

UNDERSTANDING OCCUPATIONAL SHIFT FROM AGRICULTURAL TO  
NON-AGRICULTURAL SECTORS IN SEMI URBAN AREA

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## DECLARATION

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

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the ancestors who spent their lives in agriculture to establish it as a primary economic sector in Nepal.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Rakshya Acharya for the degree of *Master in Technical and Vocational Education and Training* presented at Kathmandu University School of Education on 29 September, 2021

Title: *Understanding Occupational Shift from Agricultural to Non-agricultural Sector in Semi-Urban Area.*

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Despite considering agriculture as the primary economic sector, people in Nepal are rapidly moving away from this sector. Occupational shift from the traditional sector such as agriculture to the industrial sector and service sector is a global phenomenon because of modernity, urbanization, and search for comfortable life of people. People in Nepal also are abandoning agriculture as an occupation because of changing life styles, modernity, and national planning. As a result, the infantile industrial growth and insufficient employment generation in the service sector compelled thousands of youths to migrate daily to foreign lands for employment. Even within the country, youths migrating from rural to the urban area leaving their traditional agriculture occupation is a common phenomenon. This scenario made this researcher curious to understand the phenomenon of occupational shift and the dynamics of various elements playing a role behind it.

To pursue the research purpose, a qualitative research design with the strategy of narrative inquiry was adopted to understand the experiences and perceptions of

people who were on the verge of occupational shift. The four research participants; two from Kageswori Manohara Municipality and two from Gokarneshwor municipality of Kathmandu valley were purposefully selected for the in-depth interview. In addition to listening and reflecting to their life stories about engagement to abandon agriculture occupation, their activities, emotions, and lifestyle were also narrated, observed and analyzed.

The qualitative analysis of participant's narrations and observations of their daily life led to the major insights that various economic and socio-cultural dimensions of societal change were primarily associated with the occupational shift. People left agriculture as an occupation when they could not adopt modern technology. Therefore, they had work burden to follow the agriculture. Economic aspects like low and uncertain return from agriculture, comparatively higher benefit from non-farm occupations and access to foreign employment had motivated people for the occupational shift. Likewise, the socio-cultural aspects such as urbanization, changing values of societies, peoples' new lifestyle, and education system were also playing a vital role in the background to speed up the process of occupational shift. The dynamics of these elements were viewed from the lenses of the modernization theory whereas analyses were made in the light of macro-micro interaction between structure and agency of the society.

Despite remaining the agriculture sector at fading stage at present, the research concludes that potentiality of this sector is still high for the country to generate employment. The research indicates the importance to redefine the agricultural policy to attract youth in it thereby envisioning technical and vocational education. Likewise, the research also demonstrates the possibilities of increasing agricultural productivity

and enhancing the social value of this occupation can revive the agriculture occupation again in Nepal by revisiting the education pattern of TVET.



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Thank you to all the valuable people in my life for making me capable and supporting me throughout. I am fortunate to have you all in my life.

Rakshya Acharya, Degree Candidate

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The chapter narrated the stories of my participants who shifted away from agricultural occupation, gradually from one generation to another due to their one or the other issues oppressing their choice in life. In this regard, participants like Kanchha Magar,

Master Babu and Bhagyashali appeared several times in this chapter. Kanchha was more guided by the economic issues while Bhagyashali was more pressurized by technical difficulties and lack of access to basic requirements. Meanwhile, Master Babu experienced both the economic dissatisfaction from agriculture, better opportunities in the non-farm sector as well as the issues from policy level on technicalities. However, my fourth participant Suntali Bhauju, was more guided by the socio-cultural aspect of modernization and its consequences for the occupational shift. So, I present her stories in the next chapter under the second theme of the study.	
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
DADO	District Agriculture Development Office
DOA	Department of Agriculture
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FRBB	Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ILO	International Labor Organization
JTA	Junior Technical Assistant
Kg/s	Kilogram/s
MOALD	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOLESS	Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security
NASC	Nepal South Asia Centre
NPC	National Planning Commission
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PR	Permanent Residence
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
Sq. ft.	Square feet
USA	United States of America
NVQS	National Vocational Qualification System

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with my lived experience/observation of people shifting away from agricultural occupation around my locality. This experience of occupational shift has then been explored in the context of my research area. Such a scenario has not only led to the possibility of serious food insecurity in near future but has also resulted in the under-consumption of available resources and labor in the research sites. Thus, I have problematized the issue of the occupational shift from agricultural to non-agricultural sectors in the semi-urban areas of Kathmandu. With this, I have stated the intention of this research, i.e., understanding the phenomenon of occupational shift at an individual level, and some key questions to address it. Finally, I have justified the essence of this study in knowing the phenomenon in-depth, or as a step to knowledge building in this regard. This has led to the final section of this chapter, where I mentioned some possible benefits to readers at various levels.

#### **Setting the Scene**

I was born and brought up in a semi-urban area. It was called Jorpati, Aryal Gaun then, which is just four kilometers far from the city center of the city of Kathmandu. Till the late 1990s, it was entirely a village having many agricultural lands with scattered houses with lots of greeneries. There were hardly a hundred houses in my *Gaun*<sup>1</sup> (village) and most of the villagers would spend their days in farms and fields playing with paddy and maize plants. In just less than twenty years, the scene completely changed. Agriculture land was converted into a residential area and the greenery into a concrete jungle. This development occurred more rapidly

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<sup>1</sup> Gaun is the Nepali word to denote a village area.



when one housing company (Greenhill City) started the settlement project a decade ago. This changed not only the physical scenario but also the daily life of people.

Still, I remember my days of childhood. Aryal *Gaun* was completely a village area with hardly a hundred houses in total. There were big landholdings used only for cultivation. There used to be times when all the family members went to the field to transplant the paddy seedlings during the rainy season. Those moments when we excitedly jumped into the wet paddy fields to transplant the seedlings, ran through the flowing paddy field, feeling the touch of every spike while searching *kutilikosas*<sup>2</sup>, having a competition on who would collect the highest number of *kutilikosa*, have always remained the beautiful memories of my childhood. Where are those flowing paddy fields now, or the *kutilikosas*? Yes, the people are converting all the agricultural land into non-farm enterprises, concrete ground, or simply the site of construction. The “*Gaun*” has now been converted to a “city”— The Greenhill City and barely anybody recognizes the place by its original name “Aryal Gaun”.

Such a scenario pulled my attention, only when I joined Bachelors in Science (Honors) Agriculture stream as my bachelor level study in 2015. Further, I could see the change in the daily lifestyle of the people in this area following the arrival of many newcomers. Neither there remained such big areas of cultivated land, nor were the villagers interested in doing agricultural activities even in the remaining plot of land. Along with time, I understood that the price of land raised, the local people became richer; whereby selling a small plot of land, they could survive for a couple of years. So, either people would live without doing any work or would prefer to engage only in white-collar jobs. In addition, the youths from many families started going abroad for study or work and only the older people remained in the villages. This

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<sup>2</sup> Kutilikosa is a kind of small pea that grows as weed in wheat or paddy fields.

eliminated the social practice of having every family member working on farms. Meanwhile, as an undergrad in agriculture, I gradually began to understand the essence of agriculture in a naturally blessed country like Nepal. However, looking around my locality always disappointed me.

The trend of switching into non-farm economic activities has introduced several positive and negative effects in society. Mr. Thapa is a 50 years old farmer who struggled a lot on his farm since his teenage to have luxurious life owning a fancy bungalow and a car of his own. Now, he has built a big bungalow in his vegetable farm of 2 ropanis<sup>3</sup>, he is living with pride and glory. But now no organic vegetables come in the local vegetable market of Aryal *Gaun* from his farm. Mrs. Neupane, a 75-year-old lady, spent all her life working on the farms of others as a farm laborer. Now, she is compelled to stay at her home idle, due to the pressure of her son and daughter-in-law. This did not prevent her from expressing the frustration of staying at home idle. Moreover, it also caused a shortage of farm laborer in Aryal *Gaun*. However, her son and daughter-in-law now express their satisfaction of living a standard, luxurious life, which they always wished for.

Likewise, Mr. Rana's family was farm laborers who worked on the farms of others for earning their livelihood. It is only through this business that they now possess around 20 ropanis lands in Aryal *Gaun* itself. They stopped working as farm laborers and now started their organic fruit and vegetable farms. However, Mr. Rana seems happy with his comparatively profitable business of car washing center than organic fruit farm, but now people in Aryal *Gaun* are purchasing imported fruits. And they doubt the quality of such imported fruits which they consume today. Likewise,

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<sup>3</sup> Ropani is the unit of measuring land area. Approximately, 1 Ropani= 5,472 sq. ft.

on one hand, Mr. Gurung has been earning lots of money settling abroad while his parents here have no support or any land left to survive in the future.

### **Occupational Shift from Agriculture to Non-farm Sectors**

It was not only from my observation but statistics also shows the occupational shift in Nepal. The statistics of national living standard survey reports around 20% (from 53% to 35%) decline in wage earners from the agricultural sector during 1995/96 to 2010/11, whereas the same percentage (47% to 65%) of wage earners has increased in non-farm sectors (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2011). However, the agriculture sector contributes to the largest share in the national economy (CBS, 2011; International Labor Organization [ILO], 2019; Department of Agriculture [DOA], 2018). It is the lifeline of Nepal, where peoples' lives and livelihood are associated.

Due to the existing importance of the agriculture sector, Nepal has been making various efforts even from the national level to uplift its agriculture sector right from the first five-year plan (Dhital, 1970). Each periodic and long-term plan appears with at least a few new programs. But, the agricultural productivity, competitiveness and earnings are at ground level (Chaudhary, 2018). Despite 66 percent of the population engaged in the agriculture sector, its share is a mere 30 percent in GDP (ILO, 2019 & DOA, 2018). These statistics reflect less productivity of agriculture in Nepal.

Anywhere around the world, the occupational shift from the agricultural to the non-farm sectors is observed as a consequence of economic progress (Ghimire, 2016). Such occupational shifts gradually occur from the agriculture sector to the industry sector and then to the service sector. But industrialization has a very sluggish growth in Nepal. Contributing to only 14.3% to national GDP by industry sector does not

reflect the Nepalese industries to have followed world economic history (Ministry of Finance [MOF], 2018). This might have also made the labor shifting away from agriculture, compelled to choose foreign employment as the last option. Now, around 4.3 million Nepalese are in foreign employment (MOF, 2019). If we also consider the non-reported migrant to India, this figure becomes even higher.

The aforementioned occupational shift of the agricultural workforce has generated several adverse effects in the country. The declining agricultural production has made us dependent on other countries. Nepal known as a paddy exporter in the 1970s is now importing rice, wheat and many crops to feed its people (Chaudhary, 2018). More than this, being blessed with diversified geography, climate and topography, Nepal possesses the huge potentiality of agriculture and competitive advantage from it (DOA, 2018). Rather than utilizing the boon of rich natural resources within the nation, the country has enforced its human resource to get employment in foreign countries. Though those migrants bring foreign currencies into the country, the remittance industry is not a permanent source of income and employment. More than this, this trend of going abroad for employment has created several social effects.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The national statistics that I mentioned in the earlier section of the chapter of occupational shifts from agriculture to the non-farm sectors in Nepal is similar to my lived experience. Despite a continuous effort made by the country for the last seven decades in the agriculture sector, it has not met the expectation. In addition, inadequate employment opportunities in the domestic industry and business sector have forced the youths to choose foreign employment. Such transition has, on one hand, made the country dependent on other countries for food security, while on the

other, the country is losing the opportunity of utilizing its human resources and the potentiality of the agriculture sector. Moreover, Banjara et al. (2020) claim that remittance is not quite a reliable source due to its negative impact on the economic development and international trade of Nepal.

The available global literature shows that development, mechanization and modernization in agriculture push out the labor force to the non-farm sectors (Todaro, 1977; Ranis, 2004). Likewise, socio-cultural values and beliefs of people that the formally educated people should not engage in the agriculture sector also motivates people for the shift. Similarly, the productivity of other sectors is higher than the agriculture sector thus people shift from the agriculture sector for higher economic gain (Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO], 2017). These studies are mainly macro-level assessments lacking the qualitative exploration at individual and community levels to understand the people's experiences of shifting occupation. Likewise, these studies give less priority to understanding the phenomenon of occupational shift.

This situation made me curious to answer several questions: Why are people deviating from farm activities? Is that because of social issues linked with an individual? Is this because society gives fewer values and respect to the people having agriculture as an occupation? Can it not be just because of an excuse to escape the hard-working attitude needed in agriculture? Is this due to people's rational experience that the productivity of the agriculture sector is lower than the other sector? Sometimes, I hear my parents moaning about technical issues like labor scarcity, low-quality inputs, increasing costs incurred in crop production. Is that true or just a lame excuse to run away from agriculture? Likewise, can't it be the result of a lack of proper policy adopted by the state that people have not felt that they have got

the support from the state? Going one step ahead, is it the result of globalization that employment and occupation are influenced by the global market and its phenomenon?

The occupational shift led not only to the situation of underutilization of resources but also made the country dependent on other countries both for agricultural products and employment. Furthermore, staying a husband or wife abroad and leaving the counterpart in the home country has brought several adverse social issues such as frustration and trauma among people leading to family breakdown. Understanding peoples' experience/perception regarding occupational shift would be helpful to revive the agriculture sector and generate employment opportunities in the domestic market and thus helps the socio-economic development of the people. Furthermore, it needs to explore the complex phenomenon of occupational shift as a result of multiple socio-economic changes that occurred in society. Thus, this study intended to explore the issue of occupational shift at individual and societal levels.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to understand the occupational shift from the agricultural sector to the non-farm sector in the sub-urban area of Kathmandu.

### **Research Questions**

To pursue the purpose of this research, this study seeks to put the overarching questions that why people are shifting from agricultural to non-farm sectors. For this, the study constructs the following two research questions.

- How do the local people of semi-urban areas narrate their experiences of the shift from the agricultural to non-farm sectors?
- How do they experience social and economic changes in respect to the shift from the agricultural to non-farm sectors?

### **The Rationale of the Study**

Despite the government's priority to agriculture right from the plan development in Nepal, people are not happy with the efforts of the government. It means the government's efforts in agriculture for a couple of decades have not been working much to achieve its objectives. In addition to this, with the development of non-farm sectors, there is a high occupational shift in the country from agricultural to non-farm sectors. This has caused many adverse effects in the country. Leaving barren land has not only made underutilization of resources but also made the country dependent on other countries for agricultural products. Foreign employment further turned the nation's economy to depend on remittance. This can bring disaster to the country at any time. Furthermore, staying a husband or wife abroad and leaving the counterpart in the home country has brought several adverse social issues. This has led to a family breakdown because of the frustration and trauma among people.

Looking at the experience of people, in addition to the low productivity of the agricultural sector, there are several other social reasons for this occupational shift. Thus, understanding peoples' experiences/perceptions would help to revive the agriculture sector and thus helping in the socio-economic development of the people.

From the methodological point of view, most of the past studies (e.g., Paudel et al., 2014; Poudel, 2016) are quantitatively focused on providing the macro-level status of occupational shifting from agriculture to non-farm sectors. Understanding people's experience and context is not adequately documented. Moreover, the preliminary interaction with some villagers showed that occupational shift, as I perceived, is not simply a cause-and-effect phenomenon. This is a complex phenomenon as a result of multiple socio-economic changes that occurred in society. So this is a contextual and individualized matter. Hence, rather than generalizing the

reasons, it needs a qualitative exploration to understand people's experiences and perceptions on the shift in occupations.

### **Significance of the Study**

Having agriculture as one of the crucial economic frames of the nation, every citizen must keep updated with its current scenario. Despite having a huge potential for agriculture in Nepal naturally, why do people ignore this sector? Such a question must have struck the minds of individuals. Thus, the study seeks to understand the overall phenomenon of the occupational shift from agricultural to other sectors in Nepal.

The proposed research can be significant in three levels. First, the reasons behind declining Nepalese agriculture can be the subject of interest even for a layman. Thus, it makes a knowledge contribution to the related field. Since the study is to be taken at the individual/societal level, thus the finding would provide knowhow of core matters, i.e., from the grass-roots level. This will be useful to policymakers and practitioners for formulating future policies or reforming the existing ones. Likewise, it will open several avenues for future research.

On top of this, I gained an understanding of agricultural issues going on around my community as well. This in turn will be helpful for my future career and further research in the field through which I could make some effort to resolve it to some extent in the future.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The term agriculture is generally understood as practices like cultivation, animal husbandry, fishery, horticulture, arboriculture, floriculture and many more (Harris & Fuller, 2014). However the study delimits its concern to the practice of cereal crops and vegetables cultivation along with the livestock rearing. The



background for delimiting the area of study is mentioned in this section by explaining the context of my research area. Although agriculture has been the major source of livelihood, the people in my research area have been practicing it only in a subsistence way since five decades. In this regard, the major agricultural activities they are practicing are cereal crops cultivation, vegetable farming and sometimes fruits. Rearing livestock in this area existed only in parallel with cultivation activities rather than an independent economic activity. The large scale commercialized practice was yet to be introduced to the area. This is the reason why people's choice of abandoning agriculture have also led to leaving behind of animal husbandry or livestock rearing.

At present, when native people/land holders of my study site have started utilizing land for different purpose like renting or selling, their involvement in agricultural activities have become sparse or somewhere even nil. Mostly the non-natives are taking land on lease or buying the land for several commercial activities. In this regard, although agricultural activities have been abandoned by the native people of the area, but occupation like animal husbandry or vegetable farming have been emerging as economic activities independent to agricultural occupation as a whole. Thus, this scenario of my research site has created a delimited the concept of agriculture to only cereal crops cultivation, vegetable farming and rearing livestock, in this study.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The first chapter briefly introduced the issue of occupational shift by supporting it with my personal experience and the general context of the background. It also defined the purpose, and some research questions to pursue those purposes of the study. Finally, the first chapter mentioned the significance and rationale of the study. Now, the second chapter is all about what have the available literature mentioned about the phenomenon of occupational shift. Along with some empirical studies, the chapter also looks upon some theories to understand how people around the globe make this shift happen. Is it a normal process in development history? Or has it been the case only in Nepal? Such issues have been explored and elaborated on in this chapter. Finally, from the understanding gained after reviewing some available literature and theories, I have constructed a thematic frame for supporting and summarizing this study in brief.

