

CULTURAL BELONGING IN URBAN CONTEXT: A CASE OF INDIGENOUS
HYOLMO COMMUNITY

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Anghima Lama* for the degree Master of Philosophy in Development Studies presented on *31 October 2025* entitled *Cultural Belonging in Urban Context: A Case of Indigenous Hyolmo Community*.

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Culture is a way of communicating the intrinsic relationship with the natural, spiritual, and social world. It's practice of rituals and the use of different symbols, signs, elements and marking day and date therefore holds a deeper meaning in communicating the worldview and traditional lifeways. However, these deep values that strengthen the relationship of Indigenous peoples with their community and places are in peril as more people are migrating to the urban centers. The increasing mobility to the urban space and the grand design of modernity has posed a threat to the indigenous culture. Culture, when it is replicated in the urban environment, is affected by the social, economics, politics, and urban architecture leading to the loss of communality and increasing feeling of not belonging. This study applies Indigenous research methodology in explaining how the Hyolmo communities are perceiving the shift and in response to that how are they negotiating their belonging. This study uses figuration theory and resonance theory to explain the cultural structuration in the urban centers and the ways the communities are forging attunement with the urban dynamics.

The insights suggests that the urban conditions; political, economic, social and structural dimension are eroding the Indigenous culture, as they impede the practices of the culture in the same sense. The demanding urban work culture, meaningless competition, consumerism— neoliberal projects are the major factors affecting how, when, where the culture is practiced. Nevertheless, Hyolmo communities continues to

resist assimilation, forge alliances, claim spaces and assert their presence in the urban space. This study adds to the literature on the Indigenous Hyolmo community and cultural shift in this accelerated time and offers insights on Indigenous resistance in the modern time.

This study applies relational accountability as a research paradigm, where relation is both the knowledge and ways of knowing, and accountability is a way of maintaining ethics and is methodology (way of unpacking the relationship). Different Indigenous Hyolmo methods of knowing, such as *Tongba tum*, *Chhepa* (cultural survival), are used to understand the relationship of the Indigenous Hyolmo community. Reflexivity and community engagement in the research process further enhance the reliability of this research

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31 October 2025

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सोध सार

विकास शिक्षामा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर डिग्रीको लागि अङ्गनिमा लामाको शोध प्रबन्धको शिर्षक "शहरको परिवेशमा सांस्कृतिक अपनत्व आदिवासी ह्योल्मो समुदायको कथा" १४ कार्तिक २०८२ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो ।

.....
उप. प्रा. सुरेश गौतम, पिएचडी

सोध निर्देशक

संस्कृती भनेको कुनै समुदायको प्राकृतिक, अध्यात्मिक, सामाजिक संसारको आन्तरिक सम्बन्ध व्यक्त गर्ने माध्यम हो । सांस्कृतिक अभ्यासको क्रममा प्रयोगमा आउने बिम्ब, धातु, प्रतिक, दिन र मिति तोक्ने अभ्यास आदिले कुनै समुदायको विश्व दृष्टिलाई दर्शाउँछ । यद्यपि पछिल्लो समयमा व्यक्ति र समुदायको सम्बन्ध जीर्ण अवस्थामा देखिन्छ । बढ्दो शहरीकरण, र शहरको आर्थिक, सामुदायिक, राजनैतिक, बनौटले आदिवासी जनजातीहरुको सांस्कृतिक अभ्यासमा ठुलो चुनौती ल्याएको छ । संस्कृतिको अभ्यासमा चुनौती आउँदा, समुदाय विशेष ज्ञानहरु र समुदायको एकरूपतामा असर पर्न सक्छ, जसकारण पछिलो समयमा शहरी क्षेत्रमा बिभिन्न मानसिक तथा एकलोपन, र अपनत्व गुमाउँदै गएको भन्ने बिभिन्न अध्ययनले देखाएको छ ।

यो अध्ययनले आदिवासी जनजाती विशेष अध्ययन विधि अपनाई, ह्योल्मो समुदायले शहरी क्षेत्रको बदलिँदो सांस्कृतिक अवस्थालाई कसरी बुझ्दछ र बदलाव बबाजुत अपनत्व कसरी अपनाउदछ भनेर ठूँई प्रश्नको उत्तर दिएको छ । अध्ययनलाई थप प्रकाश पार्न फिगुरेशन (Figuration) र रेसोनेन्स (Resonance) सिद्धान्त (Theory) को प्रयोग गरिएको छ । यस अध्ययनको निष्कर्षले सहरी अवस्थामा प्रतिबन्धनात्मक राजनैतिक, आर्थिक, संस्कृतिक, र शहरी पूर्वाधारले सांस्कृतिक अभ्यासमा असर परेको देखाएको छ । सहरी काम र फुर्सद (Work and Leisure) , अर्थहीन प्रतिस्पर्धा (Competition), र बढ्दो उपभोक्तावाद (Consumerism) ले संस्कृतिक अभ्यासमा थप चुनौती थपेको पाइन्छ । यद्यपि ह्योल्मो समुदाय यी सब चुनौती बावजुत प्रतिरोधक हिसाबले आफ्नो संस्कार र संस्कृतिलाई निरन्तरता दिदै आएको देखिन्छन । यो अध्ययनले अवस्थित ह्योल्मो अद्यान र साहित्यमा ह्योल्मो संस्कृति आधुनिक समयमा र ह्योल्मोतोव बारे थप योगदान पुरयाउनेछ ।

सम्बन्धगत उत्तरदायित्व, जसमा सम्बन्ध भनेको ज्ञान पनि हो र ज्ञान प्राप्त गर्ने आधार पनि हो, र उत्तरदायित्व हुनु भनेको नैतिक हुनु पनि हो र बिधि पनि हो । यसरी सम्बन्धगत उत्तरदायित्व अध्ययन दर्शन प्रयोग गरि, ह्योल्मो समुदायसंग जोडेको बिधि तोंग्बा तम र छेपा बिधि प्रयोग गरि सुचना संकलन गरिएको छ । बिस्तृत बर्णन, समुदाय संगको संलग्नताले यस अध्ययनको विश्वसनीयता बढाउदछ ।

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१४ कार्तिक २०८२

अङ्गनिमा लामा

उपाधि उम्मेदवार

This dissertation entitled *Cultural Belonging in Urban Context: A Case of Indigenous Hyolmo Community* presented by *Angnima Lama* on *31 October 2025*.

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

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DECLARATION

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

.....

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Hyolmo Community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As an Indigenous researcher, relationship for me holds the utmost importance, I believe what constitutes self is the complex web of relationship, that are acting and shaping how you think, how feel, how you perceive the world. As I sit down to write this acknowledgement, I am thinking of all the people that have shaped this inquiry, I am also reflecting on the materials that I read, material I listened to on YouTube, places that I visited that affected me, everything and every encounter reflects on this dissertation. I remember listening to Shawn Wilson where he had said everything that can affect you has a spirit, including words. And I completely agree, because there were so many texts and visuals, that have influenced my thinking and writing of this dissertation. I would like to acknowledge all those spirits of books, texts, audio, visuals that have shaped my thought. I acknowledge what I am is also the compound of every encounter in this process.

Apart from the spirit world, there were also many individuals with the spirit that nourished me equally. I would like to express my sincere gratitude towards my research supervisor, my guiding light, Assistant. Prof. Suresh Gautam, who trusted me and extended continuous support throughout my research journey, with whom I was able to build relationship of more than teacher and student. I would also like to thank Dr. Lal Bahadur Pun, my external supervisor for his meticulous observations, insights as a reader, the enrichment in concept and terminology and for helping me to shape this research in final form. I would also like remember Dr. Indra Mani Yamphu Rai and Dr. Lina Gurung, with whom I always had some close conversation regarding Indigeneity, and to whom I would usually turn to for any additional support. My acknowledgement also extends towards all the research committee members and teachers from KUSOED who were present in my scholarly journey, and continuously fueled my interest in reading, writing, and questioning.

After my *Gurus* I would like to remember my own community, my root that continuously supported me, made me feel that I am not alone, believed in me and continuously supported in shaping and finalizing my dissertation. I would also like to declare; this work is equally of my community as much as it is of mine. Without your support and input, this dissertation would not have been possible.

And, it goes without mentioning, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude towards my family member, my father, my mother, my lovely wife and my 16 months old Son “Rigsang”. You all are a blessing to me— my inner strength and my reason for being.

As an Indigenous researcher, holding relational accountability as a research paradigm, my acknowledgement of people, process and land reflects throughout this dissertation.

Land Acknowledgement

I belong to Indigenous Hyolmo community. The land where I stay and where this inquiry takes place is an ancestral territory of Indigenous Newar community, traditionally known as *Ye* or *Yen*, modern day Kathmandu. The specific place where this study takes place “Boudha”, is traditionally known as Khasti (dew drops) in Newari language.

I acknowledge, this territory originally belongs to Indigenous Newar community, and Newar people have deep spiritual, cultural, and economic relationship with this land. I am also aware of the forced assimilation, gentrification, displacement of Newari People and express my sincere solidarity for their struggle.

While this study focuses on the cultural shift and belonging of Indigenous Hyolmo community, I do it with full awareness and respect for Indigenous Newar community who are facing similar challenges of cultural transformation.

