and social networks makes return more possible. In addressing research question how returnee education migrants narrate their experiences of life upon return, this study shows that reestablishing oneself often does not follow a smooth transition, but it involves multiple challenges shaped by social and institutional structures. Further, integrating back into society isn't an immediate process but may take some time.

To understand participants' experience and analyze what they have shared, I have presented participants' narratives in themes using narrative thematic analysis. Common themes were identified and within each theme stories were presented across the narratives of participants instead of presenting stories of one participant under a theme, which most narrative researchers do. By reviewing existing literature and studies conducted on return migration and reintegration, this study extends the field of return migration studies through the application of Cassarino's social network theory to examine how social networks influence return and by using Giddens' structuration theory to show how returnees exercise agency within structural constraints. The narratives reveal that return is not solely an individual decision; it is neither entirely forced nor entirely voluntary. Existing reintegration policies often remain generalized

and do not often account for the varied realities experienced by returnees but this study suggests that reintegration policies should move beyond assumptions of voluntary or forced return and adopt context-based, differentiated approaches that recognize diverse return trajectories. This landscape of return and reintegration as contextual, can be used to develop targeted interventions. It informs policymakers to integrate programmes and policies that can better capture the larger frame of circumstances of migrants. The stories of challenges, resistance, and fightback of the participants in this study can inform practical implications to migrants living abroad, intending to return and going through reintegration process and also to the local community and society.

This study was conducted over a relatively short period of time. To explore post-return trajectories and understand participants' stories more deeply, future studies could be conducted over a longer period. Conducting long-term studies can help explore if returnees experience of reintegration changed over time. This can also bring cases of returnees who remigrate and explore what makes return migrants move overseas again after returning home. Future research could also include study of returnees who are residing outside Kathmandu valley. Exploring region-specific struggles, variations in access to capital and markets, and localized challenges would help to better understand the varied experiences of returnees. This study has highlighted the socio-cultural and economic aspects of return and reintegration experience of participants. However, the findings also showed that some participants felt alienated and disoriented both in the host country and after returning home. Future studies could therefore explore the psychological and emotional well-being of returnees, offering a more holistic understanding of the return process. In addition, further studies could explore how the skills, knowledge, and ideas that returnees bring back contribute to national development and economic growth.

My Reflection on this Journey

Research had never felt meaningful to me in this way before I joined MPhil course. I never realized there was an ocean of knowledge that people dedicate their entire lives to exploring and researching. I studied accountancy and finance at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels. My world revolved around understanding international business markets, learning about the rise and fall of stock exchanges, calculating profit and loss from investments, and looking for job placements in banks. I used to think that everything in the world ultimately revolved around financial

economy. The dissertation I completed for my Bachelor's degree felt no more than a project report and I had completed my Master's dissertation, taking it simply as a requirement for completing the degree.

While working in an international organization, it was there that I first encountered the term baseline survey and endline survey. I saw many applicants trying so hard to apply their expressions of interest for research studies. Seeing the rigorous selection process for hiring the best consultants as researchers made me wonder whether research could be a real profession. Around the same time, a friend studying in a Master's programme at Kathmandu University often shared ideas about subjective and objective realities and used to ask if I see a red chair in front of me just as a colored chair or if I can see it as a power. He talked about different sociologists like Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Paulo Freire, John Dewey and why our society has this certain structure and why we behave in certain way. These conversations sparked my curiosity, and I considered joining an MPhil programme, which I believed would help me learn about research.

In the early stages of my MPhil, I felt that every word spoken by the lecturer was a very new concept to me, from pedagogy to ontology and epistemology. I often had to google instantly to search for meanings while most of my classmates were already familiar with these concepts from their Master's studies at KU. I learnt about qualitative and quantitative research with more interest, and for my MPhil dissertation, I decided to use a qualitative approach even before finalizing my research topic. One of the course assignments was deciding on the topic for the dissertation. I thought of choosing a widely discussed issue that frequently appeared in the news, 'brain drain'. I wanted to study why so many young people are going abroad and why the country is losing its young talent. However, it was one of the brief discussions with one of my professors, with whom I went to seek advice on my topic, and he changed my whole perspective. He said the topic was very common and asked me to think differently. He suggested that instead of studying why young people are going abroad, can you think of why they are returning home. That was it, it blew my mind. I kept thinking about it while riding back home, all the way through the streets of Hattiban to Mangal Bazaar to Sankhamul. I kept thinking while shopping for veggies and while making dinner.

I remembered what we had learned in class, that the research problem should appear as a problem for a researcher first. Brain drain had been a concern for me, but I

began to feel that romanticizing brain drain but paying less attention to brain gain was an even bigger issue to me. Within my family and friends' circle, I did not know anyone who had returned after going abroad, but all I could see was people leaving the country. I wondered what would make someone who had invested hundreds and thousands of money, some taking loans, to study abroad return home again. Why would anyone come back home after investing so much to go abroad? Why were many people hesitant when I ask them when are they coming to Nepal? Was there something abroad that Nepal did not have that people do not want to return? Or was there something in Nepal that foreign countries don't have that encourages people return? All sorts of questions raised and I thought I would make this my research topic.

As I began speaking with participants and sat down to listen to their stories, back and forth, I reflected on my own journey too. Over time, the narratives of participants began to make even more sense when I myself moved overseas. I had the opportunity to experience for myself the life abroad that I had heard from my participants previously. I realized the ideal view of foreign life, higher earnings, living close to a highly developed country or a life of comfort, life of luxury is not always ideal, the reality can be different. I understood that returning home is sometimes neither entirely forced nor entirely voluntary. You think of returning at one time but again feel something is holding you. Return is not a sudden decision that happens instantly, but it's a gradual process that evolves over time. And return is not something that is decided by a single event but is influenced by multiple circumstances. Before, I used to view return and reintegration as simply going back home and starting a new journey of life, but now this study has deepened my understanding of return as more than simply coming back home. It involves emotions, uncertainties, and many expectations. And yet return is not the end, instead it's the beginning of ongoing negotiations. I have become more aware and sensitive to the challenges one might face when starting to live after returning. This study has also developed a sense of appreciation for all return migrants who went through all the reintegration challenges. Taking the narrative inquiry approach to understand all these dynamics was appropriate, as my fundamental concern was to bring lived experiences of return migrants. However, having said that, I recognize many aspects may remain uncaptured with this methodology alone. In addition to narrative inquiry, other methods such as ethnographic observations could be helpful due to prolonged time in

the field with the migrants themselves understanding their every lifeworld in more details, allowing for more nuanced understanding of their experiences.

One of the key challenges I faced during the study was writing the dissertation itself. I moved overseas after completing my data collection and moving to a new place, new culture, and new work environment left me with limited time and attention to dedicate to writing my dissertation. However, this allowed me time to pause and reflect and come back to the stories of participants with a different perspective.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Interview Consent Form

Purpose of Interview

This interview is a part of research for the partial fulfillment of MPhil in Development Studies at Kathmandu University School of Education.

Declaration of Consent

I have participated in this study with my own interest. The researcher has informed the purpose of conducting this study and I have understood that my participation will help the researcher for their study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time or any stage without providing any valid justification. The researcher has assured me that my personal information will be kept confidential and will use pseudonyms in the study. I have been assured that my information will only be accessible to the researcher. The researcher has ensured that throughout this study, all research ethics will be considered.

I have understood the above information, and I provide my informed consent to participate in this research.

Signature

Name of the Participant

Date

Researcher: Keren Maharjan