The study includes some general terms which have been defined differently from their general meaning. Agriculture in general covers a wide spectrum of activities like cultivation, animal husbandry, arboriculture, horticulture, fishery, floriculture and many more (Harris & Fuller, 2014). However, the study has limited its meaning to the process of cultivating farmlands with crops and vegetables or rearing livestock. Likewise, literature (e.g., Shylendra & Thomas, 1995; Arteymyan, 2015) defines non-farm activities as non-agricultural activities like mining, manufacturing, trading, business, or official government jobs and services. These studies also mention that the non-farm activities could be either wage-based or regular salary-based. Likewise, the non-farm activities could be those economic activities that

are performed in the native place or outside through seasonal or sometimes permanent migration. In the same way, this study considers non-farm activities to those activities which are performed outside the periphery of agriculture. These include works from official table work, service sector to manufacturing and industries or even land-use apart from cultivation, i.e. giving land on lease, selling the land and so on.

Another important term used in the study is the semi-urban area. It simply refers to partly rural and partly urban areas. Meeus and Gulinck (2008) define the semi-urban area as the area that is in the transition phase between rural and urban areas. The authors further highlight that, as a result of urbanization, the rural place is converted into urban centers having distinct features of economy, development and livelihood. In this course, the places first remain in the transition phase called a semi-urban area. In semi-urban areas basically, the return from the urban type of land use is equal to the traditional land use (Meeus & Gulinck, 2008). In the same way, the term semi-urban area in this study refers to the area which is transforming from rural to urban area. The occupation, source of income, livelihood style, and social values are gradually changing from traditional rural to modern urban types.

### **Occupational Shift: The Basic Concept**

The mobility of people from one occupation to another is generally understood as occupational shift. ILO (2006) says that the occupational shift from farm to the non-farm sector is considered as a normal trend in the development process of a country. It has described this process of transition from farm to non-farm employment as a consequence of industrialization (ILO, 2006). This shift is also defined as a natural phenomenon, the change in society since human evolution (Volti, 2012). The history itself vividly speaks about this shift from agriculture to industry and then to

the service sector, i.e., agricultural society to an industrial one and then the modern society.

### **Occupational Shift: A Global Trend**

Any literature based on development history suggests occupational shift is a natural process of economic development. The root cause for such transition varies with countries. Somewhere, industrialization acts as a drawing element of farm labor to other diversified productive sectors (Murata, 2008). Meanwhile, in the United States of America, advancement in technology and information employed farm employees to non-farm employment. Likewise, in countries like Bhutan, Pakistan, Thailand, India, education seemed to be the driving force of non-farm employment (Rahut et al., 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2015). This means occupational shift occurs primarily because of the economic development resulting from several associated events like technological advancement, industrialization, agricultural mechanization and so on.

In many cases, fostering agricultural productivity inevitably led to industrial growth (Ghimire, 2016). Production of raw materials to run agro-based industries, income source to invest in industrial development through the export of agricultural products, surplus food to feed urban workers and through many other ways, agriculture can support industrial growth (FAO, 2017). This reflects the farm economy and non-farm economy naturally sustain each other during the process of economic development

### **Occupational Shift: The Experience of Nepal**

Nepal has also experienced a labor shift from agriculture to other sectors over time. The structural transformation of labor from agriculture to other sectors is well-defined by the share of the population involved in agriculture versus other sectors.

The share of the agriculture population in Nepal declined from 76.1% in 1998/98 to 73.9% in 2008 and further to 66% in 2017/18 (ILO, 2010; CBS, 1999; ILO, 2019). Meanwhile, these reports showed the percent share of the population in the non-agricultural sector increased from 26.3% in 2008 to 34% in 2017/18. This shows an increasing process trend of an occupational shift in Nepal.

The characteristic of the occupational shift in Nepal is different from that of global development history. It is neither true that the agriculture productivity of Nepal has fostered well enough to support industrial growth via raw materials and surplus labor supply, nor has it sufficiently developed its industrial sector to attract labor. Achieving an average agricultural GDP growth rate of 2.9% in ten years of period (MOF, 2015) is not worth the efforts invested. Likewise, commercialization and agricultural mechanization is a new topic in Nepal. Nepalese agriculture possesses only 4% of commercialized farmers with big land holdings (2 hectares or more) and only 52% of farmers throughout the nation possess the most basic equipment (CBS, 2011). Despite functioning as a primary economic sector of the nation, agricultural productivity is declining with time. The percentage of population shifting to the non-farm sector is increasing but its economic growth over the last decade is only 5% (MOF, 2020). In fact, industrialization is occurring sluggishly. Contributing only 14.3% to national GDP (MOF, 2019) does not reflect the Nepalese industries to have followed world economic history. Thus, the prime cause of the occupational shift from the agricultural sector seems to be indistinguishable in the Nepalese context. Nepal's occupational shift is influenced more by socio-cultural, economic and technological aspects as several studies claimed. These three aspects have been elaborated on further.

### **Socio-cultural Aspect of Occupational Shift**

The occupation of people is aligned with their social life which is ultimately guided by prevailing values and norms of society. Education remained one such changing agent generating new social norms and values in Nepali society. When there was a lack of formally educated people till a few decades ago, getting government jobs was quite easy for most of the educated people in Nepal. Such jobs were table works; less laborious than agricultural works and at the same time considered as the symbol of power and prestige by the society (Bista, 1991). Thus, despite the government's intention to give school education was guided by development agendas and making people literate (Bhatta, 2009; NPC, 1980), the general people understood it differently. People, in general, were not happy with their traditional occupation such as agriculture which needed hardship of labor. So, for people, schooling meant occupational mobility from their traditional, manual and hard type of physical work to non-manual and easy table work (Shrestha, 1998).

The country for the last couple of decades has experienced permanent rural to urban migration of its formally qualified educated people. Such practices have developed a social belief among Nepali youth that agriculture is a job of uneducated and unskilled people (Paudel et al., 2014). Not only limited to formally qualified educated people but the scenario trend of migration has also been accelerated among youth as well, seeking different facilities such as education, health, employment and ultimately a better lifestyle. In this process, many youths of the country, at present, migrated for foreign employment. This has hampered the agriculture profession in two ways. First, such a process of migration has left very few people (old-aged and children), living in villages. On the other hand, it has led to the vanishing of the agriculture profession in villages with increased abandoned land in the country

(Subedi & Dhital, 2007). It is because the subsistence agricultural system of Nepal, requiring a high number of human laborers and with year-long works on the farm is facing a labor shortage. In addition, foreign employment has developed a new fashion in society. The spouses in foreign employment would send the remittances to the family while the counterpart runs their livelihood from that money.

All these emerging new social values and cultures have caused the occupational shift in Nepal from agriculture to non-agriculture sectors. So as Seddon et al. (1998) argues, Nepal is moving towards urbanization and monetization as reinforced by economic globalization and market enforcement (as cited in Paudel et al., 2014). This process has greater implications in terms of changing agro-based land use, livelihood and occupational shift.

### **Economic Aspect of Occupational Shift**

Agriculture has been considered as primary economic sector followed by industry or manufacturing as secondary and service sector as tertiary one in Nepal since long ago. However, facts and figures reflect the declining productivity of the primary sector. Having covered around 70-80% share in national GDP during the 1970s/80s, agriculture employed more than 80% population in the nation. This, over time, came down to 27% in 2019/20 (MOF, 2020; ILO, 2010). Meanwhile, the share of non-agricultural sectors in GDP raised remarkably, i.e. from 15% from secondary and 52% from tertiary in 2008 to 13.7% from secondary and 58.1% from the tertiary sector in 2017/18 (MOF, 2020; ILO, 2010). This shows the structural transformation in the economy, gaining higher contribution from the tertiary (service) sector compared to the primary economic sector for two decades. At the same time, the unstable and immature industrial sector of Nepal has forced the laborers to shift from agriculture to foreign employment. This is not only supporting national income

through remittance inflow but the economic survey 2018/19 reports it to hold a large share in GDP for the last ten years i.e. 27.7% (MOF, 2019). This is the current scenario in Nepal, also a part of the global village.

Several studies conducted in Nepal (Poudel, 2016; Paudel et al., 2014; KC & Race, 2019; GC & Hall, 2020) explored lists of economic issues responsible for the occupational shift from farm to non-farm employment. With time, people are looking forward to having a better lifestyle with high income, and better employment. In contrast, Nepalese agriculture is still at the subsistence level with low productivity and poor economic return [Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2019]. The ancestral practice of *Adhiya*<sup>4</sup>, Barter system still has some effect in today's rural areas (Chaudhary, 2018), due to which landless laborers working on the farms of landowners have to pay half to their owners or receive food grains and other kinds instead of return in cash.

Most of the cases of an occupational shift in Nepal mentioned agriculture as an unrewarding profession. With the high cost of production incurred, the return on investment of labor and other inputs were substantially lower and worthless of their effort (Chaudhary, 2018; Gauchan, 2008; Paudel et al., 2014). The fashion of working in India during the off-season also became popular among poor farmers, as an option to sustain their livelihood (Chaudhary, 2018). However, this was not a credible source of revenue for Nepalese farmers. Consequently, while people started to look for an alternative source of income, they found non-farm employment to have high productivity and worthy return in cash (Chaudhary, 2018; Gauchan, 2008; Paudel et al., 2014), that could permit them to live the lifestyle they always dreamed of.

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<sup>4</sup> Adhiya is the system practiced in Nepal where agricultural products produced by people cultivating land are shared on equal proportion with land owners



### **Technical Aspect of Occupational Shift**

Tracing back to the history of Nepalese agriculture, it is quite obvious that agriculture has always been the mainstay of people. Despite this dependency in agriculture, it has not been able to rise to a commercial level from traditional subsistence farming (Poudel, 2016). It is also true that agro-industrialization and mechanization are lagging far behind. During 2010/11, there were 52% of the population possessing only basic agricultural tools like a plough. Among this, 1% own thresher, 1% own their tractors and power tillers while only 33% population use bins and containers for storing their products (CBS, 2011). Likewise, the report also highlighted an insignificant increase in total irrigated land of the country within seven years period, i.e. from 54.3% in 2003/04 to 54.4% in 2010/11 (CBS, 2011). National level reports/documents have shown many similar statuses.

There are also many technical issues explored from individual case studies. In addition to low technology integration in agriculture, people mentioned poor infrastructural and marketing issues. Problems such as lack of quality seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation facilities, followed by the poor farmer to the market linkage, unrealistic price-fixing mechanism, low return and untimely payment to farmers were pointed out by most of the people who moved away from farm employment (DOA, 2018; ADB, 2019). On top of this, they have also informed many villages of hills and mountains to have no access to road and transportation facilities to transport their products. Likewise, a gradual wipe out of indigenous knowledge on farming, poor training and skill-enhancing programs in the nation are pushing people away from the agricultural sector (Subedi & Dhital, 2007; Poudel, 2016). People in Nepal are not experiencing enabling environment to take agriculture as their occupation due to the aforementioned technical hurdles.

## **Research Gap**

While reviewing relevant literature related to occupational shift, it has revealed that studies have focused on exploring economic and technical factors responsible for the occupational shift. Most of these studies are conducted at the macro level and very few are opinion-based. But no studies are found to be a concerning study about the phenomenon of occupational shift at the micro-level. It is important to explore how individuals understand the occupational shift and what triggers them to take this decision. Thus, my research is focused on understanding people's perceptions and their experience of occupational shift.

### **Theoretical Lens to View Occupational Shift**

Based on my experience and brief literature review on the occupational shift from the agricultural sector to other sectors, I see the phenomenon explained by the economic and social aspects of modernization theory.

The economic growth theory developed during the 1950s and 1960s explaining the process of modernization believes that when societies move to transition from traditional societies to modern societies, they would follow a similar path. Among these theories the W. A. Lewis' theory explains how the shifting labor happens from the traditional sector to the modern ones due to the dualistic nature of the economy. According to this theory, the underdeveloped economy is buildup of two sectors: the traditional sector and the modern sector. The old, overpopulated rural sustenance sector has nil marginal productivity of labor whereas the modern city industrial sector has high productivity (Todaro, 1977). Thus there is a tendency of gradual transfer of surplus labor from the traditional agriculture sector to the modern industrial sector (Ranis, 2004). This shift continues till the productivity of both sectors

equates. The globalization process, the distinct feature of modernization, has further accelerated the speed of occupational shift from the agriculture sector to other sectors.

As an expansion of the Lewis model, the phenomenon has also been applied to labor movements across countries in today's liberal economic world (Ranis, 2004). The accelerated globalization process has speeded up the shift of labor from the agriculture sector to other sectors. According to Rivera-Batiz (2010), globalization is understood as the increasing interdependency of the world's economies, values, and populations where exchange in goods and services, technology and information among nations not only lead to the development of other sectors but also allow free labor movement from one nation to another.

From a sociological perspective, modernization is linked to an overarching process of rationalization. It is the process of replacement of existing culture, values, and sentiments based on rationality and reason (Todaro, 1977). As a society experiences modernization, the importance of individual increases which eventually establishes individual as the fundamental unit of society over family or community. In this process of people give high value to white-collar jobs rather than traditional ones. Consequently, it has a greater influence on the occupational shift. For example, the occupational shift from the agriculture sector was highly influenced due to the educational attainment by general people (Shrestha, 1998; Bista, 1991). This eventually, changed people's values of life from subsistence livelihood to life with power and prestige.

Another important idea that could explain the gradual occurrence of this phenomenon is the "Theory of structuration" proposed by Anthony Giddens (Ritzer, 2000). It argues that any social phenomenon is a result of interaction between the structure and the agency. According to this theory, the structure creates agents and the

existence of these agents depends on reproducing the rules. Again these reproductions form the structure of some rules which the agents not only recognize but follow as the rules of the society (Best, 2003). It means any practice of the society is the continuation of interaction between structure and agency. So, the phenomenon of occupational shift could be the result of interaction between individuals and their society. Thus, society motivates individuals for occupational shifts and such practices made by individuals to make this phenomenon a rule for the everyday life of human beings accepted and practiced by individuals consciously or unconsciously (Best, 2003). Such interactions between individuals and the structure of the society make the occupational shift a permanent phenomenon of society.

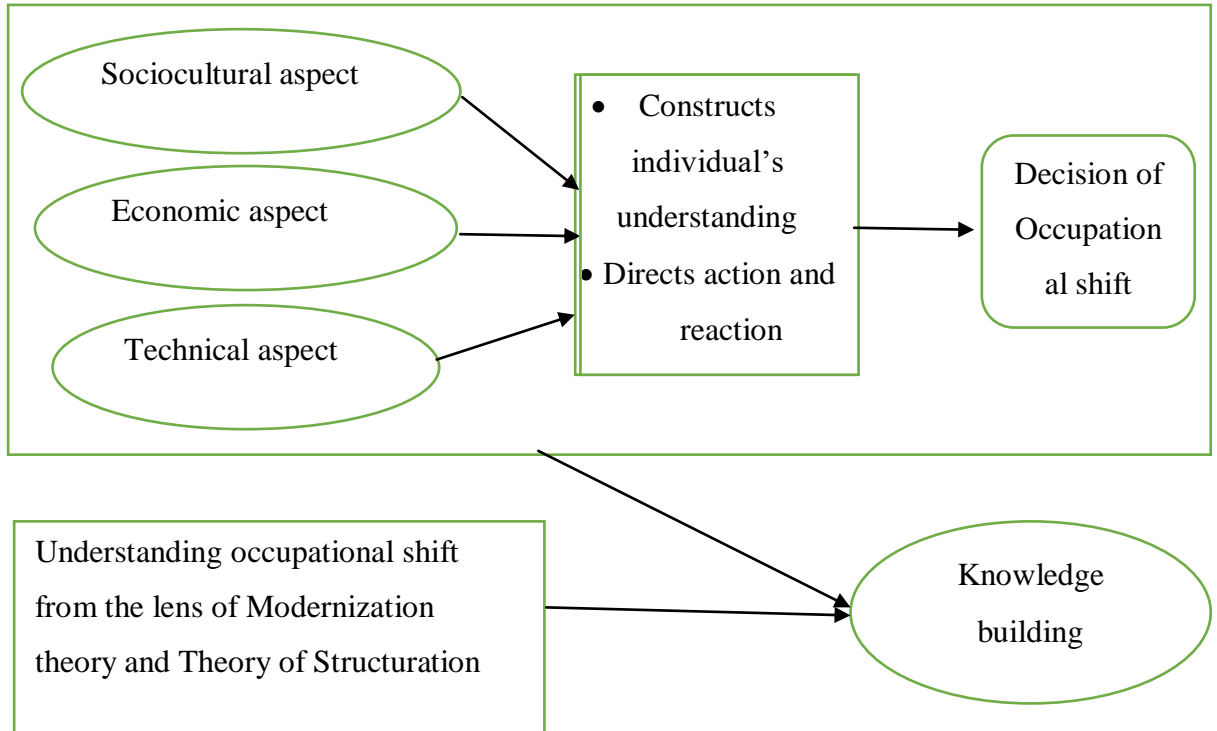
The findings from the study are analyzed from two perspectives — macro and micro perspectives. The changes in values to occupation established in the society are associated with the macro aspect while the action and reaction of individuals towards the change and their construction of mindset towards it are under micro perspective. This ultimately appears useful to explain how the occupational shift continues due to the interaction of individuals made towards the structure of society.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Based on insights from the reviewed literature, I have figured out three major influencing issues behind the occupational shift. Changes and crises brought about by socio-cultural aspects, economic aspects and technical causes are responsible for building a different perception about agriculture. Then their action to this understanding and reaction to their situations, they end up shifting from agriculture to non-agricultural occupations. The phenomenon of occupational shift is explained in the light of modernization theory. And the participants' experience is analyzed embedding Gidden's theory of structuration. These ultimately help me develop

knowledge on occupational shifts. This theme is presented below as the conceptual framework of my study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter critically examined the relevant literature and theories related to the phenomenon of occupational shift. After building the foundation knowledge on the issue and identifying a suitable theory to support the study, I entered the third chapter. Here, I explained the overall process of conducting my study. The research aims to understand the occupational shift of people from agriculture to non-farm sectors in semi-urban areas adopting the narrative inquiry within qualitative research approach. After stating my philosophical position in the research and the rationale behind selecting the qualitative method, I explained my research approach and data collection procedures and techniques in this chapter. In addition, I shared my strategy how I maintained the quality standards and research ethics throughout the study.