My land acknowledgement is a gesture of gratitude and reminder that my research stand on the web of Indigenous relationality, accountability and collective resilience.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COST	Cooperation in Science and Technology
ILO	International Labor Organizations
LA	Los Angeles
NHSSA	Nepal Hyolmo Society Service Association
UNDRIP	United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

HYOLMO ENGLISH GLOSSARY

Arak	Locally produced Distilled wine
Babar	A rice chapati made from rice flour and deep fried; a special delicacy among Hyolmo in Lhosar.
Beyul:	A sacred land according Nyingma Buddhist tradition.
Bha-Cham:	Mask dance in the high hills and mountain communities.
Changul:	A Tibetan drink where the Chyang is mixed with different fruits, nuts, Khapse
Chelba:	A bamboo basket (Doko in Nepali)
Chhepa:	Cultural occasion; rituals observed in monastery
Chi Ju	A festival to commemorate Guru Rinpoche.
Chhokpa:	Committee or association formed by different practitioner groups such as Shamans/ Pombo, lama, or it can also be of sub-ethnic groups.
Chokum	A Buddhist praying altar in Hyolmo houses
Chu:	Water
Chuba:	Traditional Tibetan attire
Chyang:	Locally produced fermented wine
Darchoe:	A Buddhist prayer flag
Dhukpu:	Misery or <i>Dukha in Nepali</i>
Gowa:	Village head under the customary governance practice.
Gumba:	Monastery
Hey:	Potatoes
Hyul:	Village
Karpu:	A white color
Khapse:	A Tibetan snack made from flour, sugar syrup and deep-fried in oil.
Khenpo:	A learned and accomplished Buddhist teacher from Buddhist monastery
Laari:	Traditional work Exchange practice (Parma in Nepali)
Lho:	Year or age (found to be used alternatively)

Lu:	Song (Can also mean place of water bodies, tree, stone, considered as a place of Lu)
Mhe Mhey:	Grand father
Nakpu:	A Black color
Numjum:	A place to buy oil (Modern day Ason)
Omji:	A village administrator under the customary governance practice
Palwa/ Palba:	A toad
Palwa konga	A toad egg
Palwa Piru	Young Toad
Poldang	Tadpole (life cycle of toad)
Pombo:	Shamans or Jhankri in Nepali
Tangmo:	A Cold feeling or sensation
Tashi Dhelekh:	Greetings in mountain communities and Tibetan Culture
Tenga:	A wollen coat that were traditionally worn by Hyolmo herders.
Terma	A prophesized revealer of the valley, objects or texts concealed by the Guru Padmasambhava in Nyingma tradition
Thim:	Customary law of the village.
Thungbu:	A singular Tree
Toa:	Stone, rock or pebbles
Tongba:	Denoting a past (time, object, talk) used as a prefix.
Tsher:	A feeling of being alone, lost, nostalgic
Tum/Tam:	Talk (kura in Nepali)
Tungna:	Traditional Hyolmo musical instrument with strings
Zhang	North direction

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A *Palwa* (Toad) Metaphor of Culture

I have used a *Palwa* as a metaphor to describe culture. The way I imagine *Palwa* is different from colonial speculation as an ugly creature; rather, for me, a *Palwa* symbolizes a spiritual being, like *Toa Palwa* (stone toad) that is in *Ama Yangri* (A sacred hill for *Hyolmo*). It symbolizes shift, transformation, adaptability, prosperity, and resilience. Because culture is also something both of and beyond the participating members (Gibson, 2009), when I am talking about culture, I am equally emphasizing the people/community and their ways of life (Causadias, 2020).

Like *Palwa*, cultures have a very fluid existence through time and space in the *Hyolmo* community. There is continuous metamorphosis taking place throughout the life cycle of a *Palwa*. Starting from *Palwa Konga* (toad egg) to *Poldang* (tadpole), *Palwa Piru* (toadlet), and *Palwa*, the being goes through a series of transformations. Culture, in the same way, is not stagnant; rather, it is dynamic and continuously evolves with the changing time and context (Varnum & Grossman, 2017). It is a time-tested knowledge and practice of the community shared and passed down through generations, introduced to newcomers and visitors, and given a facelift or more thorough makeover when big shifts are deemed necessary (Borer, 2006). Similarly, culture does not exist in a void; it is through the deep relationship between people and places that culture comes into being.

Culture, therefore, is unique and inherent in a place that metaphorically resembles the toad's relationship with water, where life happens. Their belonging to their place of origin or village is rooted in their cultural descent or ancestral home, and their belonging to the urban and global environment, anchored around survival and modernization, quite resembles the *Palwa*'s relationship with land, where they move out to hunt, mate, rest, and bask in the sun.

But the act of moving out is like a two-edged sword; it brings opportunities but also has serious consequences for both culture and the *Palwa*. Although the territory beyond provides new opportunities, it also poses a serious threat of being preyed upon, getting lost, and being alienated from your roots. It is just as true for culture as it is for *Palwa*. A study by Redfield (1947) suggests that as an individual or

the whole society moves from their folk society to the city or urbanized culture, there would be a breakdown in cultural traditions. Similarly, Lehan (2016) suggests that the rupture in the connection with your roots is mostly experienced in the urban environment due to massive acculturation and social shift, a metamorphosis of a different kind.

The Constellation of Mobility and Shift

The urban space, Kathmandu, based on my *Mhey mhey*'s (grandfather's) stories, is not a new place for the Hyolmo community. *Mhey mhey* used to share stories of his first leap to Kathmandu, his first encounter with power—when he unwarily had dared to cross the street during the procession of Juddha Shamsher. *The guard pushed and scolded me*, he would say, flashing his white-toothed smile. He saw nothing wrong in being treated that way; he spoke as lightly as of his life in the village. In one instance, he had also shared that when he had brought his eldest son, my father, to Kathmandu, carrying a *Chelba-Doko* (bamboo basket) full of *Hey* (potatoes) to sell around Boudha, they managed to sell only a few. My *Mhey mhey* had brought a biscuit and given it to my dad, but the poor fellow did not know what it was and kept holding it until he stumbled and dropped it on the floor. He would share those stories with glistening eyes as he shared of the *Dhukpu* (*Dukkha* in Nepali; Misery in English) of the past. The city for him was a reminder of the difficult life of the village; it was a reminder of his inferiority to the state, and it was also a reminder of unaffordable consumerism and consumption.

Fast forward to the present, and I and many Hyolmo communities have become a part of this city. I no longer feel like an outsider. I am just an active and equal consumer of what this city has to offer—English-medium schools, cars and motorbikes, concrete houses, health and hospitals, and whatnot. But on quite the contrary, it is when I visit a village or when some part of village life or culture is replicated in the urban environment that I am reminded of my inferiority or outsidehood to the urban community and to the state— an inequality, invisible for many but a constant reality for subalterns like me. The workleisure, laws, structures and the power that contrasts with my own ethnic reality are the stark reminders of my non-belonging.

Let Me Tell You a Story of My Outsiderhood

It was one of those evenings; our family had just completed the *Lho* cleansing ritual, praying to get rid of the faulty star. At the end of the ritual, we leave the effigy,

made from dough of different deities, on the crossroad—symbolizing harmful deities are lured out, such that they cannot find their way back. And as I and one of my cousins were proceeding with the end ritual, we were interrupted by community members; embarrassed, we left the effigy right beside the gate of our house.

On our return, we shared the experience with our family members and the Lama we had sponsored for the ritual. The Lama shared that traditionally, it should be left on the crossroads a bit far away, but now, I know it is not possible to carry out the rituals in the same sense here in Kathmandu, so it should also work.

The failure to carry out the ritual effectively, the interruption by the community in trying to leave the effigy in the crossroad, because it affects the aesthetic of the locality, are some of the ways I am reminded of my nonbelonging or outsiderhood in the urban space.

My story of outsiderhood is the reminder of the rigid social boundary of the urban space, an invisible force, a gas chamber where everything about my tradition is systematically annihilated. It is a point of not-belonging but also of resistance.

Experiencing *Culture in Urban Ways*

Cultural occasion (rituals, ceremonies, and festivals) comes and goes like a monsoon, once or twice a year. And like a *Palwa*, we engage in a life-continuing force, where, for once, we try to disconnect from our busy city life and the grand design of modern work culture and reconnect, remember, and rejoice in the tradition. Like the croaking of *Palwa*, one, two, three, and many more, the occasions make us realize the presence of our people, of our relatives, of our community, bringing back memories of our ways of water. The past, present, and future aligns together while practicing culture, where the values of the past are transmitted to the future, in present, —perpetuating our ways of water. The events or cultural practices, therefore, become an act of remembering the age-old wisdom of land, cosmology, and the shared unique worldview of the community and transmitting it to the future generation through practice (Cajete, 2020).

But sadly, in the dense urban environment, the sound of croaking is slowly fading. I remember a time when there used to be a large open field, and the monsoon used to be magical, with simmering rain and the soothing croaking of toads. But now, with the increasing concrete, I wonder where they have disappeared. I sometimes see them hopping on the street, on the public bus, and in digital spaces, alone and out of place, just like me. I wonder what it is chasing. A sprinkler for rain? Or is it trying to

chase the glittering lights of shopping malls and fast cars? Croak, croak... croak, croak in the empty street, and not another croaking sound.... Croak, croak... Croak, croak, alone and lost, and no one's around.

Statement of the Problem (Why do I care about toads?)

Indigenous culture, like a *Palwa*, is in crisis. It is out of place, and it is vulnerable to the grand design of modernity, perpetuated in urban space. Culture, when it is replicated in the urban environment, is affected by the social, economic, political, and urban architecture (Lefebvre, 2016). Culture is a way of communicating the intrinsic relationship with the natural, spiritual, and social world. Its practice of rituals and the use of different symbols, signs, elements, and marking day and date therefore holds a deeper meaning in communicating the worldview and traditional lifeways (Hall et al., 2003). Such associations are produced from the unique assemblage of people, places, and interactions with their traditional geography and community memory. When these practices are replicated in a different environment, the connection between place and culture gets severed (Borer, 2006), just like the complexity in practicing the *Lho* cleansing ritual, I have presented above.

Cultural shift in urban environments has a two-fold effect; firstly, it ruptures the continuation of time-tested knowledge and rich ancient heritage that has been passed down since time immemorial. Secondly, the shift also results in the weakening communality and increasing social upheavals or disjuncture leading to several problems related to identity, self-esteem, and psychosocial well-being (Chandler, 1998; Redfield, 1947; Wexler, 2009; Winthrop, 1967). On the same note, Winthrop (1967), suggests that the anxiety men and women experience today arises from an unclear conception of what constitutes a true sense of community.

The importance of culture has been well recognized in the Constitution of Nepal 2072 and mentioned under different fundamental rights and directives. There however are challenges in the ways it is realized in practicing development, conservation, or other state led interventions. Even more, the constitutional provisions mostly situate culture as a thing of the past, that needs protecting and preserving in its authentic form.

Empirically, there are different studies on Hyolmo community such as *Landscape, Ritual and Identity among the Hyolmo of Nepal*, by David Torri (2019), which highlights the changing political condition and identity of Hyolmo Shamans, Tom O' Neil; *The heart of Helambu: Ethnography and Entanglement in Nepal* shows

the opening up of Hyolmo to global market through engagement in carpet industry and the profession in Kathmandu during 80's and 90's, Robert Desjarlais's; "*Sensory biography: lives and deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhist*" adopts a unique sensory approach in understanding the perception and narration on death among two Hyolmo elders in Kathmandu. Although these studies shed light on changing social, political, and economic landscapes of Nepal and the Hyolmo community, they pay less attention to the interaction of the Hyolmo community with the broader urban community. On the same note, I believe that at the core of the culture and place and their decisions on the social, political, and economic is the conscious people, constantly navigating meaning, negotiating, and becoming.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to develop insight into how the culture is shifting in this accelerated time and how are individuals and communities developing resonance to the urban ways.

Research Questions

- How do Hyolmo people experience the cultural shift in the urban environment? and;
- How do Hyolmo communities negotiate their sense of belonging in the urban environment?

Rationale and Significance of the study

In this age of accelerated time, the people, culture and technologies are changing in an unprecedented scale (Rosa, 2020). The fast consumption, mobility, and appropriation of the environmental resources have invited not only an ecological crisis but also ethical. The dissonance with the urban space, where the modernity and acceleration peaks has led to feeling of alienation and not belonging.

The culture has a huge potential to enhance resonance; it has the potential to overcome alienation (Rosa, 2020). There are different works of literature that highlights how the culture can be a useful tool to enhance social capital (Huang, 2019), resilience (Ford et al., 2020), Communalities, and sustainability. For Instance, a study from the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST hereon) identified three possible roles of culture within sustainable development: culture in, culture for, and culture as sustainable development, where it sees culture not only as

cross cross-cutting theme across social, economic, and environmental dimensions, but also as a fourth pillar for sustainable development.

Nevertheless, culture has been taken for granted as a thing of the past, stagnant, heritage that needs to be protected and passed down to future generations, without realizing the potential it has in addressing the current world problems of climate shift, alienation, and ethics.

Hence, this study can add a new insight into the process of cultural shift in the modern accelerated time and in response how the ways communities are finding or forging resilience to resonate and belong. It highlights the survival of Indigenous culture and provides insight into the future of Indigeneity in the globalized and modern times. The study can be useful for students of Indigenous studies, urban planners, and sustainable development.

Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on the Indigenous Hyolmo community living in and around Boudha, Kathmandu-06. This study follows the Indigenous research paradigm, and a rich experience of the Hyolmo people living in and around the Boudha. It focuses on the experience of the community in Kathmandu, as they try to negotiate their rooted forms of belonging.

Likewise, culture can mean so many things, especially in Indigenous domain where everything is entangled and interrelated, it gets difficult to isolate them—things in isolation loses its meaning. I have therefore, put forward culture as a concept, where everything about the people and relationship are cultural being and things of culture. Culture in my enquiry therefore might appear surficial, but that is intentional, because by defining the culture I do not want to limit its scope.

Chapter Summary

Indigenous culture is at risk of discontinuation or disappearance due to the mobility to urban environment. The disruption or discontinuation of culture has two-fold effects, firstly it erases the rich knowledge heritage of the community that has continued since time immemorial. Secondly, the mobility to urban environment also puts the community at risk of poor adjustment leading to different psycho-social issues such as depression, increasing violence, drug addiction, divorce among others.

This study therefore aims to understand the phenomenon of shift and the effort that are put in response to resonate or to find attunement to the abnormal cultural shift. This study can be instrumental in understanding the perception of Hyolmo

people of fast-growing urbanization, the challenges of cultural continuity and the efforts that community put in place to belong to both worlds.

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REIVEW

This chapter follows the urban indigeneity conceptual framework in situating the study through literature reviews. Likewise, different empirical reviews on the Indigenous Hyolmo community, culture, cultural shift, and cultural shift in urban environments are the key thematic topics of review; likewise, a policy review of culture and the theoretical backing of the study are included in this chapter.

Indigenous Hyolmo Community

Indigenous Hyolmo community is one of the 61 Indigenous groups of Nepal. The total population of Hyolmo according to 2021 census is 10,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2021). However, many Hyolmo communities contests the number to be as high as 150,000. The geographical proximity with Indigenous Tamang community and the nature of ethnic identity that quite resembles with many mountains and hill community could have led to the flawed demography of Hyolmo community. In many instances, the Hyolmo community are erroneously categorized or misplaced as Tamang or Sherpa ethnic group (Torri, 2019).

The word Hyolmo denotes both the place and people. The etymology Hyolmo has been interpreted in many ways, and among them one of the most composed is, *Hyol* meaning village and *Mo* meaning deities. Hence the word Hyolmo translates as the village of deities. The Hyolmo land is popular as '*Beyul Padma Tsal*' or (the lotus groove hidden land), among the *Nyingma* sect of Mahayana Buddhist (Gelle, 2019; Torri, 2019). The legend says, Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche had concealed several sacred texts, places and symbols, among which the Hyolmo valley is one of them (Dondrup, 2010). It is believed the merits double when practiced in these sacred lands. Hyolmo villages therefore contains traces of different yogis and gurus that had visited the land in different historical epoch to practice meditation, among them the most prominent is the Milarepa.

In this sacred land, Hyolmo communities thrived practicing Agri-pastoralism (Bishop & Bishop, 1998). Due to the rugged land topography, the land yielded inadequately, making the villagers diversify their livelihood to pastoralism. The pastoral system followed vertical mobility, ascending to high mountainous range land in summer and descending to village and lower altitude in winter. Apart from their

circular mobility in practicing agro-pastoralism and their relationship with different rangelands, Hyolmo communities also had extended link with different places for other economic activities such as lower riverside basins, where many Hyolmo communities owned the rice field (Torri, 2019) or the relationship with Kathmandu, where they frequently descended to barter or sell the ghee, potatoes, radish to buy other essentials such as salts and spices. The nomenclature of different places by Hyolmo community such as *Numjum* (place to buy oil; modern days Ason), *Sa la toa la* (modern day Chabahil) further confirms the existence of relationship and the nature of relationship with different places.

Nevertheless, the Kathmandu was just a transient place just like their relationship with the lower basins and neighboring villages. The 70's and 80's decades witnessed lots of Hyolmo leaving their village to Kathmandu and working in carpet industries (Desjarlais, 2003; O'Neil, 2016). The Maoist insurgencies in the 90's further fueled the migration, as the villagers escaped to capital. The second generation of Hyolmo in the urban environment, like me, did not experience the culture in its authentic form, like they were practiced back in village. Although I grew up participating in the cultural events in Kathmandu and few faint memories of visiting the village and participating in some rituals, I can't quite say what they were. I do not know much about their significance.

The nature of relationship with the Kathmandu has shifted from a transient place to the home to many Hyolmo communities, residing around the Boudha Stupa. Amidst this changing relationship with Kathmandu, both urbanization and urbanism appear to take toll on the way culture is practiced. The urbanization of Hyolmo community has not only increased the influx of Hyolmo inside Kathmandu valley, but it is also emptying many Hyolmo villages. The challenge of cultural continuation is not only felt in the urban environment, but it is equally felt by the villagers, with the absence of youths and community. A few years ago, one fine evening I was with one of my friends from the village. He told me that there was no one in the village to do the Bha Cham (mask dance) for Chi Ju (a day to commemorate Guru Rinpoche). His concern, of the cultural continuity in village, fueled by increasing urbanization and my own experience of challenges I faced in continuing the culture in the Urban environment accentuates how the cultural practices in the urban and rural areas are deeply entangled and interdependent.

Indigenous Culture

Indigeneity is linked with history and memory of the territory (Baird, 2020). Indigenous culture is a community's way of life—a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001); Indigenous culture is the collection of ideas and habits any group learns, shares, and transmits from generation to generation (Linton, 1956). Scholarship suggests the relationship Indigenous Peoples have with their environment—objective observable behavior and metaphysical content of mind—is unique and irreplaceable (Karmakar & De, 2025). Indigenous cultural practice determines how members of society think and feel, directing their actions and defining their outlook on life (Haralambos & Heald, 2014; Sabatini, 2019). Indigenous culture, therefore, is a locus around which their unique identity, ways of life, sense of collectivity, and communality depend on. Indigenous cultural practice informs the unique worldview of the community and their relationship with the environment around them. Indigeneity and culture are therefore deeply entangled to the time and space—existing together like flesh and nail; forming, shaping and supporting each other. The culture informs the indigeneity, and the practice informs the significance of culture. It is due to same deep and intricate inside and outside cultural relationship with the environment, the unique holistic knowledge, belief, and practices are evident in Indigenous communities (Berkes, 1999). Therefore, when culture wanes, the underlying worldview, relationship, and sense of communality weakens.

Indigenous culture is the meaning people give to the time and space, making the mundane time and ordinary space special for celebration or cultural practices (Frake, 1962; Rusu & Kantola, 2016; Sans, 2004;). The deep relation and intergenerational transfer of ecological knowledge among Indigenous Peoples are dependent on natural resources and their connectedness to their ancestral land, perpetuated either through the nature of spirituality or cultural practices (Cajete, 2019; Toledo, 1999). Cultural practices, therefore, are a way of perpetuating the Indigenous worldview; it is an act of remembering the traditional wisdom and relationship with each other and with the environment around them (Cajete, 2019). The practice of culture involves the participation of community members, the use of resources, and the interaction with the place of ritualistic significance, hence creating favorable

conditions for cultural transmission to future generations. Ford et al. (2020), suggest that relationships with place provide a foundation for belief systems, identity, knowledge, and livelihood practices that develop a base for experiencing and understanding the environmental shifts and subsequently support developing resistance and responsive behavior to shift. The absence of any or all can rupture the significance of culture and erase the meaning and knowledge associated with the practices. The loss of culture not only erases identity but also a wealth of traditional ecological knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits developed over time as a member of society (Hall et al., 2003).

Indigenous Cultural Shift

Indigenous culture is inherently present as an idea, knowledge, experience, behavior and rules passed down, learned and preserved which are imbedded within the individual's memory, and art, tools, buildings, attires that are more tangible and present in the Indigenous territory (Fave & Massimini, 2015). These tangible and intangible heritage are passed down through the practice of culture and through oral traditions. Culture therefore shifts, adapts or evolves when practiced in different assemblage of people, place, and context.

In this accelerated time of modernization and globalization, cultural shift appears inevitable. The mismatch between the mechanical modern clock; that moves in accelerated phase, promotes fast consumption, mobility and growth and the ecological clock that moves synchronously with the nature and culture has resulted in the current world crisis (Rosa, 2016). Traditional cultures resonate with the nature; it informs the ecological and sustainable ways of life (Cajete, 2020). Therefore, the spatial and temporal difference between the traditional and urban environment, leads to the cultural shift.

Some of the most damaging cultural transformations, when viewed through a sustainability lens, have occurred incrementally over decades or generations because of influences that have their roots in colonization, industrialization, and modernity (Stephenson, 2023). Despite the positive affiliation of culture, the Indigenous culture in modern times is changing at an alarming rate due to both external and internal factors. The external facets include but are not limited to shifts in social, political, economic, environmental, media, and pandemic factors, among others. Likewise, the internal facets could be the deliberate action of the individual (Stephenson, 2023). Scholars have documented cultural shifts as a broad range of psychological and

behavioral patterns (Chandler, 1998). Hence, Indigenous cultural shift results from the multiple factors that are stemming within and without the individual, internal stimulus such as reflexivity and the external stimulus from the political, social, economic dimensions that the community experience and are affected by.

Cultural shift has been broadly studied through the lens of the Evolutionary School and the Cultural-Ecology School.