#### **Guiding Philosophy of My Research: Qualitative Inquiry with Interpretivism**

Since the main purpose of my research was to understand the individual's experiences and their meanings of the occupational shift from agriculture to non-farm occupation, I adopted a qualitative research design with an interpretive paradigm. I supposed that individuals around semi-urban areas have different kinds of experience on the occupational shift from agricultural to non-agricultural sectors that construct their realities behind their decision of occupational shift. Hence, I adopted a qualitative inquiry that believes in multiple realities (Kim, 2016) that are constructed in human minds through the interaction of people throughout. It means the reality

about the reason for an occupational shift for one participant may not be true for another participant.

Litchman (2013) highlights the purpose of interpretive inquiry in describing, understanding and interpreting the experience, perception and interaction of people. As I intended to understand the individual story of my participants, rather than generalizing the truth about the occupational shift, I used the interpretive research paradigm (Walliman, 2011) and my role was to make a reflective understanding (Lichtman, 2013) on participants' experiences. It means my role was to reflect the realities about occupational shift through participants' eyes rather than from my eyes (Cohen et al., 2018). In the process of interpreting people's meanings and experiences on the issue, as an interpretive researcher, I considered the process of the occupational shift as a subjective phenomenon where the peoples' contexts influenced their actions, reactions and interactions (Kim, 2016). The interpretive research paradigm enables researchers to build rich local understandings of the life-world experiences in context-specific areas (Taylor & Medina, 2011). It means, adopting this paradigm, I understood the reactions of people on the process of occupational shift which were different for different participants as their background, family culture, value and beliefs were different from one another. This paradigm, I found appropriate for my research as my primary concern was to generate context-based people's understandings, thoughts, beliefs, values associated with their social actions of occupational shifts (Taylor et al., 2009). Because of peoples' subjective realities, I found social aspects as guiding elements for the occupational shift for some participants while it was economic aspect for some others.

### **Narrative Inquiry as Approach of Research**

Narrative inquiry facilitated me to understand how the meaning and interpretations were made by the participants based on the lived and told stories and the talk about the stories (Cohen et al., 2018) of research participants. This approach helped me to understand the contextual and individual meaning of occupational shift based on the life and livelihoods-related stories of my research participants in that specific context.

As a fundamental component of narrative inquiry defined by Clandinin and Huber (2010), I gave attention to temporality (the past, present and future) of people, places, things and events; sociality (both personal conditions and, simultaneously, to social conditions) of research participants and places where the series of events those were taken place while listening, understanding and interpreting the participant's meaning towards their occupational shift (Kim, 2016). While doing this, I made a 'thick description' (Brewer, 2000) of about occupational shift of my research participants to represent their real voices and experiences by capturing their lived experiences. In this process, I described their voices, feelings, actions, and interactions that were observed in the field.

I used the narrative inquiry approach not only in the data collection phase but also in the analysis as well. I started the interview by letting them tell their stories from past to present in chronological order putting those events in order. However, I faced always a problem to make their flow chronologically. They would emphasize the events again and again from which they were much affected.

### **Research Site and Research Participants**

The northern part of the Kathmandu Valley was my research site, especially two localities; one from Gokarneshwor and another from Kageswori Manohara



municipality. The rationale behind choosing these areas was the special characteristics of the nature of these places. Gokarneshwor municipality experienced a rapid occupational shift from agriculture to non-farm sectors in the last two decades.

A few decades ago, the main occupation of this area was agriculture. Today, probably very few are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Now, except in one or two pocket areas, there is almost no farmland. Kageswori Manohara municipality is following a similar path. The difference is that it is just about one decade back. Since my entire childhood was spent in these two areas, I experienced and observed the general socio-economic transformation that happened in society in more detail.

In these, presently semi-urban areas, I talked to eight participants in the first round who shifted their occupation from farm agriculture to non-farm sectors. Later, I selected only four of them purposefully for detailed interaction because they had long experiences of shifting livelihood practices with different life stories. These participants, I realize, provided me rich information. Theoretically speaking, selecting a few or even a single unit is sufficient in qualitative research to understand the worldview of people on certain issues (Neuman, 2006). Thus, I confined my interaction only with these four research participants. Here, my primary purpose of selecting the participants for narrative inquiry research was to listen to their stories and deepen the understanding of the occupational shift rather than making the samples representative as in quantitative research. The stories of these four people adequately served me to address my research questions and to understand the phenomena of an occupational shift in the research area. Likewise, the selection of both male and female participants also remained meaningful for me as the decision-making process

was different for these two genders. I have detailed the background of my participants in the following section.

### **Kanchha Magar**

Kanchha is a 45-year-old male participant in my study. He is a permanent residence of Gokarneshwor municipality, Aryal *Gaun*. His grandfather migrated to the place without even a single penny in the name of the property. But today, his family is considered as one of the well-to-do families in society. His grandfather added up all the property by himself, taking agriculture as an occupation. He added land as his property and also by his father by working as an overseer in a construction company. His mother passed away five years ago. The two brothers divided their ancestral property. His father is living with his family in a two-storied concrete house. He completed his education up to tenth grade, so by profession, he is a manager at a carwash company. However, there are other sources of earning as well such as land on lease, rented house, etc.

### **Suntali Bhauju**

My second participant is a 75 years old lady, who lives with her daughter-in-law and grandchildren in Gokarneshwor municipality, Aryal *Gaun*. According to her, the family had only a two-storied raw mud house with a small shed when she came to this place, after her marriage. For owing no land at all, they worked as *Mohi*<sup>5</sup> for others. Their source of livelihood was agriculture as well. Besides cultivating the earned land, they also went to *mela*<sup>6</sup> and *Parma*<sup>7</sup> in the farms of the landowners. Her husband worked as a peon in the army office for 30 years and got promoted to

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<sup>5</sup> Mohi is the practice of doing agricultural production in the fields of where the producers need to pay certain amount to landlords. After certain years of cultivating the field, they owe half the ownership of that landholdings.

<sup>6</sup> Mela is the practice of working in others agricultural field as a paid labor.

<sup>7</sup> Parma is the practice of exchanging farm labor with each other in a society.

*hawaldar*<sup>8</sup> five years before his retirement. Among her three children, two daughters are married and got settled; his younger son died six months ago because of overconsumption of alcohol. Today, her daughter-in-law works as a helper in a departmental store, her grandson is an Australian PR holder. She is enjoying her husband's pension for the last 15 years. She no more works in the field because the landlords took his land back. Going to *mela/parma* is out of the question because her family feels humiliated when she goes to work. So, she sits idle at home all day long. However, society now considers them as middle-class families.

### **Master Babu**

Master Babu is the third participant of my study from Kageswori Manohara municipality. He is a 68-year-old male participant who looks tall and bold. Despite his white hair, he looks quite young and energetic. He lives with his wife in his newly constructed three-storied concrete house. All his four children (three daughters and one son) are married. His son lives in the USA with his family. Although his parents were agriculturists, Master Babu got engaged in the teaching profession for 50 years. He does not completely enjoy his retired life (retired from headmaster position), because he is still a campus chief in one of the government colleges nearby. Besides this, he also earns by leasing his property for several purposes. Thus, his family is considered as one of the well-settled families in society.

### **Bhagyashali**

Bhagyashali is a 52-year-old female participant from Kageswori Manohara municipality. She belongs to a high-class family in her society because her husband is a minister. Her husband is often in the central office ministers' quarter; so, she lives with her in-laws in a joint family, i.e. with brother-in-law's family. Her mother-in-law

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<sup>8</sup> Hawaldar is a non-commissioned officer in police or army which is equivalent in rank to sergeant.

passed away a month ago. The family was involved in agricultural activities until recently, but now they have given their land on lease. By profession, Bhagyashali is engaged in teaching and is also a board member of that boarding school. She was also an entrepreneur owning a tailor shop for the last 20 years. Now, she is only in the teaching profession. However, due to her interest in agriculture, she maintained a very green and organic kitchen garden around her house.

### **Field Engagement**

To understand the phenomenon of an occupational shift in my research site, I engaged in the field with two main strategies of data collection. In addition to the in-depth interview, I also made observations on participants' day-to-day lives, behavior and surroundings. In the process of data collection, I shared my background as well as interview purpose with research participants to build trust and also encourage the participants to open up (Neuman, 2006). This helped me to get closer with the participants and acquire the required information from them effectively.

### **In-depth Interview Sessions**

In-depth interview was my main strategy for collecting research participants' views and experiences on occupational shift to acquire detailed information from them through probing questions (Walliman, 2011). Since I aimed to bring out the life events and experiences of the participants; so, I adopted the life story protocol (Flick, 2018). Through this strategy, I got my participants to narrate their stories of past and present with future possibilities. While conducting an in-depth interview with my research participants, I always adopted an informal conversation strategy (Neuman, 2006) to explore the participants' meanings and their actions regarding occupational shifts. I consulted three times with each of my research participants. On the first visit, I simply introduced myself, my research, their background and their quick perceptions

on the issue. I also took their time for the second visit. Based on these preliminary ideas, I thought about the broad themes and guidelines in my mind and developed an open interview guideline with broader themes of conversation for in-depth interviews along with possible probing questions (Cohen et al., 2018). However, I interactively interviewed them. My probing questions were generally based on the views expressed by them.

The first two round meetings were conducted physically. These visits were made from February to March 2021, just after slackening the first wave of the pandemic of Covid 19. After two visits to each of my research participants, I started to analyze the data by interpreting the meaning of their individual stories on their occupational shift. This interpretation was followed by my reflection on their understanding of the issue. While analyzing those data I explored several unclear statements they made. In some cases, besides making some statements, I realized that I did not ask about their particular experiences on those. I made notes on all those insufficiencies of information and went for a third visit. However, I interviewed them over the telephone in my third round (Cohen et al., 2018). This was during May and June of 2021. Thus, the process of my data collection was a circular and iterative process (Walliman, 2011).

I recorded especially the interview that was made at the second visit with the research participants in a recording device which I transcribed before analyzing the data. However, I simply noted down the first and third interviews only in my notebook. As the third interview was conducted over the telephone, I did not feel comfortable making a record of it. Furthermore, I had to postpone three weeks for the third interview with one of my research participants because she lost her mother-in-law. Thus, I waited till the situation became normal to her.

## **Observation**

Another technique for my data collection was observation. I tried to get close with my participants getting along with their daily activities or involving in their informal conversation as a part of observation (Flick, 2018). It was instrumental to know my participants' way of expression, emotion while responding to my questions and also their regular activities and interaction with family members. In many cases the gestures of my participants, their eye expressions were different from their words (Walliman, 2011) and I found them helpful to know their real feelings regarding the issues, any related life events, or their perception of family members or society based on similar concerns.

## **Narrative Analysis and Use of Theory**

Transcribing the recorded data was the starting point of my data analysis work. The transcribed data were first put in a matrix and then organized into different themes through the process of coding (Flick, 2018). Then the data were presented based on the different experiences of research participants. The coding method helped me reduce my detail field data into meaningful segments and such segments were merged to make border categories. Then these broader categories were used as the themes of the analysis. While analyzing the field data, I also used the reflective note that I prepared during the field visits. I found this strategy very useful to explain the participant's experience from my perspective.

The purpose of the data analysis was not only to understand what was happened to the research participants but also to communicate the essence of this to others (Willis, 2007). Since my source of information was the narration of participants to understand the phenomenon of occupation shift, I made my best effort in describing the context and the background of my research participants. The rationale behind this

was to make my reader able to visualize the situation of participants. After understanding the participant's different meanings of occupational shift for them I discussed those findings with the help of other literature and in the light of some established theory. As Kim (2016) suggests, I used different theories to explain human action in certain issues more broadly. In this regard, I used the modernization theory, rational choice theory and theory of structuration to analyze the meaning and experience of research participants. Indeed, I found the action of different participants' in line with the insights that I got from the theories discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Quality Standards of the Research**

Credibility is the quality measure of qualitative research (Walliman, 2011). I maintained credibility during the research process with varieties of strategies. Interviewing research participants more than a single time, making oneself seriously involved in the work, analysis discussing with the help of literature, etc. were some of my efforts to maintain the credibility and authenticity of this research. Likewise, I maintained the quality of my data by capturing the participants' interpretations regarding occupational shift phenomena accurately without distortion (Willis, 2007). For this, I also adopted the strategy of member checking (Lichtman, 2013). For that, after every new statement shared by my research participants, I used to confirm my understanding of whether the same was true.

To maintain the quality standard of the research, I adopted three strategies 'reflexivity', 'dependability' and 'transferability' (Taylor & Medina, 2011). Regarding the strategy of reflexivity, I wrote my understanding as soon as the interview was completed reflecting their contexts and actions. However, reflections were made based on my identity, contextual positionality and practices (Cohen et al.,

2018). I was aware that my background would influence the meaning-making and research findings regarding the occupational shifts. So, wherever possible, I presented my background as well related to the research topics and research area to help my reader to understand the meaning and reflection on participants' experiences and narrations.

Likewise, to maintain dependability as a component of the credibility of research (Willis, 2007), I tried to maintain consistency in the research from conceptualizing the study to collecting the data and from interpreting the findings to reporting the results. In addition, I presented the clear logic behind each research process adopted such as selecting the participants and events to observe and interviews during the research process.

In the same way, I was aware of transferability, another criterion of quality standard of qualitative research (Kim, 2016). So, I provided a rich description of the research participants, the background of the participants relating to their views and the social context of the research areas so that my readers could compare their social context with the social setting of the research.

### **Research Ethics**

There were various ethical considerations to be made while conducting research. In principle, both the researcher and the participants benefit from the research but it was difficult to convince how research participants would get the benefit for this research. During the process of rapport building, I convinced them that, at least, they would not get any harm from this and I would not misuse those data. In addition to the 'no harm principle,' I adopted other research ethics such as 'informed consent, 'privacy and confidentiality (Flick, 2018), and 'relational ethics' (Litchman, 2013) during the participant's interviews.



**Informed Consent**

I honestly informed my participants clearly about my background and purpose of interaction with them (Flick, 2018). Likewise, I always asked for their consent to converse and to record their voices. I told them that they could leave the interview at any point if they found it inconvenient to them.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

I also maintained anonymity and confidentiality (Walliman, 2011) of participants' names, and information, etc. Not only during the interview but I maintained it reporting the research as well. I used the pseudo names of my research participants to maintain the privacy of their personal stories and experience.

**Relational Ethics**

Relational ethics is the action ethics that is seen explicitly within the interpersonal relationship. To bring ethics into practice, I always respected their opinions and I never made fun of or showing them/their culture inferior (Cohen et al., 2018). During the interview, though I found some ridiculous ideas from my research participants, I never reacted showing them inferior for those ideas. Neither, I expressed such ideas anywhere even in their absence. Rather I understood how such ideas were possible to construct in their minds.

## CHAPTER IV

### OCCUPATIONAL SHIFT: COERCION TO CHOICE

The previous chapter discussed the overall methodological procedures carrying out this study. In this chapter, I presented the major findings obtained by conducting the field study. Following few rounds of interviews with my participants, I developed two major themes from my study. Thus, my chapters were organized based on different themes that emerged in the process of analysis. Addressing both the research questions of my study, I mentioned the stories of my participants who shifted away from agricultural occupation to other sectors because of their decision of choosing economically rational and productive options in life. Here, I detailed out several life events of my participants that were forced them to choose options other than agriculture.

#### **Agriculture in Past: The Last Choice**

A big stomach bumping out through his tight jersey, splashes of muddy water in his branded Adidas shorts, hands full of dirt from car wheel, and holding a glass of water in his right hand, I met my first participant Kanchha Magar when he just came out of his car wash company. Yes, he was currently managing a car wash company after leaving his agricultural occupation. He felt that agriculture was always a compulsion rather than a choice to him as well as to his forefathers. He took the hardship borne by his grandparents more like a curse of depending on agriculture for survival. Kanchha Magar was the youngest son in his family. Being the only son of his grandparents, his father got all the 17 *ropanis* of land from them. Before that, his grandparents solely handled all the lands without even hiring farm laborers. “*On top of cultivating our land, my grandparents went to mela/parma as well. They had to*

*complete our farm work within night time so that there would be enough time to go for mela during daytime”*, said Mr. Magar with unhidden pain in his face. (Kanchha Magar, February 22, 2021)

During the 1990s, around the time of Kanchha’s grandparents, agriculture was the main and only source of their livelihood. Kanchha along with his mother and three siblings (one brother and two sisters) lived with his grandparents at the house. His grandparents and mother spent their entire lives in the field; they never stayed at home. His place which looks now full of concrete buildings had all green paddy fields just 10 years ago. People worked in fields day and night to earn their livelihood. Meanwhile, his father was always outside of the home, working as an overseer in a construction company in Karnali. Even around the time of 2030s BS, his father never got an experience of a farmer’s life. Kanchha and his siblings were the ones who took care of all the household chores and livestock. Even rearing livestock was a compulsion for him as they had to manage time to completely handle livestock besides attending school the whole day. He almost burst into tears while narrating his tough, laborious and pathetic childhood days. So, he always envied his father for being engaged in non-farm activities, that he had a much easier job than a farmer. So, at present, he is engaged in non-agricultural occupation and earns his livelihood through several sources (such as house rent, land on lease, renting *taharas* built on cultivable land, etc.), other than agriculture.

While narrating the history of his family, Kanchha frequently gave the notion that involving in agriculture was the only choice they had. They had quite big landholdings which were all cultivable, sufficient agriculture-related skills to grow crops and all the resources favored to be into agriculture. Most people like his grandparents and mother were not formally educated and they did not have exposure

to learning skills besides traditional agricultural skills. So, people were compelled to be into agriculture due to a lack of other opportunities in society. I could sense that every word of Kanchha detained the guilt of not having an educated member in the family, which ultimately left them no other option than working as farm laborers. Despite depending completely on agriculture for survival, Kanchha's experience signified that the society did not recognize the value of agricultural occupation even in his grandparent's time. This ultimately forced Kanchha to take his or his forefather's engagement in farm occupation as the last option they could make.