Cultural Shift from an Evolutionary Lens

Cultural evolutionary approaches tend to focus on millennia-long time scales in theoretical work as well as on micro-time scales in experiments. Henry Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861), Charles Lyell's *The Antiquity of Man* (1863), Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Lubbock's *Origin of Civilization*, and Edward Burnett Tylor's (1832–1917) are a few of the early works on cultural shift. Edward Burnett Tylor's cultural evolution stood out significantly because it resonated with the groundbreaking evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin. Just like Darwin's disposition of seeing modern humans and species as the advanced, Taylor saw the modern culture as the developed, and primitive culture that has 'survived' through time as anachronistic, undesirable, flawed, and degenerative to modern needs—requiring facelift through civilization process. For Taylor, cultural shift, therefore, was chronological advancement from the age of savagery (distinguished by activities of hunting and gathering) to the age of barbarism (nomadism and pastoralism, then agriculture), and finally into industrial civilization or the modern age (Ratnapalan, 2008). The traces of survival, therefore, offered insights into the evolution of culture and society (Boyes, 2013).

The “advanced” and “refined” culture of the West, synonymously positioned as modern, also explains the white men's burden of civilizing the Indigenous communities; It explains the forced schooling and assimilation—an emancipation in the Western eye and an erasure in the Indigenous (Kopnina, 2013). The modernizing or civilizing of the traditional cultures of the indigenous peoples and local communities resulted in cultural erasure and cultural shift. The cultural shift in the modernized Kathmandu, therefore, can be reinterpreted from the same lens. And the cultural adaptation can be viewed as the domination of modernization in the current time in the urban space

Cultural Shift from Cultural-Ecological Lens

Cultural ecology emerged towards the middle of the 20th century and got popular after the 1990s, with the focus on emerging new media (Du Yong, 2004). And the study of culture has become crucial and complex in the current globalized context, where the people, ideas, resources, and governance are in constant flux—shaping and reshaping human interaction and relationships (Urry, 2007). The notion of shift on the cultural scale likely also concerns a multitude of factors, including the evolution of ideas, the refinement of practices, reactions to shifts in social-ecological affordances, and so on

An ecological perspective on cultural shift provides an insight into the dynamics between cultural practices and environmental sustainability. It perceives cultural shift not as linear evolutionary process, but as an outcome of the interaction among individuals and their shared environment (Baumard & Andre, 2025). Cultural ecology encompasses the study of how societies adapt to their physical surroundings, the knowledge they share about these environments, and the implications of these interactions for cultural development (Barkas & Brand, 2023). The doctrine of cultural ecology seeks to identify the catalysts that influence the psychology of the community in any ecological condition and corollary shift in culture (Varnum & Grossmann, 2017). Cultural ecology suggests that the culture and environment are parallelly connected, hence the shift in the cultural environment also leads to the shift in the culture of the people. Its stance of culture as both inside and outside and positively interrelated (Nsamenang, 2015) also explains the cultural shift in the urban space when the community moves out of their traditional territory, or shifts taking place in the social, political, economic atmosphere, due to accelerated modernization.

However, in speaking of the inside and outside culture, it also suggests that the inside culture plays a dominant role in channeling the outside culture. It could also mean the culture that is deeply embedded in the person, plays a determinant role in how they interact with the changing environment, and if they choose to adopt or resist the culture they come across in different space.

Cultural shift, therefore, can be seen as a complex phenomenon. It is the result of the transcendental factors; external cultures, that are hard to account, such as social, political, ecological, commercial, capital, new media, among others that are constantly in the process of forming, and at the same time it is also the result of the immanent choice and consciousness driven by inside culture—the deliberate action

towards the cultural shift or resistance, shaping and forming depending on the changing environmental contexts.

Negotiating Belonging in Urban Context

Belonging is an emotionally charged social location, with the shared values, relations and practices (Anthias, 2006; Czarnecka, 2022). A sense of belonging is informed by affective relationship with the family and community but is also shaped by the state sponsored institutions and activities (Thapan & Raoul, 2010). The belonging therefore, holds a close resonance with the culture, as it informs your relationship to the place and people. The perception on culture therefore can be a strong analogy to understand belonging. Because belonging is closely linked to the culture, belonging as a subject of enquiry becomes even more relevant in the present world context where the people are in constant flux and must live in shared location with diverse communities.

Belonging is rooted in family or community but is equally anchored by choice, forged by political conviction, civic engagement, lifestyle among others (Baumann, 1990). Belonging, rooted and anchored appears synonymous to inside and outside culture as suggested in the cultural ecological lens. The inside culture that informs rooted form of belonging is where the commonality, mutuality and attachment can be realized. It is also the space where the insider draws a social boundary of social inclusion and exclusion, which become even more evident in the urban environment. The belonging project therefore is closely linked with the social boundary (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2022), where the community draws strict boundary to maintain the coziness of the community or keep out the newcomers, making it the issue of inclusion and exclusion (Czarnecka, 2022). Belonging therefore becomes political (Davis, 2011), constantly contested from within and without. Hence belonging is a set of dynamic processes where individual and groups are in constant dialogue of seeking and granting belonging (Skrbis et al., 2007).

Urban Life world consists of multiple forms of belonging, belonging to social group, work, other institutions and belonging from different social groups. There is constant becoming as people try to belong to different social groups, the web of relations expand far and wide in the urban environment, where we are faced with challenges and choice to belong to different urban life worlds such as professional, education, market among others, Sometimes these different forms of belonging comes into contestation especially when it contradicts with the your cultural value. There is

inside cultural force that tries to bind you to your rooted form of belonging and at the same time there is outside culture that you try to anchor to as you try to become part of urban collectives (Czarnecka, 2022).

Hence, the interplay between individual choices, commitments, practices, quests, hopes, desires on one hand, and collective processes, social norms, and boundaries on the other hand becomes a frontier of contestation in the urban environment. State rule, market forces, forced displacement, re-nationalization, pluralization, acceleration of social shift, and widening horizon of human aspirations become a frontier of contestation in belonging

The practice of culture and rituals that ameliorate the sense of belonging and strengthen the communal bond are challenged and shaped differently in the urban environment. Such practice of culture is through which the community asserts their rooted form of belonging; it is an area through which they realize commonality, mutuality, and attachment to their rooted place (Czarnecka, 2022). Because belonging is rooted in place rather than space, in familiarity, sensual experience, human interaction, and local knowledge (Vathi & Burrell, 2020), the sense of belonging of Indigenous people in the fluid urban environment appears malleable.

Cultural Shift in the Urban Context and Indigeneity

The beginning of the 21st century saw an unprecedented growth in the urbanization process, resulting in almost half of the world's population in the urban environment. According to the World Bank, the World Development Indicator Urban Report 2023, the total global population living in urban areas, as of 2021, accounts for more than 56.38% and is increasing at the rate of 1.57%. In the same way, Nepal is experiencing just a proportionate growth in the urban centers. The number of new urban centers has increased from 58 in 2013 to 293 in 2021, with 66.2% of the total population living in the urban environment, and it continues to grow (Joshi, 2023).

The expediting urbanization has two-fold effect on Indigenous communities. Many traditional Indigenous territories, are experiencing gentrification, leading to the loss of culture and increased urban poverty (Mendoza et al., 2022). Secondly, as many Indigenous communities are migrating to the urban centers in search of better opportunities, they are experiencing cultural assimilation, exclusion, and subaltern position in the urban space (Singh et al., 2025). Kathmandu, home to Indigenous Newar community, remains unexceptional as it is listed as one of the top ten fastest urbanizing countries in South Asia (Timsina et al., 2020). While the population in the

urban centers continues to grow at the rate of 6.5% per year, there is also increasing challenges of urban poverty and exposure to multi-hazard risk. Indigenous Newar community are experiencing the brunt of increasing immigration in Kathmandu as many of their traditional territories are now covered under clustered concrete slabs. Many of their sacred places are buried under the modern structures, and are in verge of extinction (Maharjan, 2024). The situation of immigrating Indigenous communities from different districts of Nepal remains equally frail, as they are forced assimilated into the countries hegemonic Hindu system. It also echoes with Redfield, (1947), when he suggested that as an individual or the whole society moves from their folk society to the city or urbanized culture, there would be a breakdown in cultural traditions.

It is given, different scholarship suggests rapid social shift and acculturation in the urban environment have the negative repercussion on cultural identity and wellbeing of the Indigenous communities. On the same note, Ford et al (2020), suggests vulnerabilities are closely linked to colonization, globalization, and development patterns that are dissociating community from the root, decreasing morality, and increasing competition and greed, fueled by neoliberal aspirations, which are mostly evident in the urban centers.

Hence in this accelerated time, as the urban centers are increasing at an unprecedented scale and many Indigenous territories are experiencing modernization, the culture of Indigenous Peoples stand at a critical juncture. Many prevalent studies show how Indigenous Peoples are already facing a challenge of cultural continuity either through gentrification or forced assimilation into the mainstream culture of the nation state. The modernization is equally responsible in shaping the perception and world view of the Indigenous communities, leading to increased out migration and cultural decay.

Urban Indigeneity

Urban Indigeneity explores how Indigenous peoples navigate and shape urban spaces, challenging traditional notions of Indigeneity tied to rural or reservation settings (Brablec & Canessa, 2023). Urban indigeneity highlights the resilience and agency demonstrated by indigenous people in (re)negotiating their sense of identity and place within urban spaces (Dorries, 2022). A growing body of research illustrates that Indigenous peoples have significant resilience and are actively observing and adapting to shift in a diverse way (Ford et al., 2020). Nevertheless, when Indigenous

peoples are exposed to the urban environment, their resilience is shaped by multiple forces of urban life, such as the dominant politics, economics, social configuration, and urban architectures.

The access and exposure to the western world and the inoculation of the western norms as the quintessence of being modern and advance has accelerated the rural-urban migration of Indigenous communities (Rosa, 2020), leading to detachment from their traditional lands. Such detachment is detrimental to the identity and sense of belonging, to Indigenous Peoples (Smith, 2010). Nevertheless, it has also become inevitable—a self-regulating force where anything solid about the culture is deemed to shift—by the self-propelling, self-intensifying, compulsive and obsessive ‘modernization (Sass, 2012), in the urban space. But, as much as the external focus of environment are shaping the culture, it is also equally true, that the community are not a passive recipient, but are active members, shaping, negotiating and navigating through the accelerated modernity, finding resonance and belonging in the urban environment (Rosa, 2020).

Modern urban culture is characterized by multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, and a shift towards maximum convenience and individual independence. But as communities move from their traditional territory to urban settings, there is also a mass acculturation and shift in the traditional values. The cultural shift in urban environments has been broadly studied by the Chicago School, Neo-Marxist School, LA school and Urban-Culturalist School. The Chicago School explains cultural shifts in relation to social structures, race, and economic politics (Borer, 2006). Although the old Chicago School scholars were centered around the notion of culture and cultural shift from the evolutionary lens where the culture of the city was perceived as modern, and a city as a place of civilized man and contrarily the rural culture was perceived as primitive, backward, outdated and stagnant (Borer, 2006). The new Chicago School sees politics as a central force that determines the consumeristic character of the city, as suggested by Neo-Marxian and LA schools (Lessig, 1998). It emphasizes different areas of study; City from a pluriverse lens, comprising of diverse and competing subculture; non-universality and uniqueness of culture; the presence of conflict as a normal dimension of urban life meditated through politics, consumerism and competition; globalization (Clark, 2004).

For Neo-Marxists, or conflict-oriented political economy, culture shift is the product of material interest, a thing of market that can be bought and sold, or capital

that enriches private parties (Castelles, 2002). It focuses on the commercialization of culture and how culture adds to the power structure are negotiated. Culture is treated as a means, a cog, operating from the external force, that contributes to the material gain when brought to market

LA school have invited a cultural turn in urban studies (Byrne, 2001), with the disposition that culture is not something as the result but an active agent in shaping the behavior and ways of life, therefore should be given equal emphasis. The LA School, however, differs from the Chicago School and the neo-Marxists for they base their interest in culture and its effects, especially media-based manipulation (Borer, 2006).

Finally, Urban culturalist school It deems to study cultural shift from both top-down and bottom-up approach. It sees the culture as a bigger frame that influences the behavior of the community and doing so, it equally reemphasizes the agency, and autonomy of the individuals and community within it, that can shape their culture. Nevertheless, it recenters the attention to the place to understand the culture and shift rather than other factors acting on the culture.

Among these different schools, I echo with urban culturalist school, because it does not perceive the shift as only the result of transcendental factors; social, political, economic, and architectural, but recognizes the agency of individuals in the structures that are equally engaged in making meaning and shaping the urban interaction.

Policy Review

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) declares Nepal as a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious, multicultural, geographical diverse, secular, inclusive, federal, democratic republican state. Likewise, the under the fundamental rights, Article 32 there is a right to language and culture. This right basically focuses on the right of individuals to use their mother tongue, right to participate in the cultural life of their communities, and right to preserve and promote language, script, culture, cultural civilization, and heritage. The directive principle, article 50 (2) the social and cultural objective of the state is directed towards creating civilized and egalitarian society by eliminating all forms of discrimination, exploitation and injustice including the cultural. Article 51, C (1), under the policy design relating to social and cultural transformation, it emphasizes on building friendly social relation by developing a healthy and civilized culture. Under the article 51 (j), policies related to social justice and Inclusion article 8, especially emphasizes on the participation of Indigenous

Nationalities in decision concerning their community and ensuring their rights to live with dignity, identity and protect and promote their traditional knowledge, skill, culture, social tradition and experience of Indigenous Peoples and Local communities.

Although the culture and cultural dimension is ostensibly used in the current constitution of Nepal it mostly is centered around the protection, and commercialization of the culture for the prosperity of the state. The idea of culture is taken superficial; as thing of past, a thing that can be materialized and preserved in traditional form for tourist to gaze and for economic benefit. Although the constitution guarantees the rights for community to participate and practice their culture, the same constitutional provision and different forest and conservation act also limit the access to the resources and different places of cultural and spiritual significances that are important for the community to practice their culture.

Globally, the perception on culture is shifting, it is no longer seen just as a thing of the past, but it is treated as intersecting and cross cutting themes across different disciplines of environment, economics, social, and political. A study from the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST hereon) identified three possible roles of culture within sustainable development: Culture in, for and as sustainable development. The first role (“in”) sees culture as a fourth autonomous pillar of sustainable development; the second, (“for”) advocates a mediating role of culture between the three pillars; the third, (“as”), “defines culture as the necessary overall foundation and structure for achieving the aims of sustainable development” (Sabatini, 2019).

Likewise, although the constitution of Nepal reflects few of the international provisions that has been enshrined through conventions and declaration such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) 169, United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), that are more dedicated to the rights of Indigenous peoples and guarantees the provisions or FPIC and meaningful participation, it is meagerly reflected on the constitution. Likewise, the provision of UNESCO¹ (universal declaration of cultural diversity, 2001) that mostly emphasizes on the protection of tangible and intangible cultural

heritage holds a central position in the constitution while referring to cultural rights or policy plan for culture.

The effect of accelerated cultural shift is one of the major problems of modern time, a subject that is well known yet easily overlooked. The state's laws and policies that are designed to favor one type of ethnicity can have negative repercussion on the culture and practices of other heterogenous community living within the boundary of nation-state. The state should not limit culture only as a constitutional right, but also carefully consider the plurality of the community, and help address the issues where the culture prerogatives of more than one community contest in values.

Figuration Theory

Elias et al. (2012) defines figuration as a structure of mutually orientated and dependent people, where the individuals forge interdependencies. The theory further sees the process of figuration as dynamic, where the network of people, their nature of dependency on the common space and time, are seen as in constant flux (Dolan, 2014). The concept highlights the shifting relationship between individuals as nature and extent of their interdependence shift over time; it is for the same reason that figuration sociology is also known as process sociology. The figuration of interdependence is developed over many generations encompassing shift in social forms, structure, value, attitude, belief and norms (Dolan, 2014). The concept, therefore, requires longitudinal study to make meaning of how the structures are formed, shaped, determined. For Elias et al. (2010) though people make choices, they make them within the context of a preexisting figuration that both constrains and compels choices and perceptions. Hence the structuration is longitudinal process, shaped by the preexisting status.

At the core of figuration theory is the relationship, which is perceived as an important aspect for the individual's well-being and fulfillment of the social and physical needs. That is why it hypothesizes people tend to develop wider and more extensive relationship to enhance the quality of life (QOL). The expansion of relationship also means they must learn to attune (synchronize) their conduct to the demand and compulsion of wider social pattern, which often leads to the difficulty in fulfilment of one's own needs or desires. The increased dependency outward towards the dominant structure also means the less or poor control within the mutually dependent people known as society (Elias et al., 2012).

Figuration theory therefore holds a central stage in explaining ways of becoming or belonging, because the theory emphasizes on the relationship and interrelatedness, and while acknowledging the fluid nature of time and space, it also suggests that people are in constant effort to establish relationship to configure a relationship, in harmonious way and in doing so there is an interplay of power in determining the structuration of the new relationship.

Figuration theory in my research helps to understand how culture of Indigenous peoples is structuring in the urban environment, as the people try to develop interdependency and relationship with the broader urban dynamics. Placing culture as a unique assemblage or configuration, the theory will help in understanding the phenomenon of structuring, in the urbanized modern context.

Resonance Theory

Rosa suggests resonance as a response to the dissonance of the current accelerated time. For Rosa, modern time is characterized by the expediting mobility, consumption, development, an insatiable need that become increasingly difficult to fulfill. Rosa therefore finds the modern time as unresponsive and dissonating, and in response to this he suggests the resonance is the answer. He therefore places Resonance theory as a mode of relating, through which people feel moved, touched, or affected by people, objects, or by places they encounter (Rosa, 2016). It is only when someone is affected, or deeply touched, they will stop the madness of modern time and find attunement.

Rosa further goes on to suggest that the resonance is a fundamental human characteristic, because it is tied to survival; it is something we are born with and a prerequisite of a good life, through which our subject and social world come into being (Rosa, 2016). Resonance is an instinctive and intuitive process that is shaped by personality and experience (Rosa, 2016). Hence, resonance or our ways of resonating is a continuous process; it is our effort for survival and effort for a good life (Vosmer, 2024).

Because resonance is closely linked with the belonging; finding commonality, mutuality and attachment (Czarnecka, 2022), which is like finding attunement. This theory helps in substantiating my second research question on how is belonging is negotiated in the urban space.

Chapter Summary

Indigenous culture is undergoing a major shift in this highly globalized and modern time. As the rate of rural-urban migration continues to increase, it has not only led to the increased concentration of people in the urban centers, but it has also invited several social and psychological problems such as increased feeling of alienation and dissonance. Although culture has huge potential in addressing the issues of dissonance and alienation, the urban politics, economy, structure further fuels the challenges in practicing culture. The constitution of Nepal although it has granted different cultural rights and the directives are present to preserve culture, the understanding or the position of culture are kept as a mere spectacle or heritage that needs to be protected, without adequately mentioning the strength of culture in addressing different modern problem and future possibilities. The review of Figurations and Resonance theory further substantializes the importance of the relationship. Because at the core of both the theories it emphasizes the relation to configure or build a relationship or to address the growing problem of alienation or dissonance in the urban environment.

The review of literature and policies has helped in developing insight into thematic area concerning the Indigeneity, urbanism/urbanization, cultural shift, indigenous culture and it has also developed insight into existing studies on cultural shift and culture in urban environment. The review of policies has helped in understanding the policy gaps and the legal provisions concerning the practice of culture. Likewise, theoretical review has helped in explaining my two research questions. The cultural shift, explained through figuration theory and the belonging through resonance theory.

CHAPTER III INQUIRY PROCESS

Research methodology provides a foundation for the research. It creates the philosophical position to look at the research purpose and the appropriate methods to substantiate the research.

Who am I, and why this research?

I wonder if anyone truly knows who they are. We identify ourselves based on our sensorial experiences of time and space, and how it leaves us affected. Our ways of being and belonging are hence a careful negotiation of our consciousness that has developed over time through our experience or the experience of our ancestors that has been subtly passed down onto us, embedded as culture or in our very genetic construct.

The idea of relational self is fragile and contextual. Someday, I feel confident, bold, and active, and other days, just opposite, filled with self-doubt and not belonging. The idea of asserting self, therefore, is difficult, and I leave that burden to you. Rather than what makes my physical identity, my flesh and bones, my skin and outlook—Pleasing to some and irritating to others— all depending on the nature of the relationship, I reemphasize my position through the lens of belonging.

My rooted belonging arches to the Hyolmo region and Hyolmo culture, but I am not just limited there. I anchor myself in different academic and professional settings in the urban environment, I try to belong here but at the same time try not forgetting where I come from.

As a young academic researcher, pursuing his research, on the topic, “Cultural shift and negotiating belonging among Hyolmo Community” a few reasons shape my choice and my inclination towards the topic; firstly, as an insider Hyolmo who was born and raised outside Helambu. Helambu or Hyolmo has remained a transient place for me, with occasional visits once a year or less. The last time I was there was in 2021, almost three years ago.