Although people in the 1990s did not have access to modern tools and technologies, modern practices and ideas, I must say, the environment then was supportive of doing agriculture. People could get farm laborers easily because all the family members worked in the field and mostly hiring separate labor was not necessary. I sensed such a scenario from the explanation of my participant, Suntali Bhauju. An old lady, who was leaning against the wall and talking in low voice due to diarrhea and physical weakness, her energy instantly got revived when she remembered her youth days. She explains with huge satisfaction in her voice, "*I am so proud to say that my elder daughter could do all the agricultural tasks just at the age of ten years.*" They even worked in a barter system for each other within the society. So, the cost of labor during production was almost nil as they exchanged labor and sometimes with food and grains. Likewise, the climate was favorable and stable for cultivation. Pulling her saree up to her knees, *Suntali Bhauju* expressed in a loud voice,

*Water in paddy fields at that time used to be filled up to our knees and we did not have to worry about irrigation. I alone used to produce tons of vegetables*

*like Newars<sup>9</sup> in Bode<sup>10</sup> and make money out of it. But now, mother earth looks so thirsty, everything is dried up, there is no rainfall at all for six months.*

(Suntali Bhauju, February 24, 2021)

So, easy farm labor availability without any cost, supportive climate to cultivate fields was some a boon in terms of the resource for agriculture. Despite having such high potentiality, it did not seem to be productive to people during the past.

*Despite growing so many grains and crops, our fate only allowed us to eat dhido<sup>11</sup> and save rice for selling. And that paddy never got the price we demanded; it used to be collected by collection centers in Bode and we had to accept whatever little they offered us.* (Kanchha Magar, February 22, 2021)

The pain in his eyes and furious looks on his face while describing his family's way of earning from the agricultural transaction in the past vividly revealed that agriculture was more like an obligation to people rather than their choice.

A very beaming face, active and energetic, keeping agriculture as one of her hobbies, Bhagyashali is another participant in the story. Bhagyashali is the wife of a minister from Bagmati province. She lives in a joint family with her in-laws. She is the younger daughter-in-law of the two sons of her in-laws. Continuing tailoring for the last 20 years, she shifted to teaching which she had been doing for the past eight years. At the time of data collection, she was the board member of that school.

Although she was passionate about agricultural works, she did not want to take it as her source of livelihood. When I reached her place on a Monday morning, in

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<sup>9</sup> Newars are the native ethnic group of Kathmandu valley from ancient time. They are known for doing business in Kathmandu.

<sup>10</sup> Bode is one of the places in Bhaktapur. It is famous for growing and selling fresh green vegetables and grains all over the Kathmandu Valley.

<sup>11</sup> Dhido is a kind of pudding prepared mostly from maize flour. In Nepal people also make it from finger millet and buckwheat

scorching heat at around 11 am, she was working with the manure she prepared from biodegradable household wastes. She had not yet taken her lunch due to her engagement in that work. Her interest in agriculture was reflected through the green and attractive kitchen garden full of seasonal vegetables, fruits and marigold flowers along her verandah. But, she considered agriculture solely could not sustain their livelihood. Back in the 1990s, her in-laws had the situation of depending totally upon agriculture for survival. Bhagyashali thought this was due to their situation of having the only option for earning rather than their choice. *“My in-laws were into agriculture just to cultivate the land and avoid the barrenness. If they had access to education, they would be involved in some better jobs”* (Bhagyashali, March 8, 2021). Her father-in-law could not acquire any sort of formal education because of losing his parents at an early age. Hence, he did not get the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge of other works and spent his entire life in agriculture.

The way Bhagyashali empathized with the fate of her in-laws for having no access to education and being forced to engage in agriculture also reflected how lucky she felt of a new generation in this context. Because now all the children in the family were settled abroad, brother in law and husband engaged in official work and she was a board member of a reputed school in Kathmandu. Even in this case, agriculture was just an option to manage their land and properties; not their choice. Despite having no education at all, her in-laws managed to educate all their five children. Just to see their children in the reputed and respected jobs, they tolerated all the hardship while earning from agriculture.

### **Investment in Agriculture: Low and Uncertain Return**

The life stories and experiences shared by my research participants made me realize that several economic issues were playing role in demotivating people to be

into agriculture. They moaned about so many bitter experiences and losses from agriculture which were discouraging for farmers.

A tall, smart-looking man, sitting on a wooden bench in a verandah and reading *The Himalayan Times*, Master Babu was waiting to receive me, when I first visited him. When I just sat beside him on the same bench, before entering the subject matter, he first wished me “Happy women’s Day.” Seeing him read an English newspaper, he wished me a happy women’s day and made me feel that he was up to date with the news, events, and all the things happening in and outside the nation because I forgot it was women’s day that day. He was a formally well-educated participant who was able to visualize profit and loss in any work. The experience of Master Babu comparing the cost of agricultural production in past and present was like a fairytale for me. In his childhood days during the 2020s, he claimed to have farm labor available for one whole day, just in exchange for one meal or some amount of grains. But now, they charge 1200-1500 rupees for men and 800 rupees for women laborers along with some tea and snacks, just for a day. Not only laborers, even the inputs and other resources were expensive. The return they get from agriculture was never worth making so much investment. He related the fact with his experience of doing terrace farming. He visited his son in the USA in 2070 BS (2013 AD), during his vacation. After observing native people in America facing tough times due to employment, earning, livelihood issues, he felt he was quite a rich guy from Nepal; he owned not less than 45 *ropanis* of land in Nepal, held the position of a headmaster in a campus. Then he felt he could utilize those lands and earn money or even give employment to people. So, after returning to Nepal from his two months-long tour, he started wheat farming in his terrace land at his place. He spent around 20,000 rupees

to cultivate wheat in a small plot of land. As a result, he grew three *muri*<sup>12</sup> of wheat worth rupees 6,000 in total. He felt it was impossible to sustain being a farmer in Nepal.

Likewise, the experience of my first participant Kanchha Magar was heart-wrenching. Due to a horrible work environment in a private car company, he decided to quit the job in 2059 BS, just after a year of recruitment. It was his first job in life so he explained to have entered the company with full energy and excitement to work. But dusting his dirty hands, he was trying to show me that similar kind or even more extreme hard work was assigned by his boss in the company. Despite doing such tough jobs sincerely, he never received his salary on time, got warned by the boss all the time, and never experienced a free and enabling environment to work peacefully. Kanchha, thus, felt that he was born to become an entrepreneur, rather than work under the supervision of someone. So, in 2059 BS, at the age of 28, he initiated commercial vegetable farming. For having no enough educational qualifications, he felt he could do something in agriculture with the little skills he learned from his grandparents by seeing them work in the field.

The initial period of 3-4 months of sowing vegetables was extremely intolerable for him. He was habituated to receiving a monthly salary from his previous job, but here he never got a single penny continuously for 3-4 months. He only invested around two lakhs and many resources without having an income. Right from the time he got off from his bed until the sunset in the evening, he spent his days on that farm with the hope of having good production. After lots of hard work, patience, and determination for such a long time when he took his products to market, the value

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<sup>12</sup> Muri is the measurement unit of agricultural products like grains. Approximately, 1 muri= 72 kgs.



of their product would already go down in the market. Counting in fingers, he started calculating the investment made.

*I invested around 10 rupees per cauliflower plant from sowing to harvesting. Among 1300 plants, I could save only around 1000 plants. Even if I grow 2kg of cauliflower I would get 40 rupees (being 20 rupees per kg). With the expectation of earning 30rs profit per plant, I was so excited to work.*

(Kanchha Magar, February 22, 2021)

His planning and estimations were so intense just to initiate a small-scale vegetable farm. But then, deeply exhaling breathe, he said, “*there is only loss*”. The value of their product was only around 15 rupees per kg when they offered around 45 rupees per kg for imported cauliflower. There was a separate cost for taking products to market. Residing in a semi-urban area, there was a lack of regular transportation. So, farmers like Kanchha had to take their products to market on their own.

After four months of investment, it was the month of *Poush*,<sup>13</sup> finally, it was the time to sell Kanchha’s products. One cold and foggy morning, he took around 15kgs of cauliflower to market in his motorcycle. On selling that big amount, he got only 1200 rupees from the market at that time. He was unable to bring back money home because he spent 800 rupees on mutton to feed his family and the remaining 400 rupees on fertilizer. He did not even have money to fill his fuel tank. Giving this example he was trying to reflect how low, unsure and fragmented the earning from agriculture was. He never received even 50000 rupees at once in his entire life being a farmer.

Bhagyashali pointing towards all her lands around her house from the window, she showed that they never received attractive earning or return from agriculture even

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<sup>13</sup> Poush is a month in Nepali calendar. It falls in winter season so usually comes during November December.

after investing high costs in production. Along with tremendous hard work, dedication determination, agriculture required high financial investment right from sowing to harvesting. Her family owns big properties and lands. Flat cultivable land of 12 *ropanis*, and terrace land suitable for legumes cultivation, of another 10-12 *ropanis* was no less area for a family. These lands only incurred big investments for cultivation, but their production was just enough to feed their family. Due to a lack of idea and access to essential techniques and technologies, her in-laws could not gain a good return from agriculture.

The next generation in their family was literate and well-known to the modern world. Realizing the fault in their parent's way of doing agriculture, they tried to correct it. Being an agricultural graduate, I could see how well-known they were to the modern tools and techniques. *"We started using chemical fertilizers, curative measures to plant diseases and deficiencies, tools and techniques like a tractor, irrigation, etc. Ultimately, it only required even big amount of money for production; the return was same; low and unsure"* (Bhagyashali, March 8, 2021). Her experiences and expressions on return from agriculture sounded demotivating.

The cost of production estimated and the return predicted from it by Master Babu, the bitter experience gained by Kanchha Magar from cauliflower production and the return received by Bhagyashali from the practice of costly and modern practices were not unsatisfying experiences to my participants. While listening to their stories, practices and context of those events, as an agricultural scientist, I could sense that the traditional ways of doing agriculture are still prevalent in society. Many people in the society who have their ancestral land and need to do some agricultural activities just to manage them (just like my participants) are still relying on the same traditional practices and tools. Employing manual labor rather than machines and

equipment is generally much costlier in today's context. I could not predict if they are unable to get access to modern practices or are unaware of them. This situation seems to be one of the issues behind gaining lower returns from the high cost of production.

### **Occupational Shift: Guided by the Changing Context**

The research participants explain that during their forefathers' time (around the 1990s), the skills, resources, ability and knowledge in people around the society, all favored them to be into agriculture. With time, people began to acquire skills, ideas and knowledge of another sector as well. Their narrations elaborated below support the phenomenon of occupational shift guided by the changing socio-economic context of society.

The phenomenal experience of changing the context behind having occupation shift was most prominently reflected again by my first participant, Kanchha Magar. Despite having big properties, lands, houses, livestock and money, his grandparents previously spent a life full of hardship and obstacles. The hard work of his grandparents was solely not enough to run their livelihood. They had to sell most of their food product and only they earned little to eat and survive. It was around the time in the 2030s BS that his father started working as an overseer. Being the only son, his grandparents managed to educate his father and encouraged him to work as an overseer. They also believed that working outside of the agricultural field could give respect, as well as a good income. Their thinking was made so due to the hard times and fewer earning opportunities they experienced from agriculture. When his father earned such a handsome amount from engaging in a construction company, Kanchha claimed to be attracted by the non-farm occupation. With eyes full of pride and joy at the same time, he said, *“my father's income was so supportive to run a household that, we got to experience better lifestyle after his job in an overseer*

*company*” (February 22, 2021, *Kanchha Magar*). Yes, they started to buy clothes twice a year, started to eat rice and live a better lifestyle. Kanchha believes that the occupation taken by his father was much easier and, in fact, more profitable than agriculture.

Kanchha’s family gradually deviated from agriculture, when they started exploring innovative ways of using their lands. Kanchha’s grandfather came without a penny to the place they are now. Doing little more hard work in the agricultural sector, he could earn whatever they possess now. During his period, Kanchha’s grandfather built a raw mud house. With time, his father got the opportunity to work in a more profitable sector, they believe. Then they sold their land to replace their raw muddy house with concrete buildings, some for ceremonies and occasions like marriages. They began to realize the way of having easy money from the lands they possessed. The overwhelming joy reflected in Kanchha’s eyes reflected that such use of their lands made their life full of happiness. Coming to the period of 2050s-70s BS, Kanchha explored even more profitable ways of land use. He seemed simply happy to count his monthly earning at present, after giving all of their lands on lease and so on. *“The lands where taharas are built now previously gave 3 muris paddy in a year during my grandfather’s period, worth rupees ten thousand. But now, it gives around one lakh rupees per month just by sitting at home”* (Kanchha Magar, February 22, 2021). He was continuously counting the earnings from his land, *“...car wash in 1.5 ropani of land, tahara in 3 ropani, 50-60 lakhs per aana<sup>14</sup> land if sold...”*, just then his wife entered with two vintage ceramic cups of coffee in a fancy glass tray for us. With a wide smile on her face, she offered us coffee and sat beside him. In a very humble tone, she added, *“the earning from agriculture previously was not even*

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<sup>14</sup> Aana is the unit to measure land holdings used in Nepal. Approximately, 1 ropani has 16 aanas area.

*comparable to that from the non-farm sector at present” (Kanchha’s wife, February 22, 2021). She seemed quite satisfied with their way of living experience due to the transformation of their land use.*

Likewise, Master Babu is also a native of his place. His family had been to that place for the last six generations. Just like Kanchha’s grandparents, his forefathers also earned properties and land holdings only by working in the field. His family owned around 40 *ropanis* of land right from the 1990s. In a year, they could grow 60 *muris* of paddy, of which 25 *muris* were kept for household consumption and they sold the remaining. Despite growing such a good quantity of grains for consuming and selling, Master Babu chose to leave agriculture. When I curiously questioned him the reason behind it, he instantly responded,

*Consuming rice saved for a family wasn’t possible all the time. We most of the time ate dhido to save rice for selling. It was one of the concrete sources of money to build a house, to celebrate festivals, perform rituals and ceremonies (Master babu, February 25, 2021).*

He sadly regrets being unable to utilize the land efficiently during past days. Today, Master Babu is happier to spend his retired life luxuriously. He gets a comparatively much higher amount of money from his cultivable land given on lease to cow farm, washing company and some to *adhiya*. He also enjoys grains sufficient to feed his family from the return paid by *adhiya*, without even stepping on the field.

Taking a sip of tea from his cup, he said in a very satisfied tone, “...*today I am living a life I dreamt of in my young days. And this is all possible only due to the decision of continuing my career in the non-agricultural sector or let’s say a more profitable profession” (Master Babu, February 25, 2021). Looking at his wife with a wide smile on his face, he showed that they now established themselves as a high-*

class family in society. When agriculture was their prime source of earning, his wife too had to go for *mela* with his parents. His wife could not just control her tears when Master Babu explained how tough her life was back then.

*There was no fashion of wearing shoes during the 2030s BS and my wife had to walk barefoot over the thick layers of dewdrops in grasses during cold chilly mornings of the winter season to bring fodder for livestock, she has even got serious backache problems by carrying heavy fodders and timbers, day and night back then. (Master Babu, February 25, 2021)*

It was since he realized of earning better from his teaching profession, that his involvement in agriculture became sparse. Not only, Master Babu, even his parents believed that non-farm occupation could provide more stable earning; “...*very happy, easy, clean and respectful life unlike the painful and bitter experience of agriculture from a life full of hardship and difficulties*”, proudly describing his current lifestyle. Thus, he is only engaged in farming as a part of his hobby rather than his profession.

The life stories of my participants, their grandparents and parents reflect that the occupational shift was somewhat guided by the socio-economic transformations occurring chronologically in their society. Kanchha and Master Babu are the native residents of their place. Their forefathers’ earned lots of landholdings through agricultural occupation. Those lands which were used for cultivation and agricultural productions with very laborious activities during the 1990s or 2000s, became a very valuable capital while coming to 2050s or present time. So, those natives who owned big ancestral land holdings automatically got a wide range of easy money earning opportunities by making several non-agricultural uses of those lands like renting or selling. This gradual transformation ultimately led to an occupational shift.

### Technically Unsupportive Agriculture

It is the case of one of my active, formally educated and very forward participants, Bhagyashali. Getting married at the age of 21 after completing her plus-two level education, she had to take over the responsibilities of running her family. Since her husband was a politician and did not earn pretty much for running the house, so she did two-three jobs for earning their livelihood. During her childhood, she was never involved in agriculture as an occupation because her parents always encouraged her to study and did not want to disturb her education by assigning farm works. However, her hobby was gardening, maintaining an attractive kitchen garden and so on. It was only after her marriage that she started working on the farms for earning. Slowly, the farm work turned into her occupation from her hobby because she had to go *mela* with her in-laws. After her father-in-law passed away in 2035 BS, they got all the responsibilities to manage their overall farms and lands.

Bhagyashali believed in herself for managing agricultural work in a better way than her in-laws. She always felt their practice was not supportive enough to enhance the productivity of their land.

*Preserving old seeds for sowing next year, information about the use of fertilizers, depending upon natural water for irrigation, were some of the blunders my in-laws made during their time. From altogether 22 ropanis of land, they could produce foods just enough to feed the family. (Bhagyashali, March 8, 2021)*

She felt that their practice was incorrect due to their illiteracy. She, however, knew modern agricultural techniques and inputs. Although she did not study agricultural sciences through formal education, she was active enough to participate and gain knowledge of modern practices through women's agricultural groups,

informal training provided by clubs, etc. She was aware of chemical fertilizers and manures, plant growth enhancers, disease preventive and curative measures, effective ways of irrigation, benefits of hybrid seeds and many more. With that confidence, she started cultivating her ancestral lands. But the result was even the same. Yes, the production was comparatively higher than in her in-laws time, but it was again not sufficient to sell or make money. The only reason was the unavailability of all the inputs and facilities in that area. The place where Bhagyashali lives just experienced the very initial phase of development. Even the basic facilities like road and transportation were not accessible to people there. It was only after her husband came into a big political status that the place started having some development activities. It was comparatively easier for them to get access to all the inputs because of their political power. However, using political power all the time to manage such big landholdings was not a feasible and sustainable way. Thus, the use of modern tools and techniques was only limited to their kitchen garden and they gave all their farmlands on lease.