Secondly, as an urbanite in constant persuasion to become and to be accepted in this chaotic urban life, and in doing so, not losing my sanity. My belonging, therefore, is shaped by two colliding worlds, one where I come from and the other where I belong. The amnesia in the city is real; there is a lot of forgetting and

dissonance from your roots. Like many other Hyolmo youths, I try my best to compose myself, participating in the cultural occasion, to feel connected and be accepted. But it is not easy keeping up with the two worlds. As Taylor, (1995) puts it, “Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen.” I think my interest in studying Hyolmo culture emerges from a similar experience of getting lost, the feeling of dissociation and meaninglessness in this vast and concrete jungle of urban space.

Indigenous Research Paradigm

If paradigm is an underlying worldview and assumptions that guide research and researchers, the Indigenous research paradigm follows relational accountability as a philosophical stance (Wilson, 2009). In the Indigenous research paradigm, knowledge does not exist in a void; it is always in relationship. It is shared and holistic in nature. Therefore, relationships do not merely shape reality; they are reality. Since the knowledge is relational, it is through understanding why/how these relationships are established. Therefore, relationality is both the knowledge and the ways of knowing.

The philosophy of relationality fits the notion of culture. Because of the understanding that culture is holistic and universally constitutive of social relations, and therefore, also of identities (Yaduvendu, 2021). It is through understanding the relation and interconnectedness, culture can be known. To understand the social relations, the researcher should follow strong ethical guidelines and the community code of conduct and be accountable towards the all the interconnecting relationship.

The process of knowing follows understanding the relationship, through experience; somatic and cognizant— to understanding the experience of the participant in the village and in the urban context, and how it affects their sense of belonging. Indigenous methods such as Tongba tum (storytelling), celebrating survival, and reflexivity were the methods used to collect data. Community ethics and wellbeing were kept central, following the principle of do-good no harm, throughout the research process—an attempt to maintain accountability towards the community. Likewise, reflexivity on the ethics, methods, participant interaction, and findings also helped in enriching relational accountability and ethics.

Inquiry Approach

Relationality is learnt from stories, watching our old people yarn, or sitting with Country – relationality is seldom learnt from academic journal articles (Tynan,

2021). The rich sensorial experience of the community and how they defined their experience through words, metaphors, and practices adds to the rich data for this research. I used different Indigenous methods of data collection; some inspired by the work of Linda Smith's Decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999), some through the close observation and reflexivity of how knowledge is usually shared in the family and community. Some of the decolonial methods I have used are as follows:

Tongba Tum (Talk of the Past)

The etymology of Tongba tum translates as Tongba (past, earlier), and tum (talk). The method does not follow any ritualized setting, it is in the presence of two or more individuals immersed in talking and listening of nostalgia, of *Dhugpu* (onus or *Dukha*), events among others, and can cover vast areas related to the myths, stories of the land, stories of themselves, stories of ancestors, or the ways of life in the past. These talks are important because they act like a time split, bringing out what stood important or what left them affected. It also re-animates the relationship with the place, time, people, and nature, forgotten in time, brought back through stories and sharing. The conversational method helped in generating information about the first experience of coming to Kathmandu, their interaction in the process, their memories of the feeling and people among others. Tongba tum mostly took place with elders, to hear or to know about the events that unfolded in the past. Growing up in the same community, there were many instances when I would hear from my grandparents, parents, relatives, and friends about their Tongba Tum.

Chhepa (Celebrating Survival)

Chhepa are an important cultural occasion, taking place in monastery. These are communal and collective events, where the whole villagers gather to pray or to celebrate. Cheppa involves different rituals such as *Chi ju*, *Nara*, *Maani boom*, *Talpangti* among others. These occasions echo the traditional life ways and play an important role in strengthening communal bonds, values, and world views, that are important to establish relationships within and with future generations.

It was through participating, closely observing of the rituals and symbols, and through conversing with the participating elders, I was able to understand the underlying reason and purpose of the rituals. For instance, the *Talpangti* ritual, which mostly falls right after Losar is an important nature worshipping ritual, where the villagers gather and worship the protector gods and deities. The ceremony is held for the good weather and good harvest, which informs the Hyolmo relationship with the

land, climate and spirits. Participating in Chhepa also helped in connecting and building relationship with other Hyolmo communities.

Locating the Study Area

Located in Ward No. 6 of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC), Boudha is a home to many Hyolmo people coming from adjacent district, Sindhupalchowk. Boudha has remained as a place of spiritual as well as place of economic interaction to Hyolmo communities. In the past, Hyolmo people descended to Boudha, to buy essentials such as oil, sugars, and other household appliances. Fast forward to 80's and 90's many Hyolmo people were domiciled around Boudha (Torri, 2019). Moreover, the decade long Maoist insurgency also appears to have expedited the flow of people from village to the cities. Boudha stupa's establishment is connected to the myths of Nga Chang Shakya Jango (A northern revealer- Ter-ma), the same guru who opened the beyul, Hyolmo valley for settlement (Torri, 2019). Hence, the spiritual ties and the cultural proximity could be the reason for many Hyolmo people to select Boudha as a home away from home.

People Whom I Work With

Participants for the study were purposively selected. The insights from two Hyolmo elders, one customary leader, two people from Hyolmo welfare society, and several informal interactions with family members, scholars, youths, and my own experiences growing up, and my reflexivity, acts as an information in my study. The selection of my participants were driven by interest to understand the perception of those who were born and grew up in village and only in their later stages of their life came and settled in Kathmandu; these informants were mostly elders, or few others who were born in village but grew up in Kathmandu, mostly belonging to generation X and Y, and the generation who were born and grew up in Kathmandu, mostly Millennials. My selection was also driven by the purpose to understand the perception and experience of Hyolmo urban dwellers, students, employee, and businessman. I have also tried to be careful about the inclusion of the women's voice and their experience in urban space. The detail of the interaction is presented in the next chapter.

Community Ethics

Ethics is one of the most important aspects of Indigenous methodology (Kovach, 2009). I have tried my best to become ethical in researching with my

community. I have remained reflexive of my approach and ways of approaching the community to reduce any form of harm on my people.

My insider position and my experience of growing up in the community helped me in understanding the community ethics and culturally appropriate behavior such as, ways to approach, taking consent, remembering, reciprocating, anticipating and analyzing the situation, time, and space among others. I was careful in not obstructing their routine. I took all the time and explained in the best ways and language to inform them why this study was necessary, why their voice and experience were necessary, and why it was important for us to pause and reflect on who we truly were. To avoid misinterpretation, my insights were also shared with few other Hyolmo people.

The Credibility of my Research

The view present here was developed in several ways. My lifelong participant observation as an Indigenous person has formed my world view in general and my belief about Indigenous research more specifically (Shawn, 2008). I have to the best of my ability practiced accountability towards my community, informing them about the research, engaging them in creating knowledge. Likewise, strengthening relationship with the community through active participation in different cultural occasions also adds to the credibility of my study. In different instances new relationships were established, the relationships were named following our ancestral descent and ethnic identity. The ability to build and name relationship also increases the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. Thick description, field notes, transcripts also add to the credibility of my research.

CHAPTER IV STORIES OF MY CULTURE

One of the key ethics in Indigenous research methodology is becoming accountability by making explicit about the research process, right through the planning, to final meaning making (Wilson, 2008). This section provides an insight into how the process of data collection unfolded. How the relationship was established or strengthened, in the process. Rather than very structured question and answer process, the writing I have presented follows an interactive process, where I and participant is equally engaged in meaning making. I have also kept backdrops to set the mood of interaction because such backdrops can give a sense of shift under which the conversation took place.

Mr. Pemba: Absurdity of Modern Time

It was late afternoon in April, after a long winter; finally, spring was here, but it felt nothing like spring. The scorching heat, thick air with a burning sensation with the scene outside like doomsday; hazy sky filled with smoke. Just a day before, the news read, “Kathmandu ranked the most polluted city in the world.” (Paudel, 2025). The unending protests by different political wings that were turning violent, and the dire environmental conditions had left me affected, what am I doing in this country? I hated being here.

After walking for around 15 minutes in the dreadful heat, I finally reached Himalayan Java. A strong smell of freshly ground coffee hit my nose, and suddenly, I fell back on my feet. I feel a sense of belonging amongst the crowd of coffee connoisseurs. In the far corner there were a few people at the shared table, eyes fixated on their screens and fingers scanning through the keyboards—digital slaves just like me. I checked for a space that was a bit quieter and less occupied so I could talk freely with Mr. Pemba. Sometimes in a place like this, I find myself in conflict—a hypocrite who complains about colonialism, criticizes modernism, and keeps opinion of resonating to the core, while holding a coffee or beer in hand—a colonial residue. It was a similar cynical feeling that day. I was here to speak about culture and traditions that were degrading in the urban environment while holding a cup of Americano (double shot). Mr. Pemba must have felt the same way. Our conversation felt more like a session of counseling. As the words were spoken, it quietly mocked

us; each of his answers was my own reality. And maybe my questions were a stark reminder of his similar reality. Our conversation progressed like a dance: obvious and confirming.

Conversation on cultural loss? What a privilege, isn't it? Just a generation ago, the conversation would be about survival, the cafes would be wilderness, and the coffee would be Arak (local spirit). And here we are, trying to understand what makes us Hyolmo. What made us similar and different? We were trying to make sense of our social and cultural boundaries that were drawn after we became Hyolmo to the outsiders in this densely populated urban space. But the making and unmaking do not appear to be a linear process. There is a chaotic experience of getting lost and finding, remembering and forgetting, and learning and unlearning and adapting to, but also resisting getting consumed by modernization.

Amidst such chaos of urban life, where your everyday life runs with the signal of a clock, where you have well-defined 9-5 jobs that keep you occupied for 6 days a week and 365 days a year. A space where what happens in America affects you more than what happens in your village, the only time with family is after the office, completely drained. And on weekends, when you try your best to add some soul to your life and to your relationships with family and friends, that too sometimes gets difficult. No doubt the nature of urban is alienating.

I was meeting Mr. Pemba. after almost 5 years, though we live just a few kilometers away. The only time we see fellow villagers is during some important (*chhepa*) function in Hyolmo Gumba (Hyolmo monastery). It has been ages since I have been there; the last time was during my grandfather's funeral in 2018. Sometimes I find it challenging; Mr. Pemba, too, agreed that practicing culture in traditional ways in Kathmandu is demanding. It's like you're trying to live in two worlds at once; the rhythm of both worlds beats differently. And at one singular time, living the best of both worlds is almost unimaginable and tiring.