Another problem that Bhagyashali, time and again, moaned about was the lack of farm labor to continue agriculture. Previously, people used to do *mela* or *parma*. Without having any transaction of money, they exchanged the labor with one another in society. Many works could be done only with the help of family members in the past. *“Nowadays, it is almost impossible to find cheap labor or simply labors at any cost around here. Sadly, none of my family members can work in the field now”*, whispers Bhagyashali in a lowered voice. Just then her brother-in-law walked past the hall we were sitting in. She paused for some time, we both smiled at him and again she continued in a low voice, pointing towards him who just left the hall,



*We two were actively managing all the farm works. But now, he has become old and weaker, his wife is an asthma patient. Mother-in-law is paralyzed, the husband is most of the time at his central office (Hetauda) and all the children are either abroad or in official work inside the nation. Although we have a big joint family, we started facing farm labor scarcity (Bhagyashali, March 8, 2021).*

They did not feel the situation to be supportive of continuing agriculture for them anymore. Similar circumstances were experienced by Master Babu as well. He was frequently complaining about technical errors in the agricultural sector of Nepal. He believes the shortage of workforce, high wage rate, unavailability of quality seeds and fertilizers on time, no irrigation facilities, and even the problem in marketing of local products to be highly demotivating people to continue agriculture. He says that neither the agricultural sector has developed enough in terms of mechanization and modernization of tools and techniques, nor is there sufficient technical support from the experts.

There are several issues related to market availability, transportation and product valuation among my research participants. While Kanchha Magar carried his product to market on his bicycle and got the worthless value of his product, Bhagyashali's family never got the opportunity to even trade their products to market due to the unavailability of transportation in their village. These obstacles hindered people's activities for a long time when *Bodel*<sup>15</sup> used to collect grains from people for selling, i.e. around the time of 2030s BS. But these never came into concern or priority of anybody. Despite people's interest and passion towards agriculture, they could not continue it due to the demotivated situation and poor facilitation of its

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<sup>15</sup> Bodel are the newar people belonging to Bode in Bhaktapur district.

resources. It seems that people in past were carrying out their agriculture at any cost. Availability of appropriate situations, facilities, or resources was not a matter of concern for them to continue or halt working. With time and development, awareness on modern agricultural tools and techniques or resources, among improved but not their access to it. So, people are shifting away from agriculture rather than looking for alternatives.

### **Agriculture: In the Shadow of Government's Priority**

Master Babu was engaged in the teaching profession for the last 50 years and is still connected to it being a campus chief of the only government college in his area. He also got the opportunity to visit foreign countries in his lifetime. So, he generally kept updated on events happening in and outside the nation. He mentioned that reading books, articles and novels was his hobby. That must be the reason how he remembered the women's day and wished me during my visit. Along with the status of education in Nepal, he also kept a keen interest in issues of the agricultural sector. Just after discussing the corrupted and politically disturbed educational system, Master Babu as a teacher became quite furious. That anger was so deeply embedded in his heart that he reflected that emotion even while talking about the technical problems of the agricultural sector. Relating the issues of degrading agriculture and its facilities in his area with the national scenario, he gave me several examples of failure from the government to improve this sector.

*We daily hear so many cases of farmers throwing away their rotten vegetables due to delay in trading or the unavailability of marketing facilities. Our government is not capable enough to ban imported foods, which is ultimately hampering our local products. Did you not hear the recent heart-wrenching news of sugarcane farmers?*

He almost dropped the tea cup on the table, in front of him while swinging his hands wrathfully. *Where is the justice for farmers? Do you think a farmer gets his product value worth his hard work? Do you think these middlemen allow them to have a direct marketing chain?* he continued. (Master Babu, February 25, 2021). The aggressive Master Babu just could not control his emotions. He was just too disappointed with the way our Government dealt with the national agricultural sector. He further grunts in anger,

*I have seen many JTAs not being able to detect the suitable soil type for different types of vegetables. All the agricultural experts only seek for a higher position in government offices; none of them are interested to work in real fields* (Master babu, February 25, 2021).

Right from the government to practitioners and experts, he believes all of them are just too selfish and corrupted to handle the sector well. There was much evidence mentioned by Kanchha Magar as well regarding the carelessness of our government. It was my second visit to him to talk about the occupational shift. Since he focused more on the socio-economic changes and related experiences during our first meeting, he thus revealed technical issues during our second conversation. Referring to the same story of initiating vegetable farming, he mentioned some technical difficulties. When he proposed to banks for an agricultural loan, he was simply rejected just because banks did not trust farmer's ability to pay back some huge amount through profit from agricultural products. Sitting on a concrete block inside his car wash company, he sadly explained the situation of applying for an agricultural loan stating some other concerns. Moving a step ahead he blames agricultural offices and centers for such a situation. *"There are DADOs and local government for helping at the local level but they don't care at all. People are willing to take training on modern*

*agricultural practices but don't know who could help them*" (Kanchha Magar, February 23, 2021).

He was the one who managed one mushroom farming training to women in his place ten years back so with the vision of empowering them with modern skills of agriculture. But that failed due to less participation and avoidance shown by women after initiating the training. So, he further added, *"This might be due to negligence of people as well. Since we are enjoying easy money from multipurpose use of our lands except for agriculture, so we might also be lagging to raise our voice for our rights."* Belonging to the same municipality, he was making me recall the performance of our new ward chairperson. None of their initiatives have been in favor of fostering agriculture; they are only working to develop the education sector by bringing book corners, doing awareness programs on literacy and all.

Likewise, both Master Babu and Kanchha reminded me about the failure of the government to address the need of Nepalese farmers. Delay in importing fertilizers, inability to make availability of certified seeds to farmers, not providing subsidy to farmers, difficulty to get bank loans for agricultural purposes, designing and implementing useful training programs to farmers, lack of capacity to introduce the mechanized agricultural system in Nepal like in foreign countries were some of the weaknesses highlighted by them.

### **Chapter Summary**

The chapter narrated the stories of my participants who shifted away from agricultural occupation, gradually from one generation to another due to their one or the other issues oppressing their choice in life. In this regard, participants like Kanchha Magar, Master Babu and Bhagyashali appeared several times in this chapter. Kanchha was more guided by the economic issues while Bhagyashali was more pressurized by technical difficulties and lack of access to basic requirements. Meanwhile, Master Babu experienced both the economic dissatisfaction from agriculture, better opportunities in the non-farm sector as well as the issues from policy level on technicalities. However, my fourth participant Suntali Bhauju, was more guided by the socio-cultural aspect of modernization and its consequences for the occupational shift. So, I present her stories in the next chapter under the second theme of the study.

## CHAPTER V

## OCCUPATIONAL SHIFT: COUP OF MODERNIZATION

The fourth chapter discussed the findings under the first theme: Coercion to choice. This chapter is based on the second theme of my participants' stories related to the occupational shift from agriculture. This section includes those life events and experiences of my participants brought about by the changing social context, values and beliefs. The societal value regarding occupation, way of living life and motive of survival has been gradually shifting from simple to complex form. As a result, people's choices, thinking, and beliefs transformed accordingly. This ultimately persuades the occupational shift from agriculture to other non-agricultural occupations.

**Agriculture: Peoples' Devalued Sector**

Suntali Bhauju is the most unique participant in my study. When I reached her rooftop on 24 February 2020, a thin old lady aged 75 years was sleeping in a worn-out *gundri*<sup>16</sup> under the scorching sun. It was Suntali Bhauju. I was shocked to see her in such a condition because I had never seen such an active lady staying silently at one place before that. She always used to move here and there right from early morning in search of work. She simply loved to work, I mean farm work. After informing her of the purpose of my visit, she just set two new *muda*<sup>17</sup> in shade for both of us and we began to talk. I began with my first question, “*Why were you sleeping here even during this time of the day*”? She spontaneously answered, “*What to do nanu*<sup>18</sup>, I

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<sup>16</sup> Gundri is a traditional Nepali mat made of dried straw and rope. People use it to sit on the ground or verandah since ancient times.

<sup>17</sup> Muda is a traditional Nepali tool made of nylon rope and thin wooden sticks tied with rope. It is generally used to offer a seat to people outside the room; on grounds or balcony.

<sup>18</sup> Nanu is a Nepali term used to call or denote younger female who is near and dear to us.

*couldn't find work anywhere. I have become physically weak by staying idle all the time. Yesterday I ate a spicy pickle and my body was unable to digest even the normal quantity of spice"* (Suntali Bhauju, February 24, 2021). Pressing her stomach tightly due to pain, she was trying to show that she had been suffering from diarrhea. So, without taking much of her time and ending our conversation short, I asked her time for the next day.

Two days later, when I revisited her home, she looked perfectly fine and was ready to interact with me. Through some general talk in my first visit, I figured out that Suntali Bhauju could be one of the participants representing the social cause for the occupational shift. So, my probing questions were more directed in the same line. We were sitting on a *muda* at her rooftop and her daughter-in-law was doing her household chores nearby. Suntali Bhauju was stating the concern regarding cost-benefit analysis, issues of resources unavailability and so on for making the occupational shift. Once her daughter-in-law went down to the kitchen garden, she began to pour her heart out in front of me.

*I always enjoyed doing farm work; I spent my entire life in this. How can these people stop me at this time when I am living my last days of life? My grandson doesn't even allow me to play with plants in my kitchen garden. Both mother and son start to yell at me saying that I am taking their prestige and fame in vain by ploughing a field or working on the farm.* (Suntali Bhauju, February 26, 2021)

I was continuously trying to calm her down. Wiping away her tears, she sobbed and spoke softly.

*Do you think I wish to work just to earn money? My family always scolds me saying greedy old lady, how much money would be enough to make you stop*

*wandering here and there searching for works. Just stop wandering too much now* (Suntali Bhauju, February 26, 2021).

I was just wondering how she could bear such harsh words even at that age. She proudly claimed her elder daughter to be competent in any kind of farm work, just at the age of ten. But now, she considered her grandchildren and daughter-in-law just like handicapped people who could not even enter their farmlands.

Since the family of Suntali Bhauju achieved the status of a middle-class family in their society through lots of hard work, and by working in the field, they believe that agriculture was work done by poor and needy people. Now they had enough money to live so-called standard life, with some other stable and reliable source of income. So, they felt going to the farm or *mela* would simply be embarrassing. Her daughter-in-law also left going to *mela* and began working as a helper in a departmental store nearby. Even her neighbors (brother in law's family) blamed her for humiliating them in society by working as a slave here and there. But working in her agricultural field or going *mela* for others' work never made her feel embarrassed. Along with some earning, she got love, care and even some clothes from people while going to such works. So, more than the money she wanted to continue the work for her fitness, activeness and to never lose the love she got in her society. However, her grandson who was also an Australian PR holder refused to allow her to work in the field. She sadly expressed, "*I feel very much upset to stay idle at home and watch the barren lands*" (Suntali Bhauju, February 26, 2021).

On the other hand, Suntali Bhauju also felt herself to be responsible for creating such a view of her children towards agriculture. In the past, when her son was unable to pass even the tenth grade, she insisted her husband get an official job at any cost for her son. She never wanted to see her children facing similar obstacles and



hardships that she faced when she was young. So, first, she got her son to work in a biscuit factory and then in the Nepal army using the power of her husband's senior. Even when her husband was appointed as a peon at the army office she considered him lucky to be engaged in such a respectful occupation. So, even for a person who was so much connected to agriculture, it was just a dirty, laborious and disrespectful occupation as compared to even just a position of a peon at a government office. Somewhere at one corner of her heart, she also wished her children and grandchildren to be educated and get in a respectful position.

Although Suntali Bhauju was reflecting the social phenomenon for an occupational shift, my other participants also brought up some similar issues. Kanchha Magar although was not in any official job at present, his grandparents always worked day and night just to make him capable and educated enough for white-collar, respectful jobs at government offices. Similarly, the Bhagyashali's parents regularly sent her to school even when they faced some sort of farm labor sometimes. Her father-in-law did not get access to education, but their thoughts were liberal enough to educate their three (among five) children up to master's level degree. They believed education could give respectful and high living standards to their children. Likewise, Master Babu left his home in 2026BS after the death of his father and came to Kathmandu city for acquiring education at a young age, even when his father passed away and had to take all the responsibilities. He believed education was instrumental to get a better job and ultimately a bright future. So, he continued his education and got engaged in a non-agricultural occupation, i.e. teaching.

Agriculture was the backbone of the Nepalese people. Right from food for survival to earning for livelihood, people since the 1990s were dependent upon agriculture. Gradually people started to move away from agriculture and engage in

other activities for their living. The aforementioned life events of my participants reflect that agriculture was never preferred by people in society. Although, my participants explained that agriculture was the backbone to their livelihood but it seemed more like their compulsion even during the past. Right from the past generation, people had been preparing the foundation to switch occupations from agriculture to others. Because of their mindset that agriculture is a dirty, laborious and low-level job, their ancestors worked hard to provide access to education, the white-collar job is generally considered as clean, high-level and respectful, ultimately offering a so-called better future for their future generation.

### **Young Dethroning the Old in Family**

Digging the case of Suntali Bhauju, she simply seemed helpless and speechless at present. Rather than obeying her grandchildren's demands, she had no other options left. Since her son was a victim of alcohol addiction and remained in a subconscious state most of the time, so most of his responsibilities were taken over by her grandson. However, the grandson had been to Australia for higher studies for the last two years. Her son died due to overconsumption of alcohol just six months ago. Then her grandson returned from abroad to manage everything here in Nepal. For the last two years, her daughter-in-law worked in a departmental store when her son had been abroad. That was the time when Suntali Bhauju lived a free life. She used to work for anybody and anywhere. Even at that time, her family members shouted at her and stopped her from going to work. But once they go to their respective jobs she would immediately leave the house for work. Now, her grandson is back to perform the last rituals of his father, her daughter-in-law left the job at a departmental store and Suntali Bhauju has everyone around her all the time. Rather than enjoying their company she feels suffocated as she is not allowed to even step out of her house.

During my first visit, I inquired about her occupational history. Her explanation of my concern was so elaborative that she got nostalgic when she remembered the first time she came to her husband's place after marriage. She was only 8 years old and she remembers having a two-storied old raw mud house with a small cattle shed at the entrance of the house and a small space for kitchen garden was the only property that her in-laws possessed during the 1990s BS. Due to the lack of rooms, they even slept in *falaicha*<sup>19</sup> most of the time. None of the lands that Suntali Bhauju used for agricultural purposes belonged to them. She worked as *mohi* for others. Even in such a situation, she could save 18 *muri* paddy a year after paying 17 *muri* to her landlord.

Rearing cattle and goats was like a passion to her. I still remember going to her house just to drink local curd during extremely hot days. I simply enjoyed watching her white silky goats jump all over her tops and drink the chilled curd. Knowing my love for *bigauti*<sup>20</sup>, she used to always invite me to eat *bigauti*, each time her cows delivered calves. So, earning from livestock rearing, selling milk, going to *parma*, and cultivating their landlord's field, Suntali Bhauju could bring her family to the position they are today. The old raw mud house of the 1990s with one small shed was converted to a three-storied concrete building, only due to their hard work. Counting in her fingers, she claims proudly,

*Two ropanis of land, one nearby our house and the other in Makalbaari, this concrete building, the land around this house; everything is the result of our hard work. My son has not even built one wall from his earning. We also have*

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<sup>19</sup> Falaicha is a traditional Nepali structure seen in old mud house. It is built in verandah on the ground generally using wood. It is used for sitting purpose and can accommodate two adult persons while sleeping as well.

<sup>20</sup> Bigauti is a colostrum milk produced by cattle for 3-5 days after delivering a calf.

*lots of savings in the bank. I was the one to manage money for sending my grandson abroad. (Suntali Bhauju, February 24, 2021)*

Tapping on my knees, she whispered on my face, “*Do you now think it is correct to treat me this way and not allow me to work? I never dared to talk back to my in-laws or seniors. Now see how has the society changed.*” Whatsoever, she is now compelled to stay home doing nothing and just enjoy her husband’s pension. She has now accepted that, along with responsibility, she has also now transferred the authority of the head person in the house to her daughter-in-law or grandson.

While describing his son’s luxurious life in America, Master Babu felt proud of him. He believed today’s youth were seeking life different from the older generation. When he visited America during his vacation, he observed different culture than that of Nepal. People worked very hard to earn few pennies and they spent it all partying and enjoying during the weekends. So he felt youths in Nepal are also influenced by such culture rather than following the stereotype thoughts of ancestors. Similarly, even his son got settled in the USA.

*My son went to the USA for pursuing his doctoral degree in 2064 BS. Now he earns monthly \$2000 working in a high position of a reputed company, owes a house and two cars and is providing quality education to his children” (Master Babu, February 25, 2021).*

This and that... with a big curve in his lips he was going on and on. Just then his wife sitting near him interrupted, “*But I extremely miss my son. We are two oldies in this big house, we need emotional support or just our son to take care of us.*” Then, Master Babu, in a lowered tone, stated that he had been asking his son to return to Nepal and take responsibility for all the lands and properties they owned. But they were simply happy there in the USA.

The other participant Kanchha Magar moaned about his daughters' behavior with him. Just while he explained to me about changing lifestyle at present, he illustrated the case of his daughters. Kanchha and his siblings celebrated with joy just on getting one new dress per year or when they got to eat rice instead of *dhido*. But now, according to him, the demand of his daughters were so extreme that they asked for new clothes every time they needed to go out somewhere. They always asked for pizza, momo, burgers and fast foods for their tiffin. Going out for lunch or dinner with family, twice a week became mandatory for his daughters. Just when he was stating all these, his elder daughter passed by.

*See her returning from college. Her college is five minutes from the house but she needs a Vespa scooter to go to college. She is demanding the latest model of iPhone because her old phone has gone out of fashion; not because it has stopped functioning. Two sisters go shopping nearby and buy dresses without letting us know. Later when we go to buy something the shopkeepers show us their debt (Kanchha Magar, February 22, 2021).*

Kanchha was trying to show how drastically the lifestyle and thinking changed just within one generation. He was compelled to fulfill all their demands because of his love for them or their better future, he believed. Suddenly remembering their plans to settle abroad, he further mentioned that he would even accept their decision of settling abroad if it was about their happiness. Bringing up the changing culture that was being adopted in the family, he wanted to relate it to occupational shift. His daughters right from their teenage suggested that he should use the land for a more profitable business like a resort, hotels, party palace and shopping malls and just quit agriculture.

Bhagyashali, on the other hand, was telling me how her children refused to help in farm work. Just then her younger daughter entered the hall we were sitting in with a glass of water for me. Bhagyashali immediately pointed towards me and said to her daughter, *“You see her, she is five months younger than you. She is already married and even has one child.”* Her daughter was simply smiling and looking at me. *“She is even interested in agriculture, she completed her Bachelor’s degree in agriculture”*, she continued talking to her daughter relating to our ongoing conversation of her children’s interest in agriculture. Both I and her daughter did not speak anything. She went back to the kitchen and Bhagyashali continued to answer my concern.

She was interested in agriculture and felt the new generation to at least acquire basic skills to continue it. When she sometimes asked her children to help in some kind of farm work, they directly answered back saying it to be irrelevant to their studies or interest. *“I don’t know about you, but today’s children have guts to talk back to their elders. Working in the field or taking agriculture as an occupation is something impossible for them”* (Bhagyashali, March 8, 2021). Bhagyashali stating something frustrating in such a simple tone with a smile on her face, clearly expressed that she was habituated to such situations in her home and has accepted the current reality and changing the culture of the new generation. Sayings, values, thought of the old generation made no difference today. So their occupations or way of doing work become outdated to the new generation. Thus, following what they showed or obeyed them was the only option left to the older generation.

There was a common shift observed in the family relationship of my participants regarding the generation gap. Along with some family responsibilities, the younger generation in the family slowly started to take over the ruling power in

the family as well. Such reflections were visualized through several life events stated by my participants. They narrated one or the other stories of the younger generation dominating over the older ones, either it is small or big. Family members of Suntali Bhauju believed agriculture was a disgraceful occupation, Bhagyashali's children did not feel the need to acquire agricultural skills, while Kanchha's daughters found it non-profitable or unsupportive to live today's high standard lifestyle. Just like how the societal value was slowly prioritizing white-collar jobs over agriculture in the previous section, now the mindset of the new generation was constructed. Thus, their thinking and values dominated the thoughts from the past and society moved by accepting the ongoing truth.

### **Expansion of Occupational List**

Around the 1990s, agriculture was everything for Kanchha's grandparents; their work, occupation, source of income and even their way to livelihood. Slowly while coming to the period of his father around 2030s, other alternatives were explored as well. His father's job at some construction company, selling their lands to manage money for building houses, performing rituals were some ways realized by them. Kanchha frankly told me that he felt his father's job to be much more productive, easier, and better than what his grandparents did during their time. After selling lands, they began to know the value of their lands if used otherwise.

*Our society has drastically changed from an underdeveloped society to a modern city just within a decade. After settling a housing company here, there opened so many avenues for employment. The skyrocketing value of lands while selling or giving on a lease, ideas of departmental stores, or building tahara on lands by the roadside, introducing varieties of shops in such tahara*

*is now popularly practiced only after constructing housing company here.*

(Kanchha Magar, February 22, 2021)

He seemed quite happy with the housing company and the opportunities introduced by it to locals there. This might be because of the progress his family could make by grabbing those opportunities. Otherwise, who could imagine running a departmental store and car wash company in that area if it was in the situation of just five years back? Because just five years back, the place mostly consisted of green paddy fields, there were no proper roads and transportation facilities in that area. Now, even his daughters were relaxed regarding their future. *“First they have plans to go abroad selling our lands. By chance, if they don’t get good grades to go abroad, they have the mindset of using these lands commercially by building complex and apartments here,”* giant Kanchha almost fell off the concrete block behind the Santro car in his washing company while he bursts in laughter trying to show how advanced the thinking of today’s generation became even at such early age.

The availability of multiple employment alternatives could be visualized right from the time of Suntali Bhauju’s son (around 2050s) as well. Despite having education qualifications only up to grade nine, she got her son to avoid tedious and so-called low-level jobs which according to her was agriculture. Although she was unable to make him work in a reputed government office, ultimately she requested all her relatives in power and position to get him hired in the Nepal army. Because the hardship she tolerated through farm work or the disrespectful behavior which she experienced from the society while working as *mohi* until the last 4-5 years was not something she wanted her son to bear. She wanted to get him a respectful job which turned out to be the Nepal army in her view. Seeing her hands folded like a gentleman while narrating her son’s occupational history I felt like she had been the proudest



mother ever to successfully get her son to work in the army. Before that, her son got a job at a biscuit factory in Balaju. She claims to have begged her neighbor to manage his job in that company. However, when she came to know about a harsh work environment, tolerating scorching heat and dirt, she no more wanted to see her son work there. Hearing such stories made me feel that, how easy it became to get and change a job for a person who has not even cleared tenth grade.

The case of Bhagyashali who was fortunate enough to get an opportunity of learning sewing skills right after her SLC examination spoke of it as well. The daughter-in-law of the parents who worked on the farm day and night was able to open her a tailor shop just at the age of 25 years. *“Without any help from any of my family members, I could run the shop for 20 long years,”* the pride in her eyes could not be hidden behind her long curled eyelashes. At that time, she even managed to help her in-laws during the morning and evening or holidays. Her multitalented personality and nature of accepting any sort of job was being reflected when she happily accepted that agriculture gave her family some food for survival while tailoring was of financial help to another purpose like children’s education, health and clothing. After running the tailor for 12 years (from 2050-2070 BS), she even started to teach in a boarding school where her children studied. She took such a decision, basically to take care of her children at school (as they were day boarders in school).

For 8 years (from 2063-2070 BS), she could both her professions in parallel. However, it was not easy for her to manage time to handle both professions. She proudly smiled and told me her schedule of those days,

*Reaching the tailor at 7 am, I would do some cuttings and draft making so that I could give those to my employers for stitching. Then, from Chabahil, I reached school in Jorpati by 10 am. Then again after school at 4 pm, I went*

*back to tailor to take orders and stayed there till 7 pm* (Bhagyashali, March 8, 2021).

However, due to the bigger flow of people in the house after her husband's promotion to a member of the national parliament, she could not manage time for both professions and closed the tailor.

Over the period, the scope of employment and income generation sources has widened in our society. Interaction with my participants about occupational shift reflected that occupation extended from just being in agriculture during our forefather's period to opportunities in several other sectors. This brought to my realization that time created numerous employment opportunities. This doesn't necessarily consider our qualifications as well. Suntali Bhauju's son who is not even an SLC graduate had many options of employment. Bhagyashali, who was a plus-two graduate, got an opportunity to continue many jobs at the same time as per her problem and concern. Even Kanchha was assured of his daughters' future whether they got good grades or not. Hence, these narrations revealed that time consequently opened up many avenues of occupation for people disregard their qualifications, ability or interest.

### **Agriculture: Victim of Foreign Migration**

Our society today mostly has children and old people living. Most of the youths and working-age groups are in foreign countries, either for higher education or for employment. I claim this by looking around my place and from the stories I heard from my participants. Some settled abroad, some are planning for it and some have just returned to Nepal during vacations. They have their urge to choose the option of foreign migration. The related stories are presented in this section.

Despite having four spouses (three daughters and one son), Master Babu felt lonely to live in his new house with his wife. When I reached his place, I could see a newly built three-storied concrete building with lots of modern designs and decorations in it. There were altogether 10 rooms in that house where only two people lived. Deep down, he wished his children to return to Nepal. But he was frequently trying to hide that feeling by describing the luxurious and happy lifestyle of his son in the USA. Big house, many cars and trucks, excellent job, handsome salary and quality lifestyle of his son looked pretty attractive for him. At one point, he just could not hide the need of his son with them. *“We are happy with the achievements of our children. Now that we are getting old, we also need someone to look after our health and medication. I now wish my son to return and settle here with us,”* said Master Babu in a sentimental voice. But immediately he started defending it by pointing to the poor educational system of Nepal.

*There is a negative political influence on the educational system of Nepal. I am also a teacher and I feel simply disappointed with the way people are taking education as a means of doing business. There are no qualified teachers, no enough resources, and the system is so corrupted that one can buy a thesis for graduating at the Master’s level. (Master Babu, February 25, 2021)*

Despite spending his entire life in the teaching profession in Nepal, he believed that education was not worth investing any money in here. Not only his son, but he also proudly mentioned of his grandson (daughter’s son) was pursuing higher education in America on full scholarship. Master Babu simply believed, once they had an international certificate and degree from such a renowned university, they could

get a job at any company around the world. He felt his decision of sending his children abroad was for their better future.

Not to forget Bhagyashali's complaint of lagging human resources in the agricultural sector, none of her children planned to stay in Nepal. Her son was married and settled in the USA since his visit to pursue Bachelor's degree. Her elder daughter was a nurse and her younger one just completed Bachelor's degree in computer engineering. Both of them were engaged in their occupational sector. Even when sometimes Bhagyashali asked for their help in agricultural work, they simply refused to say it to be out of their concern. Taking a piece of apple from the ceramic plate kept on the classic glass table in front of us, she proudly said,

*I am happy with the decisions my children make. My elder daughter is married to a guy from America and she is doing her PhD there. About my younger daughter, she is preparing to go abroad for continuing her further education. I ask her to apply for a government job in Nepal. But she refuses to do so due to lesser money offered to engineers in government offices. (Bhagyashali, March 8, 2021)*

The way she described the achievement of her children and even herself by engaging in sectors other than agriculture seemed to be mesmerizing for her. She believed, her children were heading abroad for acquiring quality education, a reputed job and ultimately a happy future. It was because she seemed to be completely supportive of her children's choice of being economically independent and not relying on ancestral property in their lives.

Although Suntali Bhauju spent her entire life in agriculture, she was the happiest person to see her grandson graduate from a foreign university. Since he was now an Australian PR holder, she even supported his decision to settle abroad by

agreeing to take over all the responsibilities here in Nepal until she breathed last. Indeed, Suntali Bhauju always supported the thought of educating her children right from the time when she had not even realized its benefits. Her son was not able to pass even the SLC and her daughters were married at a young age. So, she tried to fulfill her dream of seeing her children in a respectful position by supporting her grandson's education. Beating her chest proudly with her fist, she said,

*...although I'm illiterate, I know the value of education in life. I even kept the guts to manage all the financial arrangements for my grandson to go abroad. I kept 17 aana of land as a security deposit to get a loan from the bank (Suntali bhauju, February 24, 2021).*

Without having any knowledge of the challenges of sending such a young guy abroad, she blindly trusted her grandson. Her grandson under influence of his cousin and friends decided to go abroad for further education. She readily agreed without any debate, just because she trusted him and believed it would help him secure his future. The plans of Kanchha's daughters were also focused on settling abroad. Kanchha looked tensed and worried while mentioning his daughters' plans to go out forever. He seemed just upset that despite fulfilling all their wants and demands, either be it food, clothes, entertainment or even education, they preferred to leave Nepal. However, if their future could brighten on going abroad or settling there, then Kanchha was ready to happily accept their decision.

The new generation of all four participants in this study chose foreign migration for one or the other cause. Some were influenced by their friends/relatives while some researched on its benefits before taking such decisions. This showed that the trend of going abroad was rapidly increasing in our society. In this process, the youths were ultimately overlooking the agricultural sector and its potentiality.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter embedded the narrations and experiences of my participants regarding occupational shift which was more aligned to modernization and its consequences. The socio-cultural values of modern society seemed different from that of older society, towards occupation, lifestyle and people living in society. First of all the modern society opened up numerous avenues occupation-wise. People today had multiple paths to choose between, remaining inside the nation or even through foreign migration. Second, the people's point of view towards lifestyle changed. People today dreamed of living a quality life through easy ways out or without putting much effort. This reflected the culture change as well. Not only the nature of doing work, rather the persuasion of any situation, but relation or events in society by youths today was also different from their previous generation. With such changes, the newer generations established their dominance not only in their family but in society as a whole. Thus, society while trying to adopt the modern culture and social values, it experienced a shift away from agriculture because the new generation simply devalued agriculture thinking of it as the occupation of poor and uneducated people.

## CHAPTER VI

### UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF OCCUPATIONAL SHIFT

Occupational shift is an evolutionary process that happens in a society when it covers from traditional stage to modern one. After few rounds of interviews with my participants, observations made during the interview with them and, based on my background knowledge, I understood three major broad dimensions that were working at background guiding peoples' thinking and their decision for an occupational shift from farm agriculture to other sectors in society. First, the changing economic context of society greatly influenced peoples' thinking and action regarding the occupational shift. Second, the changed social norms, values and practices of the society were impelling people in their decision. Third, the technical aspects associated with the agriculture sector such as peoples' inaccessibility to different agriculture facilities, market situation, cost and benefit of the sectors also equally responsible for demotivating people to continue the agriculture occupation. This chapter discusses these economic, social and technical environments affecting peoples' decision of occupational shift. Apart from discussing these dimensions, this chapter also discusses the phenomenon of occupational shifts from theoretical lenses, especially in the light of modernization theory and Giddens' theory of structuration.

#### **Occupational Shift: An Evolutionary Process**

Kanchha Magar, Bhagyashali and Master Babu, all recalled their experience that their parents did not have any other alternatives means of occupation. Thus agriculture was the only option for their livelihood. As Kanchha recalled his experience, at his grandfather's time, no other occupation was available except agriculture. But his father got an opportunity to work in a construction company as a

side job as a labor and later he became a technician. As a legacy of the agricultural occupation of the family, Kanchha also experienced the agricultural occupation in his childhood. However, as soon as he completed school-level education two decades ago, he started his occupation from a non-agriculture sector he still got involved in. In the case of Suntali Bhauju, agriculture was the only source of income in the past and now her means of livelihood was the rent income that she earned by leasing the *taharas* and land. Her son was already dead and her grandson migrated to Australia. Despite having significant areas of land, Master Babu's main source of income at present was his pension that he retired from his three-decades-long occupations of teaching. Bhagyashali, a wife of a political leader, was now busy helping her husband in his political activities where their children were full-time students, one in the home country and two abroad. All these participants still possessed a considerable area of land where they relied on just a few decades back. But at present their source of income was something else. However, as agriculture was in their blood and they all were still doing small-scale vegetable farming or maintaining the kitchen garden, fruit orchard at present, just as their hobby.

This signifies that in the case of all my participants, agriculture occupation was the only source of livelihood for their forefathers. It continued till their last generation while in their lifetime, they experienced a transition from agriculture to the non-agriculture sectors: only in agriculture in the first half of their life and then partially in the second half. In all cases, my participants foresaw no more existence of this occupation in their family from the next generation, as their children were either abroad or attending college education who did not have any plans of getting back to their traditional occupation.



In terms of timeline, though the occupational shift started in the country from the 1950s when the country initiated planned development, the early 1990s was a very important point to experience the occupational shift significantly in the community. This was the period of major macroeconomic reforms initiated by the country. Nepal initiated new macroeconomic policies to liberalize the economy from the mid-1980s (Khanal & Kanel, 2005). This policy helped to expand the industry and service sector in the country, especially at the private level. The gradual shifts from agriculture to other occupations started from this period further accelerated in the last decades.

This gradual shift of occupation from agriculture to non-agriculture experienced by my research participant is just a mirror effect of the national scenario. Just five decades ago agriculture was the dominant sector in the national income contributing 68% of the national GDP (Nepal South Asia Centre [NASAC], 1998). In the fiscal year 2010/11, the share of agriculture reduced by half to 37.1% and now the agriculture sector contributes merely 27% in national GDP (MOF, 2020). It means the non-agriculture such as industrial and service sector was flourishing that created more employment opportunities for the people inside the country. This naturally signifies that more and more people gradually shifted from the agriculture sector to other sectors in the country.

While talking about the changing scenario of peoples' livelihood in the country, around 90% of the population were completely dependent on agriculture for their livelihood and it was their only source of livelihood in the 1970s. At that time, people would meet the financial need of their life and livelihood by selling agricultural products in a barter system, exchanging farm laborers in *parma* system, and rearing livestock (Bhattari, 2006). The stories narrated in this study also revealed similar lifestyles. This is, indeed, a consequence of a structural transformation (FAO,

2017) of the agriculture-based economy to an industry or service-based economy. Such transformation is associated with improvement in productivity of service and industrial sector happening due to shift of labor and priority away from the agricultural sector. This is thus, an evolutionary process in the course of development.

This evolutionary process of the development of a society can be visualized and discussed with the help of economic modernization theory. The modernization theory of development explains the process of social evolution and development of society (Goorha, 2017) and assumes that the process of modernization follow the similar pattern when the society transits from traditional societies to modern one (Todaro, 1977). The occupational shift from the agriculture sector to the industry and service sectors happening in the country could be explained with such growth theories. Among various such theories developed during the 1950s and 60s, the occupational shift was found somehow in the line of W. A. Lewis's theory of “unlimited supply of labor” (Todaro, 1977). The theory explains the dualistic nature of the economy as the prime cause for the labor shifts from the traditional sector to modern sectors. According to this theory, two different sectors form the underdeveloped economy: the traditional sector and the modern sector. The zero marginal productivity of labor is the main feature of old, overpopulated or sustenance sector while in modern sector, it has high productivity (Todaro, 1977). Thus, there is a tendency of gradual transfer of surplus labor from the traditional agriculture sector to the modern industrial sector (Ranis, 2004) till the productivity of both the sectors equates.

As my all research participants expressed their experience of low productivity in the agriculture sector, I found the Lewis theory explaining the phenomenon of an occupational shift in my research area. But rather than engaging in other industry or

service sectors, as described by this theory, my research participants' strategy was to use the land resource to earn rent by giving it for other purposes. The reason behind giving it on the rent was mainly to hold their land. Because, there was an experience of price hike of land every year and holding their land, rather than the means of agriculture, was something like holding gold which could be converted into cash at any time.