Our traditional ways were spontaneous; they're unorganized, just like life. Our ancestors lived in that rhythm of climate and cosmos that informed our unique culture; when it rained, they sowed; when it ripened, they harvested; their mobility to different transhumance pastoral camps itself followed a rhythm. But urban life is different; it is predictable, it is fueled by consumption, and it is controlling of the natural cycle. Now, can you imagine the terror one can feel? The conflict between being and belonging in two different worlds? For instance, when a person dies,

everyone gathers in the monastery to pay homage; the ritual continues for days before the person is cremated, and then after 7 days, there is another post-death ritual, and again after 21 days and 49 days. That is how the presence and solidarity gradually wane in the urban environment, because it is difficult to keep up with.

But as much as urban ways have made life challenging, they have also made it convenient, says Mr. Pemba. Earlier life was difficult because it required lots of muscle power and community, but now, if you are earning well, you can afford everything, including *ijjat* (prestige). In the past, Lamas were among the most respected; youths strived to learn under his apprenticeship. The Lamas themselves frequently indulged in *Chham* (secluded meditation in the cave); Lamas that had remained in *Chham* for longer were highly respected. But in later decades, the village Lamas themselves are migrating to Kathmandu. The propensity of youths towards the Lamaic tradition, learning, and practicing appears to be simultaneously declining. Mr. Pemba, who once religiously assisted the village Lama in different rituals and had a deep interest in learning the Bhota (Tibetan) scripts and ritual mask dances (*Bha-cham*), finds it inglorious; he says there is no *ijjat* (prestige) for a Lama. Ultimately, it's money — if you have money, you have *ijjat*, if you have money—*bejjat nahos* (may the shame not fall on you), but even if you don't have *ijjat*, what should it matter?

The status obtained in the urban environment is slowly crystallizing in the remote villages as well. There is an unspoken class forming in the shadows of cultural practices, which manifests during the festivals and ceremonies; it veils itself under the ostentatious display of foods, catering services, and donations for the monastery or development work. While it liberates a few rich, it also terrorizes others who can't afford similar services. It stimulates the community, mostly youths, to migrate out to urban areas and abroad. The convenience stemming from consumerism is spreading like a cancer disease, weakening mutuality (shared responsibility and reciprocity) and the customary governance system, where village chiefs once stood powerful and who once dictated now appear submissive to the bigger force of modernization.

Mr. Sonam Wangchuk.: Making and Unmaking Culture

There's something about Kathmandu's traffic; you can easily lose your sanity. The flow of vehicles on the street is maddening; sometimes I wonder where all these people (that feel just like me) are coming from and where they are heading to. It's like these streets are never cooling. After traveling for around 45 minutes to cover just 7

km, which, according to Google, takes only 14 minutes, I reached the location my participant had suggested. The tightly clustered houses and visually overwhelming billboards of different products and services the city has to offer left me paralyzed. I tried to spot the hoarding board of the office but failed miserably. I asked the shopkeepers and pedestrians about the location of the office, yet no clue—no wonder people are so occupied; I doubt if they even know the person living next door. Helpless, I called Mr. Sonam, whom I had come to meet.

I met Mr. Sonam last year at the World Social Forum in Kathmandu. I was introduced to him by one of my friends. We exchanged contact, and it was just a few days ago, he crossed my mind when I was planning for my research participants.

As I reached the location, I saw Mr. Sonam appear in a white polo shirt and blue chinos, wearing his usual broad, white-teethed smile. I had almost forgotten what he looked like, but his similar warm, welcoming smile from the last meeting remained unchanged. I greeted *Tashi-Dhelekh*, and he reciprocated.

We moved to a less busy section of the office and found a sofa. I began by asking the name of his village—an effort to establish the relationship. It's common among the Hyolmo community to ask the name of the village and your ethnic identity (*thar*) when you meet for the first time. I think it underscores the most important quality of Indigeneity, where relationship stands at the core of belonging and ethics; it also helps to win over trust. It turns out the closest relationship with Mr. Sonam is that of the elder brother, so I started addressing him as *Ada* (elder brother). Mr. Sonam's great-grandparents had migrated to Ramechhap a long time ago; mobility is a complex adaptive system, especially for places like Helambu, where there is less fertile land and the community must depend on multiple livelihood options. What also fascinated me is how the communities that were dispersed a few generations ago are now slowly assembling in Kathmandu under the grand identity of Hyolmo. Although Hyolmo is a place-based identity referring to the people of the Hyolmo or Helambu region, now, the communities that have settled in Ramechhap, Lamjung, Gorkha, Illam, and several other districts of Nepal are also re-navigating their cultural roots to the Hyolmo region and are recognizing themselves as Hyolmo.

However, the non-Hyolmo identity, as Tamang, Sherpa, Kagate, or Gurung, that the community adopted as they moved away from Helambu—an effort to belong to the communities in proximity? This could also be the reason for the small population of Hyolmo—10,000 as per the CBS 2011, which has remained unchanged

since the 2011 census. Mr. Sonam. shared how he and his friends had worked to sensitize the community to keep Hyolmo as an ethnic identity in CBS, but he feels people are hesitant because it could contradict the identity as per the Nagritra (citizenship certificate), exposing them to a complicated bureaucratic process for any official work in the future. He, however, shared that the actual population was around 150,000. The small population of Hyolmo is also one of the reasons for our invisibility and low interest from the state. It is also the reason the ask for a corrected ethnic identity has gained central attention in different Hyolmo formal events. For instance, in the last Sonam Losar, a few Hyolmo activists' videos surfaced on social media regarding their discontentment with referring to Sonam Losar as Tamang Losar. It struck me because even I was once told, "Hyolmo is also Tamang," and I have a whole lot of experience explaining how Hyolmo is different from Tamang and Sherpa.

But in this subtle effort of belonging, the shift in the becoming from local to global citizen is also remarkable. For example, the new generation of Hyolmo is more adept at speaking Nepali and is learning values to fit into the bigger structure of the nation-state as well as global citizenship. But in doing so, there is lots of forgetting of the traditional beliefs and values, such as speaking in the native tongue and certain etiquettes, such as dressing up on occasions, pouring tea, and hosting guests, among others. Mr. Sonam added. He was worried about such diminishing traditional values, connected to the land, and is putting effort into preserving culture but lacks funds. Although there is meager interest from the government or from the diasporic communities abroad for cultural preservation, it also baffles me how something that was learned and transmitted so naturally in the past now requires funds. On one occasion, I asked my mother how she learned the Hyolmo songs and dance, and she replied it was through participating in the rituals and ceremonies of the village such as marriage, and different other chhepa such as *Nara*, *Chiju* among others, where she participated, and observed elders, perform.

Apart from economics, there is also a social dimension, which is redefining the appropriate practices. For instance, in later years there is an unspoken contestation between the Lamaic tradition and monastic Lama. Earlier, the Lamaic traditions were patrilineal in nature; they were passed down from father to son. The knowledge transmission was within the clan and through apprenticeship. However, in later decades, with increasing mobility and propensity towards monastic practices, there

are increasing numbers of Khenpos (teachers) and monastic Lamas. The traditional Lamaic practices under the scrutiny of new Khenpos and monastic Lamas are changing. Mr. Sonam. shared how, in the past, regardless of *Nakpu* or *Karpu Chepa* (black or white ritual)², the wines were poured, and meat was served on the cultural occasion, but now, people are avoiding meat and drinks, there is massive disciplining of the traditional ways. Although Mr. Sonam, who also belongs to Lama clan, agrees the practice of avoiding wine and meat as reasonable, because he says its due to wine we find people fighting in the occasions and the practice of avoiding meat is also welcoming because our religion teaches us not to harm any sentient beings, but he expresses strong discontentment regarding the refinements of other rituals and practices as well, calling it inappropriate or incorrect by the new celibate Lamas. He added, “These Lamas take references from teachings by different Rinpoche and suggest how things should be done, changing our traditional ways.”

The institutional monastic system is one of the homogenizing agents in the urban centers. There is a flow of ideas, knowledge, and ethics outward from these institutions, which are mostly based on Buddhist texts. While it assembles the heterogeneous Buddhist community from the hilly and mountain regions of Nepal into solidarity, into a single Tibetan heritage, it also completely obliterates the relation of the community towards their place-based spirituality. It could be for the same reason there is a shift in the ways certain cultures are practiced; it could be for the same reason there is decreasing inclination towards the shamanic/Pombo's tradition in the later decades; it could be for the same reasons my mother thinks she committed sins in the past by taking service of Pombo, who engaged in sacrificial rituals.

The urban environment, therefore, is a turmoil where different structures, ideas, and values amalgamate into unresolvable complexity. Where different ethics, cultures, and values contest, where the communality holds different meanings and is multifaceted. It is easy to get lost in such complexity.

Ms. Dolma and Mr. Mingmar: Cultural Survival

As the war between India and Pakistan escalates, my social media feed is filled with horrifying images of missiles flaring through the deepest of the night, videos comparing weapons of mass destruction and what they are capable of, and news anchors showcasing the carnage of the missiles that killed people on both sides;

² *Nakpu* rituals; *death rituals*, *Karpu* rituals, *birth*, *Nyungne*, or *marriage*

the number of kill flashes on the screen, not as a portrayal of a loss of humanity but as the efficiency of the weapons. And as the netizens stay divided, the comment section is filled with foul language and warmongers screaming for more attacks, celebrating as the news of another house destroyed or another person killed across the border — it's devastating. What's even more heart-wrenching is the realization we are living in this broken time, filled with deceit, manipulations, and propaganda that conjure up every aspect of our lives.

The digital flow of a violent encounter between two countries had left me affected. I skipped my research, intending for digital detox; in doing so, I had almost forgotten about the meeting with two of my informants, Ms. Dolma and Mr. Mingmar the members of the Nepal Hyolmo Society Service Association. Thanks to the phone notification that popped up two hours before.

Isn't it ironic that the same device that I wanted to disconnect from is something I am deeply entangled with? It's the absurdity of this generation, the most connected yet most detached, most free yet equally manipulated, with the algorithms and propaganda conjuring mind and preferences, blurring the line between subjective and objective being, shaping political inclination, consumption habit, and mobility. — Is this generation living in a free society? I doubt so.

In a humble-looking room with a few chairs that were arranged in circles, Ms. Dolma was waiting along with a few other women. I entered with folded hands and greeted *Tashi Dhelekh*. I sat on a chair beside her and gave the best of my introduction, both rooted and anchored— as an academic researcher and as belonging to Hyolmo— trying my best to maintain transparency and build trust. Although they appeared open for interaction, there was also hesitation in openly sharing. Was it a recorder or a notebook? Or was it a shadow of an outsider (a power) that I was unwarily casting?

“Maybe it will be better if you ask someone else; we might not be able to explain everything about the culture,” remarked Mr. Mingmar, who had entered the room a little late. Even within the Helambu region, each Hyolmo village has some subtle differences in the way they practice culture; the Hyul Thim (village norm) could vary from village to village. It's never questioned but accepted. But could the hesitation to comment on culture be stemming from my position as an insider making them extra conscious of speaking confidently and sharing their experiences to avoid the risk of being politically and culturally correct.