### **Economic Dimension of Occupational shift**

This is a common phenomenon that peoples' behavior tends to change as the context changes. The economic context is one of the major environments that influence most of the human actions and reactions related to their life and livelihood (Federal Reserve Bank of Boston [FRBB], 2003). This includes a wide range of people's actions and reactions in selecting employment to the mobility of people from one place to another. The economic dimension of society influences every decision of people related to their daily life. In the subsequent paragraphs, I discussed the economic context of the society that influenced people's actions and reactions, especially relating to the occupational shift in the community.

### **Migration**

The youth members from three of my research participants' families had already been abroad for education. There seems a high possibility of occurring the same phenomenon soon in the fourth family as well. If we see the present macro-level situation of our society, a considerable number of youths have been abroad living children and old people at home. The migration report shows that more than 80% of the labor out-migrants between 2017/18 to 2018/19 belonged to the age group of 18 to 35 (Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security [MOLESS], 2020). Depending upon the economic class of many youths temporarily or permanently

migrated abroad for work or study. Primarily, the Nepali youths from poor economic backgrounds migrate to Malaysia or Gulf countries or India to work as laborers (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ] & ILO, 2015) whereas the youths having better economic status migrate to developed countries such as the USA, Canada, Europe or Australia in the name of attaining an educational degree. The record of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology shows that thousands of Nepali youth annually go abroad for study, especially to developed countries such as Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia. The statistics displays that from July 2018 to end of 2019, almost 85,800 students received no-objection letters from MOEST (Ghimire, 2020). Since my research participants were from middle-class people comparatively from the better economic conditions, they chose to migrate to developed countries for study. The experience of community shows that the Nepali people visiting such developed countries hardly returned as my research participants thought. The children of my three research participants already took or were in the process of taking green card /permanent residency to live permanently in those countries. Thus, I see none of them were getting back to their home country. Even if they got back, it was impossible to engage in agriculture farming in the future, as they were well educated and the educated people in Nepal never engaged in agriculture occupation. The other members who remained in Nepal already entered the category of old age and had no more possibilities of engaging in agriculture farming at all. This is a common story of many families in the community of my research area. This signifies that people are gradually shifting occupation from agriculture to other sectors, whether they live in their home country or abroad.

Going back to a few decades ago, Kanchha, Master Babu, Bhagyashali and Suntali Bhauju, all belonged to low economic status. The main property they

possessed was land, their source for livelihood. The whole family members would engage in the agriculture work producing crops and vegetables to meet their daily needs. They would sell some of their product in the market and meet other basic requirements besides the food items. The value of the land at present went a price hike and these valueless lands were now converted into a huge amount of cash. Pangeni (2020) argued that the government of Nepal could not control the price hike of land in recent years. Though the situation was not favorable for overall market policy, it was like a boom for landowners. Thus, it had been one of the reasons for the people, who lived in my research sites for generations, to convert from low economic class to medium or even high economic class. The land of my all research participants at present was enough to run the rest of their life, even if they did not work a single day.

Thus, the centralized development policies adopted by the country were somehow responsible for the occupational shift. Because such policies concentrated the development activities in capital or district headquarters. This created not only employment opportunities in those areas but also made available the basic facilities such as health and education at those places.

The phenomenon discussed above signifies that the process of urbanization was working in the background to lead the occupational shift. And, urbanization is experienced as one of the properties of modernization (Ibrahim, 1972). As a consequence of urbanization, the occupational shift was the natural outcome in three ways. First, the occupational shift was automatically associated with rural-urban migration as the people could not bring their agricultural land with them along with the migration. Hence, naturally, migration compelled people to leave the agriculture occupation and to take another occupation whatever was available in the urban areas. Second, non-farm activities were more probable in the urban areas as there lack of

cultivable lands in the urban areas. This also led to occupational shifts for the migrated people.

Third, all the human actions are ultimately oriented to have a better lifestyle of people in the society (Ibrahim, 1972; FAO, 2017). The life history and experiences of my participants in their society resemble similar phenomena. The forefathers of my participants considered agriculture as their only source of livelihood. Despite the tedious nature of agriculture occupation, they were compelled to engage in it, as there were no other alternatives. But along with development efforts made in the country, especially after the 1960s, they started to get employment opportunities in non-farm activities like government jobs and jobs in private companies. They explored new ways of earning even from their cultivable lands; by selling them, renting them, building small houses on them to rent, rather than cultivating them. Such alternatives not only gave them a higher return than the agricultural occupation but also supported them to live a luxurious and modern lifestyle, which they always wished for since their childhood days.

The low productivity of the workforce remained responsible for rural-urban migration. Because the low wage rate of labor in the rural subsistence sector in comparison to the capitalist sector in an urban area (Osceles, 2015) was motivating people to move from their agriculture occupation and rural residence to non-agriculture occupation in urban or semi-urban areas.

The consequences of urbanization led to the occupational shift in other ways as well. Since urbanization occurred in limited places, it led to the price hike of the land of those areas. Thus, people who originally resided in those areas and had agricultural lands automatically upgraded from low status to high economic status without much effort made on an individual basis. Since my research area is

geographically located at the periphery of Kathmandu city, my research participants became enough lucky to gain these benefits. These changes led the occupational shifts in two ways. First, their land was automatically converted from the means of livelihood through agriculture to means of cash. So rather than engaging in agriculture, their attitude developed as rent-seeking behavior. Second, people send their children to developed countries for study with personal financing. Both of these actions resulted in the occupational shift from agriculture to other sectors.

The globalization process - the distinct feature of modernization, also played a vital role in such international migration ultimately resulting in the occupational shift from the agriculture sector. As an expansion of the Lewis model, the phenomenon also applied to labor movements across countries in today's liberal economic world (Renis, 2004). Globalization, 'as the unrestricted flow of capital, ideas, goods, labor and services from one state to another state' (Sharma, 2003), played an important role in the foreign migration of Nepal's labor force. The migration of thousands of youths to the Gulf countries and Malaysia was the prime example of this phenomenon at the national level. But in the case of my research participants, the youth migrated to developed countries. Despite they were there in the name of having higher education, earning a handsome income and ultimately owing modern lifestyle was associated with the shift of youth from domestic agriculture sector to the modern sector at international level.

### **The Phenomenon of Rationality and Reasoning**

My research participants mentioned production issues and lower return being aligned with their decision of occupational shift. They revealed that investment in agriculture was a much higher amount than the return they got. Along with the risks, uncertainty and instability incurred in agricultural production, the nature of the work

also proved to provide an unsure and non-profitable return to my participants. The loss experienced by Kanchha in his vegetable farming, lower return gained by Master Babu from terrace wheat farming and comparison of investment and return shown by Bhagyashali while sowing her farm annually, were all the cases where they had bitter experience of the agriculture occupation. The participants experienced a demotivating earning despite their involvement with extreme hard work and patience and risk factors or costly investment in the agricultural occupation.

The experience of my research participants was aligned with the findings of Bairwa et al. (2013). They concluded that several dynamics such as unfavorable climate and calamities, insects/ pests and diseases, market risks occurring due to lengthy and complex processes of trading, institutional risks as a result of political instabilities and disturbances affected the production risks in the agriculture sector. High cost of production with the low economic return, lack of farm labors and necessary agricultural inputs (Poudel et al., 2014), dependency upon neighboring countries for food security rather than creating opportunities for local products (Poudel, 2016), all influenced together to make agriculture as a less desirable occupation to Nepalese farmers.

Participants' coercion to occupational shift was driven by their comparison of cost-benefit analysis between several occupational opportunities in their access. Along with the relief from hardship and anxiety, they experienced non-agricultural occupations as a highly profitable source of money that could be earned just by sitting home. Pageni (2020) also agrees that the agricultural lands of Nepal became a lucrative and tradable commodity, drawing the attention of people towards the real estate sectors. This ultimately created a more profitable income source for landowners who previously lived tedious life involving in the agricultural sector. Since the nature



of human beings is such that we always look for a better alternative by comparing between the available options, thus, there is a gradual deviation away from agriculture occupation. People tend to move to a more productive sector from less productive once they get an opportunity.

This phenomenon signifies that people would reason with and be rational in the decision of engaging in a certain occupation or not. This is also a part of the modernization of the society where reasoning is considered as a synonym for the process of rationalization of thinking (Tipps, 1973). This is the process of replacing old traditions and values with rationality and reasoning. For example, earlier, people would never leave a barren land. This would be a matter of social prestige. Leaving the land barren was considered as an inability to handle the land or it was a kind of sin. But now people in the research area compared the cost and benefit of doing agriculture. For getting a lower and unstable return from the higher cost of production in agriculture, they preferred to abandon agriculture. They rather gave it on lease to others and enjoyed easy money or just keep it barren if renting was not possible. This reasoning and rationalizing attitude of people largely caused the occupational shift.

### **Socio-Cultural Dimension of Occupational Shift**

One of the unspoken yet hidden aspects of the occupational shift was socio-cultural values towards any occupation. The stories narrated by my participants revealed that changing social norms, values and practices; perception toward agriculture and the role of formal education were some responsible elements to shift their occupational from agriculture to the non-agriculture sectors.

### **Social Norms, Values and Practices**

Listening to the narrations of my research participants, I sensed three distinct social norms, values and practices developed in the last two or three decades in

society. These distinct features adversely affected the continuation of the existing practices of people's engagement in an agricultural occupation. The first change was observed in family type. Earlier people used to live in an extended family which was, by nature, supportive to carry out agriculture activities in the family. All family members used to engage in agriculture, especially at the time of cultivation and harvesting. Now the family composition changed from the joint family to the nuclear one. Such changing structure of family from extended family to nuclear family was another prominent consequence of modernization (Ibrahim et al., 2011). The nuclear family as a result of modernization is a concurrent event of urbanization. The youths migrate to urban areas in search of high-earning employment opportunities and a better lifestyle leaving old members in the family (Mayowa, 2020). The tendency amplifies once an individual is engaged in multiple economic activities other than agriculture at diverse locations. This is visible in the lives of my research participants as well. The younger generations in the family are migrating to other nations in search of better education, employment and ultimately the lifestyle. Meanwhile, the older members of the family are left alone at home. They are physically weaker and unable to engage in the laborious tasks of agriculture. Then, due to a shortage of human resources to engage in the field, the agricultural occupation as a whole is at risk. Such a phenomenon is gradually pulling people away from the agricultural occupation.

The second distinct feature of the family at present was that the new generation of people was completely unaware of agriculture. Kanchha Magar, Suntali Bhauju, Master Babu as well as Bhagyashali, all felt this in one way or the other. The hard work, labor, patience, the risk incurred in this occupation is unfamiliar to the new generation. It is because, they believed in living a luxurious, high standard and so-called modern lifestyle. No doubt that they were made so by their surrounding

culture at home or the lessons they got in life. Indeed, the parents were also not interested to teach their children things as they did not wish their children to continue agriculture as an occupation. The third, feature I sensed from the stories of my participants was the domination of youth members in the family. The culture of following elders, respecting their thoughts or obeying them faded with time. Now, the youths who grew up in modern culture and thoughts possessed individualism. The narrations of my research participants signified that these new generations were usually talking about their rights and never fulfilling their responsibilities. Parents were compelled to fulfill any demands of their children and the children had a perception of enjoying a luxurious life. Thus, the agricultural land which was previously a place to work has now become a means of earning easy money for luxurious life. Interestingly, I noticed that this was the same agricultural land that made the life of my research participants distressful and difficult during the past and it was the means of enjoying a luxurious life at present.

The fourth social practice that prevailed in the community was to send their children abroad for higher education. This was more prevalent in the family where the economic condition was better. My research participants were not happy with their sons and/or daughters living abroad indeed. This was because they did not have any successors there to look after their property. But at the same time, my research participants would express their pride in having their children abroad. This was a matter of prestige in front of neighbors and relatives. Whenever they found a suitable context they would love to share their experience of visiting the country where their children stay. To justify the need of going abroad, they used to argue that no career and employment opportunity was possible inside a country having a disgusting political environment. I could sense the pain of my research participants regarding

their children living abroad permanently. This had become the prominent cause for Master Babu, Suntali Bhauju and Vagyashali's words to frequently reflect the emptiness in their life. Their wish was to have their children return home and take responsibility for all the properties and land. But their children never returned after their education as they permanently settled there. Those youths were hardly found worried about their parents and their interests. Their priority was to enjoy a modern and luxurious life abroad, rather than valuing the family, culture and tradition in the home country.

The modernization theory fundamentally explains how an old, rural, agricultural society transforms into a materialistic, urban and industrialized society (Kumar, 2020) in a uniform modality globally. There are some distinct features of modern society that define society as modern if it possesses those characteristics. The components such as individualism urbanization; changing from extending family to small and nuclear family; determining individuals by their property holding, occupation, and education level are some other distinct features of modern society (Kumar, 2020). I could visualize all these features of modern society in my research areas and these elements were strongly associated with the phenomenon of my participants' occupational shift.

Among the aforementioned features of modern society, individualism is being highly emphasized in modern societies of advanced countries (Chiswell & Lobly, 2018). The Western world is largely characterized by dominant modern theories where individuals are considered free and autonomous (Soars, 2018). Regardless of judging this feature as wrong or right, I found, especially the youth from the family of my research participants possess this character. Individualism is the attitude of human beings that emphasizes the importance of the self and individual actions are guided by

the motive of self-benefits (Soars, 2018). One could find one drastic change in the society that along with the attitudinal change from collectivism to giving importance to individualism, greatly supported the process of occupational shift in the society.

On top of the aforementioned change in social norms, values and practices the most important social dimension that influence the action of any individual is the social status of the people. Determining an individual's status by their property holding, occupation, and education level is another feature of modernization (Kumar, 2020). Historically, peoples' status in the research area was judged based on the landholdings and quantity of grains harvested. Now people recognized, in my research areas, based on other elements such as the number of buildings they possess, the educational level they attended, or income level of the positions in companies or government bodies, etc. And my participants couldn't find all these pro-status features to be possible by engaging in agriculture.

### **Agriculture as a Low Graded Occupation**

Agriculture was taken as a low-level and less prestigious occupation right from my participants' forefather's period. Despite relying solely on agriculture for their survival, they never prioritized agriculture over any other occupation. In the past, all my research participants relied on the agricultural sector to make money and run their livelihood. They worked hard on this occupation but these efforts were made not to foster the occupation. Rather, their hidden interest was to pull back their children from it. And one of the strong strategies was to educate their children. The driving force for this was the belief that education could get them a respectful and clean table works, unlike laborious and dirty agricultural occupation.

Agriculture occupation being considered as a disrespectful occupation is a worldwide phenomenon. One of the studies conducted in a rural area of Indonesia

revealed that youths have a negative perception of agricultural occupation (Widiyanti et al., 2019). It was guided by their interaction with friends and schoolmates.

Moreover, their teacher also directed them towards other alternatives which seemed more respectful than agriculture. Khanal et al. (2021) obtained similar findings from a study in the Lamjung district in Nepal. Especially youths were abandoning agriculture occupation due to social beliefs of taking agriculture as a burdensome occupation done mostly by the aged, under-privileged and uneducated people. They consequently found very little contribution from youths in agriculture; 45% of youths among the surveyed ones had negative opinions towards agriculture and were out of it.

The society where my participants lived believes agriculture to be an occupation of the poor and uneducated people. Hence, they or more strongly their children grew up constructing similar mindset. Moreover, the hardship and losses expressed by their parents became even more convincing for them to deviate from agriculture. Having said this, Suntali Bhauju, who spent her entire life in agriculture, belongs to the older generation. The rest of the participants were in a transition phase. However, regarding their future generation, they were very sure that they would completely abandon agriculture as an occupation. Widiyanti et al. (2019) supports the similar thinking of the older generation in society being obstructive for youths to be into agriculture. Thus, I understood this phenomenon of the occupational shift was due to socio-culturally constructed mindset which got stronger along the new opportunities created with time after each generation.

In Nepal at present, common people are not happy with their traditional occupations such as agriculture and animal husbandry which are considered quite laborious. At the same time, formal education has led occupational mobility from their traditional type of manual and hard physical work to non-manual and easy table

work (Shrestha, 1998). However, the judgment criteria of society upon the status of the family still includes landholdings. But, the eye of judgment behind it is different today. Holding more land being a source of higher agricultural production previously has changed to a high source of money today. Likewise, people with white-collar jobs are considered as superior over the inferior occupation of agriculture. Acquiring education has been highly valued considering it as a strong source of more power, property and prestige (Bista, 1991). Thus, in the name of becoming modern, people and societal values are changing regarding ownership of more property, acquiring higher education and engaging in a white-collar job. All these changing values have speeded up the occupational shift in society recently.

I could see the theory of structuration aligned with this structuration of occupational shift in the community. As the theory of structuration developed by Anthony Giddens suggests (Ritzer, 2000), the social changes should be viewed from both structure and agency perspective where it conceives that any social phenomenon is the result of interaction between agency and structure of the society. Thus, the phenomenon of occupational shift can be explained from both the micro and macro perspective where the existing social norms and values regarding the occupational shift have been explained as the macro perspective and that of the individual's action and reaction as a micro perspective. The gradual change in the societal structure influenced the individual's action for an occupational shift while the individuals' collective action made the phenomenon of occupational shift more matured and established it as a permanent structure of the society. As a result, the occupational shift from agriculture to other sectors became the belief and practice of the society leading to a permanent structure of the society. This was the continuation of the interactions between the existing social structure and the actions of the agency.

## **Role of Formal Education**

Nepal holds quite a short history of formal education. If we go just seven decades back, there existed a very few schools in Nepal. Almost 98 percent of the population was illiterate and depended upon subsistence agriculture for livelihood, so there were merely 300 college graduates in the entire country (USAID, 2001). After the downfall of the Rana regime in the early 1950s and then of donor agencies, the country entered a new course of modern development with periodic plans. But there were very few educated people in the country. Thus, at that time even those school graduates of that period got employment in some administrative work due to scarcity of educated human resources in the country. The life of these government employees was much attractive than that of the agriculture life in many ways. This event was a remarkable milestone for society in developing educational perception on education in many ways. This was also the starting point of an occupational shift from agriculture to non-farm sectors in the country.

The administrative work was much easier than the physically tough work in agriculture. People conceived that they get an opportunity in such works only if they attained formal education. More than this, the government people had a different social status with their important role and scope. This created a kind of hierarchy where the government jobs remained at the top over other occupations, eventually the result of educational attainment. Hence, education became a symbol of power and prestige in society (Bista, 1991). But the government job and that also the educational institutions were available only in the capital or cities. Thus, it led to the peoples' mobility from rural to urban areas. The government employees migrated from the rural areas with their families. Thus, this was, eventually, a starting point of the occupational shift from agriculture to the non-farm sector in Nepal. These phenomena



established new norms and values towards education in the society that schooling meant occupational mobility from their traditional, manual and hard type of physical work to non-manual and easy table work (Shrestha, 1998). These values continued in society till today in one or another way.

Along with the planned development activities of the country, the government expanded its various development activities. The process of industrialization and opening new avenues of business and service continuously demanded the educated human resources in the country. Again, all these changes occurred in the cities and capital and more and more people came to urban areas. Some were in pursuit of higher and better education while some were in seeking different occupations. People could migrate but they couldn't take their land and agriculture occupation along with them. Thus, the meaning of education as an occupational shift from agriculture to other sectors became a permanent social structure. Here also, the interaction between structure and agency made the occupational shift as a social structure.

After the 1990s, this practice of pursuing higher education extended to foreign countries as well. Especially the middle and upper-middle-class people started to send their children to foreign universities. From among my research participant's at least one of their children were in the USA or Australia for higher education. Thus, agricultural activities no longer exist in their families. Thus, the occupational shift has become a deep-rooted phenomenon of our community in search of better and higher education to get better jobs in other non-farm sectors. The statistical data also yield the reverse order of educational development and peoples' engagement in agriculture occupations. While comparing the literacy rate, it has increased from two percent in the 1950s to 70 percent at present, while the people's engagement in agriculture reduced from 98 percent to 60 percent at present (USAID, 2001; MoF, 2020).

Formal schooling enables an individual for occupational mobility from traditional, manual and hard types of physical work to non-manual and easy table work. Sometimes it results because of our faulty educational system. Our society has a perception that once people get educated, they should not engage in agriculture. Even the people having higher education in the agriculture stream are found looking for white-collar jobs. *“People who have no interest in soil are the ones who get degrees in agriculture sciences”* (Bista, 1991, p.132). The experiences show that parents educate their children because they want to take them out of agriculture occupation. At present, despite people’s perception of the meaninglessness of formal education for their life and livelihood, their priority is to educate their children with the hope of a better future. As Bista (1991) claims, despite the school and college education as less meaningful, people seek to get educational degrees just to acquire higher status in society. So the question is how to make those degrees meaningful.

Likewise, our education system hardly prioritizes the technical and vocational education and training (Parajuli, 2013). It has always been regarded as the second option for people or as the sector meant for socio-economically disadvantaged group. With the formulation of Constitution of Nepal 2072, nation has been prioritizing technical education for fostering the economic development (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). However, the red book of different fiscal years show that share of TVET in total educational budget had been declining from 4.6% in 2015/16 to 4% in 2016/17 and then to 3% in 2018/19. It is only after the formulation of new educational policy that budget allocation to TVET sector slightly raised to 5.19% in fiscal year 2019/20 (MOF, 2015/16-2019/20). The new educational policy “National Educational Policy 2076” focuses on producing educated, skilled, competent tech-friendly, human resources for transforming Nepal into prosperous nation (MoEST, 2019). Ultimately,

it intends to enhance citizen's employability for having nation's economic progress. Thus, after formulation of new educational policy in 2019, the budget allocation in TVET seems to be slightly risen, i.e. 5.19% in fiscal year 2019/20. However the rise is quite negligible.

Even within the technical education, plans and programs seems more focused towards other sectors like engineering, IT and hotel management. The new dual vet apprenticeship program has also been designed for mechanical, electrical, automobile engineering, hotel management and IT (Boli, et. al, 2019). Its focus on agriculture seems null. The informal sector barely recognizes the farmer's knowledge and skill who does not have formal education. Society hardly gives respect to the farmers even they possess excellent knowledge and skills in this sector. However with the new strategy of recognition to prior learning (RPL) and new national vocational qualification framework, there is a new ray of hope to retain people in agricultural sector (CTEVT & NVQS, 2019). If this concept could be practiced, it would give honor and self-respect to those farmers which would motivate them to continue their occupation.

### **Technical Dimensions of Occupational Shift**

The phenomenon of the occupational shift was somewhat associated with the technical hurdles in the agricultural sector. Despite having an interest and passion for agriculture, participants also blamed the faulty agricultural system and its poor management responsible for demotivating people to engage in an agricultural occupation. The following paragraphs thus, elaborate the dynamics agricultural system of Nepal influencing the action and reaction of my research participants.

### **Nepalese Agriculture System**

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century generation, my participants faced inaccessibility to basic facilities for agricultural occupation. Besides moaning about the times when their forefathers in the 1990s continued unproductive agriculture without using modern machines and tools, they also complained of how sluggish the progress is in their community. They did not get exposure to modern tools and techniques of agriculture. They pointed out the government of Nepal and its system were responsible for creating such a situation where even the basic inputs like certified seeds, quality fertilizers, irrigation facilities, technical support, or training were rarely available to the people at my research site.

In the line of adopting liberal economic policies, deregulation policies were implemented in the agriculture sector as well. Khanal and Kanel (2005) claim that such deregulations could not offer an incentive to the agriculture sector in Nepal to stimulate growth and enhance productivity. In the process of adopting liberal economic policies, the government implemented several reform policies where subsidy cut down was one major reform that created an adverse impact in the agriculture sector in the country, especially to compete with India (Acharya, 2004). As India continued the subsidy policy in the agriculture sector resulting in agricultural production at a low cost. Due to the open market, Indian agricultural products were available at a cheaper rate than Nepalese products. Thus, the situation demotivated Nepali people for agriculture and especially commercial farming. As a result, people gradually started leaving this sector shifting to other occupations.

Following the general process of economic development, we find the development of the industrial or service sector as a result of the advanced and well-developed agricultural sector (FAO, 2017). The raw materials and resources for

running these sectors could be made available from well-flourished agriculture in developed nations. But Nepal has not followed this manner of economic development. Its agricultural sector is not established enough to support the industries or service sectors. Only 52% of the population used basic tools for production; no agricultural mechanization has been implemented in the country (CBS, 2011). The agricultural transformation (FAO, 2017) which should have taken place as a consequence of development, is not visible in Nepal. Rather than enhancing commercialization in agriculture, people began to abandon farming and shifting to a less intensive farming system. According to the studies conducted by KC and Race (2019) and GC and Hall (2020), people chose to keep land barren or just continue smallholding farming rather than moving towards commercialization. This was again the result of risk, uncertainties, inputs shortage, and an unsupportive system in Nepal.

Master Babu and Kanchha Magar were also familiar with the carelessness of our government towards our agricultural system at the national level. Along with their personal experience on difficulties to get a bank loan for agriculture, training and technical production support, they were also up-to-date on several other cases at the national level such as products wastage, market unapproachability, fraud activities from middlemen to farmers, favoring imported products over domestic goods and many more. Their question indicates the functioning of local level bodies and new government as a whole was quite reliable to the national scenario of agriculture failure in the country.

The unsupportive experiences of my participants and similar news heard by them reflected poor agricultural policies and vague systems in the nation. Despite having well-defined structures and institutions in place, the local people are unable to reach the authorities. ILO (2019) claims that access to easy bank loans for agricultural

purposes is still challenging to smallholder farmers like my participants due to their lack of technical skills to produce successful and pay back the loan. There is very little technical support and provisions for such smallholders farmers in Nepal (Khanal et al., 2021). Moreover, after the formulation of the new government system through the new constitution of Nepal, the authorities do not seem to be clear enough with their roles and responsibilities. So, with the federalized structure rather than providing strong support to the local level, they are completely avoiding their problems (Bhattarai & GC, 2020). Likewise, the policies and provisions formulated by the government are not effective at the implementation level.

Taking the example of sugarcane farmers mentioned by our participants, Bhattarai and GC (2020) mentions that, despite having a strong support price policy from the central level government, the farmers could not receive their actual product value due to a big chain of middlemen in the bureaucratic system. This could be resolved easily if the concerned authorities were responsible for supporting at local levels. Similar issues came up regarding market accessibility all over the nation. Lack of clear direction, weak infrastructure for product storage and distribution system, and poor coordination among institutions were responsible for the failure of price policy in Nepal which is even much difficult to handle due to open border with India (Bhattarai & GC, 2020; Poudel, 2016). Thus, our government is incapable of valuing domestic products over imported ones. Moreover, the article also highlights the inability of the national economy to support small-scale farmers. This could be reflected even from the budget where a primary economic sector of the nation was allocated only 2.81% of the total budget (MOF, 2020). The unsupportive system of the country, devalued sector and unaware people seem to be triggering issues for rising occupational shift away from agriculture in Nepal.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY, INSIGHTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The chapter summarizes the insights of this dissertation. In the first section, I present a summary of my study, addressing the concerns of ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions. Descriptions of the ‘what’ question include the major themes of study along with some literature and prior studies done. How the section deals with the procedures of conducting this research along with its justification. Then, the next section is all about the insights on the occupational shift that I learned after conducting this research. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I articulate implications of my study. The possible steps that could be taken by referring to the major insights of this study are elaborated under the final section.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Agriculture plays a crucial role in uplifting Nepal’s economy since pre-historic times. Not only the contribution of agriculture to national GDP and employment opportunities but also it had been serving around 90% of the total population in Nepal for livelihood. Moreover, agriculture maintains the ecological diversity through the natural resources, geography, climate, soil and topography in Nepal.

In such a context, Nepali people seem to be shifting away from the agricultural sector to other non-farm occupations or move to foreign employment. Today, only 67% of the total population are employed in agricultural sectors and make a contribution of only 27% to national GDP. The resources are being underutilized, the country as a whole is forced to import food from other nations and still 11.4% of the total population is unemployed in the nation.

While digging depth on occupational shift, I found that it was indeed a global trend that labor shift from less productive sectors like agriculture to the more productive economic sectors as a consequence of development. However, the case of Nepal was different. The labor from agriculture was shifting to the even less developed industrial sector which has been still at the initial stage. Agro-climatic and cultural aspects of Nepal still reflected a huge potentiality to revive the Nepalese agricultural sector. Thus, to understand the in-depth phenomenon of occupational shift and its dynamics in Nepal, I undertook this study in semi-urban areas of the Kathmandu Valley.

The two municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley, Gokarshwor and Kagesowri Manohara municipality were selected as my research sites. These places held a long history of people's engagement in agricultural occupation and their gradual deviation from it, generation after generation. Altogether four participants (two from each municipality), who made the best representation of the occupational shift phenomenon, were purposefully selected. Since the study focused on exploring the perception and experience of people on occupational shift, so it was guided by the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research design. It adopted the strategy of narrative inquiry to uncover people's views on occupational shift. For this, the study applied an in-depth interview method supported by the observation of participants, their activities, expressions and emotions. Maintaining it as an iterative process, I conducted the last round of interview sessions through telephone due to the covid-19 pandemic situation. I first transcribed the field data followed by its transcription and then formed codes from that information. Putting similar codes together, I developed some themes which were then analyzed and discussed from the socio-economic lenses of modernization theory.



### **Key Insights**

Similar to the findings of several studies done at the national level, this study also explored socio-cultural, economic and technical aspects of the occupational shift. However, its phenomenon was quite vast and deep. I found that people's decision of switching their occupation was not instantaneous or dependent upon one single event. It was rather a sequential occurrence of series of life events and experiences of an individual. And not to forget those events and experiences once get hit by the social beliefs, norms and values, the individual constructs his/her mind to make the shift. So, these social, economic and technical limitations were just the triggering points of the phenomenon.

The study explored that economic issues were responsible for people's decision to change away from agriculture to non-agriculture. People were less satisfied with the economic modality of agricultural occupation. Since the beginning, people invested their time, resources, money, hard work, and patience into agriculture. They were even aware that achieving their targeted return would take some time. Unfortunately, they never got the economic return they calculated. Even if they got, the return was unstable and unsure. With time, people gradually explored many other ways of land utilization, which got them a higher return than agriculture. People started giving cultivable lands on lease or sell them and enjoy the easy money from the same and, as in the past, it required laborious and tedious work. Soon the agricultural land was a burden to people became the precious capital of earning easy money. The unavoidable human nature of moving towards a highly profitable sector just became enough to take people away from agricultural occupations.

In addition, the trend of foreign migration highly increased throughout the country. This quickly became an attractive income source to Nepali youths like the

children of my participants. Again their ancestral land served the financial support to send their children abroad. So, it became a matter of pride and prestige to my participants in their society that they were able to send their children abroad for possession of big land holdings. To maintain that pride in society, they were even suppressing their emotional attachment with their children and happily accepting their children's decision of settling in abroad or let's say their decision of safeguarding the properties for future generations.

Another major insight brought by this study was the functioning of socio-cultural issues on occupational shift. None of the participants regarded agriculture as a respectful occupation. Their society, upbringing and life lessons were responsible for such a mindset. On the one hand, they saw their forefathers/mothers engaged pathetically in agriculture bearing all the hardships and obstacles. While on the other hand, they continuously learned to prioritize white-collar jobs, clean table works, over the dirty, laborious farm works. It was indeed their parents teaching that agriculture was meant to be taken by poor and uneducated ones while table works are for educated and well-off ones. Not only family but also this value to occupation was also prevalent in society as a whole. They thus grabbed whatever little opportunity they got to escape from agriculture; either it is blaming the politics of the nation, or poor technical assistance or a corrupted system.

The learning pursued by my participants was even more intensified while coming to their future generation. They then, completely abandoned agriculture. Not only in terms of occupation, had it got the overall lifestyle being changed to a modern one. The food habits, clothing, education, health, and every demand of their future generation varied so enormously to theirs that they could not satisfy their children. Despite fulfilling all the demands, their children only wish to settle abroad in the

name of pursuing a higher educational degree or foreign employment. With time the culture inside the family, its structure and values changed as a result of modernization.

Yes, the findings on occupational shift were discussed in the light of modernization and analyzed by the theory of structuration. As a result of modernization, urbanization created numerous employment opportunities in modern society. This is why, the youths were dispersing from an extended family to nuclear ones in search of good job opportunities, higher income and ultimately a better lifestyle. The old generations were left behind and there was no human resource to continue their traditional occupation, i.e., agriculture. The feeling of individualism gets intense in this overall mechanism. To explain the complex phenomenon in simple words, the interaction between an agency and structure plays a vital role in taking these events to a decision of occupational shift. With time, the values and norms of society regarding occupation change and the action and reaction of the individual to such changes construct such mindset that they were forced to switch their occupation to remain as a part of that society.

### **Conclusion**

Occupational shift is a global phenomenon occurring in world as a part of development process over the period. The experience of developed countries follows a similar pattern of a gradual shift in occupation from agriculture to industry and then to service sector. Based on these experiences the development theories such W. A. Lewis theory of “unlimited supply of labor” states that the occupational shift from agriculture to other sector happens due to low productivity of agriculture sector than the other sectors. However, unlike the modality of 60s, and paces of shift varies according to the context of the countries in closed economy. Thus the occupational

shift was more guided by the economic factors. But today, the world has been changed into a global village where the process of modernization and globalization has a greater influence in people's life and livelihood. Today, people in Nepal are abandoning agriculture to give the sense of living a modern lifestyle which is ultimately perceived by society to be achieved from engaging in other economic sectors, migrating foreign countries or simply leaving the agriculture.

The phenomenon of occupational shift in Nepal is different from the experience of the developed countries. In developed nations, the shift from agriculture to other sector is associated with the agro-based development of industries and service sector where resources and raw materials from agricultural sector is utilized to foster other sectors. But in case of Nepal, people seem to be simply escaping the agricultural sector and moving to other sectors without proper plans and vision. The phenomenon is thus, bypassing the people in Nepal instead of benefiting them. This is not only causing loss of foundation for industrial growth but also making people ignore the most potential sector of the nation, both nature-wise and resource-wise. Ultimately such scenario is leading to several issues like loss of productive land, underutilization of natural resources, low employment opportunities to people and so on.

The study hence concludes that, the globally occurring phenomenon of occupational shift would be beneficial to people if it is taken in a natural way by utilizing agricultural sector to construct a strong foundation for development of other economic sectors and enhance their productivity. This can be eased with the meaningful implication of technical education in agricultural sector to enhance the employability and productivity of farmers. Simply, with the support of technical education, the indigenous skills and knowledge of farmers could be recognized hence acknowledging the value of agriculture to develop our nation.

### **Implications**

The study was undertaken to explore socio-cultural and economic dynamics behind the phenomenon of occupational shift. It explored the complex phenomenon along with the functioning of socio-cultural and economic dynamics to deviate people from agriculture to other sectors. Comparatively lesser productivity of the agricultural sector and low social value towards the occupation were responsible for the root causes of the issue. Thus, these findings could be useful for redefining the policies to revive the Nepalese agricultural system. The supportive policies could be formed to bring youth in agriculture for better employment opportunities and investing in agriculture as the main source of economy to increase GDP.

The study also implies in strengthening TVET educational system in Nepal. Since the occupation is less valued in society and considered the income source of poor and uneducated people. So, the overall educational system needs to be remodeled in such a way that it values our traditional occupation such as agriculture. The awareness of its potentiality, contribution and essence in the lives of Nepalese people and, Nepal as a whole, should be highlighted right from the primary level of education. In addition to this, a negative feeling of value to work is developed among future generations. This could also be supported by agricultural practitioners and social activists. Demonstration of its worth in economic growth and even development of other sectors like industry, manufacturing and service can be highlighted by the agricultural practitioners. It may contribute to reduce the agro trade deficit which is related to the income and social status. Once people find their improved social status, other people may also follow it. Meanwhile, the social activists could refer to the study for understanding the social dynamics of

occupational shift so that they would be aware of such phenomenon and help in reviving our agricultural sector.

Finally, the study could be useful to other academicians and researchers. My study was limited to exploring the socio-economic dynamics behind the complex phenomenon of occupational shift at the individual or societal level. I believe this would open avenues to further research or explorations on other dimensions of occupational shift, or effective ways to address the issue of occupational shift right from the national level.

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