After agreeing to not record and reminding them to not respond to the question if they felt uncomfortable or put them in difficult position I finally could convince to proceed with the interaction.

Mr. Mingmar remarks the culture (rituals, ceremonies and festivals) will keep changing; in urban environments, giving example of the traditions such as ya ye (which is similar to Deusi bhailo), he said we cannot practice the tradition in the same sense in Kathmandu and went on adding, the traditional cultures will be reimagined and reinterpreted according to the changing time and context. The flow of youths from the village to Kathmandu and abroad is inevitable; we cannot shift that. But what we can do is put in an effort from our end; we can arrange classes for youths who are interested. He adds that the youths do not have as much responsibility as adults who must work to provide for the family, so they can afford to learn., It is up to us to continue and pass down the tradition, and it will be up to them how they wish to carry on the tradition.

What also fascinated me was the fact that the few elders in Kathmandu were voluntarily approaching and offering free classes through the institution. Contrarily, youths were not as interested. It highlights two important realities: Firstly, the cultural roots and sense of belonging were high among the older generations that grew up in the village. Their concern stemmed from their own reality— the disinterest and disconnection of the trend in their own family. Secondly, the youths who grew up and adopted urban culture could be finding it meaningless or are seeking other purposes, just like in the case of Mr. Pemba (Hyolmo youth).

Apart from the community values there were also legal or pollical factors, such as urban norms that prohibits any types of social events that are loud and can disturbs the community, culture that are practiced at night. But there are festivals such as Ya ye- which is quite like Deusi-Bhailo, and is practiced at the nighttime, going house to house and singing Ya-ye and the house owner offers edibles and money it is believed giving enriches. Ya-ye song informs about the Hyolmo worldview on the origin of life and relationships.

The effectiveness of cultural transmission through a very institutionalized system in an urban environment is highly debatable; nevertheless, institutions, such as the Nepal Hyolmo Association, has contributed a space for Hyolmo people to negotiate their belonging in the urban environment. Its services, such as recommendation letters for political or for different quotas for Indigenous peoples in

Nepal, have benefited lots of Hyolmo youths and Hyolmo politicians in securing positions in highly competitive urban spaces. The institution has also created a point of collaboration among different Hyolmo associations that are established by Hyolmo Diaspora in America (YSA), Israel, Korea, and different parts of the globe, with which they coordinate in times of disasters, such as the Nepal Hyolmo Society Association with these diasporic institutions in distributing relief in times of natural disasters such as the 2015 earthquake and Melamchi flood of 2024.

The institution rendered different cultural protection activities, such as Hyolmo songs: dances, musical instruments, tungna, or even traditional woodworks. They also handed over the book, a publication by the Nepal Hyolmo Association; it included the cultural aspects of Hyolmo, including songs that were transcribed in Nepali. There were chapters that translated the meaning of songs. It was fascinating. The songs communicated the relationship of people and environment (Lhosar Chyang lu), the expression of emotion, loss, and laborious life (Tsher-lu), and rituals and spirituality (Tshe-chu), among others.

As we continue culture in a different sense from the past; can the underlying meaning and does the worldview of the tradition survive in this urban space? How will that benefit youths and other Hyolmo community members in continuing the tradition? Apart from exerting rooted belonging, what greater purpose can culture serve?

Ms. Tshering: Cultural Nostalgia

The chanting and the beating of the Damaru pierced through my ear, as I struggled to open my eyes. I had agreed to support my father with the flag-changing ritual. The altar was prepared, a tablecloth with Buddhist auspicious symbols spread over the coffee table. On it were a sorcerer with rice, a Tambe (traditional jar) filled with local spirit (Arak), a small butter lamp (Chomi), Damaru and Dorje, a sacred textbook, and Tinjar (water sprinkling peacock feathered jar). As I ascended the stairs and approached the place, I could see the lama was making certain mudra (ritual gesture), eyes shot and murmuring chants. Time and again he would lift and beat the Damaru, and use Dorje to make certain gestures. As he chants, the fresh prayer flutters softly in the wind, and in another corner is a smoke from juniper leaves gracefully rising, making the whole ritual appear more aesthetically pleasing. After flipping through several pages and deep ritualistic engagement, I was asked to lift the

spirit jar, and each time I held it high above my head, everyone echoed: Lha Gyalo—
- May the god win, (for three times). Ending the flag worship ritual.

I was in conversation with one of the elderly relatives today. As I was engaged in the Losar celebration, I wanted to know about her time, her experience of Losar, her growing up, and what the celebration meant for her. What started as an awkward conversation, staged as interviewer and interviewee, our conversation deepened as we got caught up in the flow. I wanted to listen, and she wanted to share her days growing up. I guess it is also because elderly people do not have many people to interact with in the urban setting, and the conversation, as such, provided her the opportunity to share.

Our conversation brought back to life the names of the people that were no more and the stories that were lived but almost forgotten; it brought back the reason and worldview of the community that made us who we were and why we did, what we did. The Losar was immanently entangled with the lifeways, spirituality, cosmos, nature, and praxis of the Hyolmo people. The festival was not a mere celebration, but it was also a time marker of the season; it informed the mobility of the community to different pasturelands; it informed the time and choice of crops in their farm, and it informed the relationship with the community in the lower basin or with the Kathmandu, as they moved for economic purposes, in preparing for the celebration of the festival. As they moved and interacted, they also named the newly established relationship (for example, Hyolmo people understood Ason as Numjum, a place to buy oil). Similarly, Chisa pani is Chu Tangmu (cold water), Chabahil as Sala toala. Such mobility and nomenclature of different places also highlight the constellations of their relationship and the nature of interaction in their mobile life ways.

The festival itself began at least a month before the day of Lhosar. The preparation of beverages (wines and Chyang), the storage of firewood for the celebration, the mobility to market in Kathmandu—to buy essentials such as chilly, salt, and oil, and the mobility to lower basin to barter for rice and jaggery, the harvesting of prayer flagpoles from the forest, the grinding of rice in water mills and beating them in Dikki (traditional beating technology), the cleaning and dusting of chimneys, and the preparation of zero and Babar (Losar delicacies) required at least a month-long preparation and the communal support. But now, in the urban space, the market has made it convenient. There are no more laborious tasks of collecting firewood or Darcho (prayer flag-pole). They have been replaced by advanced cooking

stoves and metal poles, which are more common now. Likewise, essentials such as rice, cooking oil, and herbs are found ostensibly in the market. There are now varieties to choose from, local to global market, and they are easily accessible. Even more, during the time of the festival, the markets have their own ways of boosting sales by offering discounts, sponsoring the events. The preparation of Losar delicacies, which were done a day before the Losar, so that they did not go bad, is now prepared several days before or close to the day of Losar. Technology such as refrigerators and the grinding tools at home has made it convenient to store for a long time as well as prepare in a short time. Even more, the mushrooming shops that sell packaged Khapse (special delicacy, a deep-fried cookies made of flour and sugar syrup) has made it more convenient. In one instance Ms. Tshering had shared,

“In the past, it was not easy to make Zero, Babar (Rice roti), it took lots of time. We practiced work exchange (laari-parma in Nepali); we would start with our eldest member's house. Everyone would gather there and take on different roles of making dough, cutting shapes, or deep-frying it. Some would assist in cooking meals for everyone. The exchange would follow until all involved members had finished with their turn.

Although she agrees the modern technologies and the market have made it convenient, she also laments the joy of sharing stories, having fun, singing songs, or talking about the past with the relatives that have gathered to exchange labor. She added, *“But now I am almost as occupied in preparing for the festival but lonelier.”*

The rituals of celebration of Losar began at least two days prior on the Ngishu-Gu (9th day of the Buddhist lunar calendar), a day before the Aausi (new moon). On this day the community engages in cleaning both the house and the body. As the waste is dusted and thrown out, the community also throws nine varieties of grains symbolizing the nine planetary faults. In this regard the Losar also can be seen as a celebration of the new beginning, a new aspiration and hope. What follows cleansing both the house and soul is the preparation of delicacies on the new moon, completing the preparation of the festival.

The first ritual that follows during the Losar is fetching Chubi (first water) from the spring. It symbolizes the purest, and the first water is brought to the house to offer it to the gods and deities. In the past, the villagers headed to the spring at Phangsa Thungbhu (Phangsa Tree), before the birds began to chirp and before the breaking of dawn. However, in the urban environment, we do not have any springs in

our proximity, so we worship the place from which we bore water: the machine. The worshipping of machines felt like a strong metaphor of modern time.

Likewise, the flag worshipping ritual, which in the past was done by the elder of the household, is now being replaced by the monastic lama. The monks are being sponsored and summoned to carry out the ritual. The synchronicity in the day of installing the flag, which in the past was done in the Cheba chi (first day), is now being shifted according to the auspicious day and date prescribed by the Buddhist calendar. Even more, the delicacy served in the Losar terka (platter) has gotten more sophisticated with the sweets and cookies that come from the global market. Apart from the market and the Buddhist norms, the community has also adopted certain practices from Tibetan ways of celebration, such as Desa (Sweet butter rice), and Chagul (Chyang mixed with different fruits and nuts) which originally were not served during the Losar but have become part of the Losar platter in the urban context.

The festival, which in the past took months of preparation and weeks of celebration, has now been confined to a one-day national holiday, which sometimes gets difficult to attend due to work. For instance, last year, during the time of Losar, our family members gathered for the feast. All except one of our cousins could not participate in the celebration because he had to go to the field for the organization that he was working for.

CHAPTER V FROM STORIES TO INSIGHTS

This chapter answers my first research question, how is culture shifting in the urban environment? It highlights the relationship between the outward; urbanization and urbanism and inward; rooted values in showing how are the shifts taking place. What is it about the modernization and the individuals living their everyday life within it, that informs the shift in the ways the culture is practices. The study tries to capture the multilayered relationship to explain the shift in the urban context.

We live in fluid time; the people, idea, culture is moving at an unprecedented scale. And with the mobility, the social boundaries are simultaneously shifting. The improved connectivity of roads and the internets have converged the space and brought the people together. But just as much as it has converged, it has also increased the feeling of alienation, as people have started moving out to greeted distance.

Cultural Worlding

There appears to be an increasing flow of Hyolmo people from village to Kathmandu in recent decades— worlding in the urban environment (Murriss, 2022, p.144). There are many Hyolmo who have come from different parts of the country and settled in Kathmandu, all seeking for better opportunities and to improve life chances. Hence, there is lots of learning, unlearning, and a shift in the traditional culture as they try to adapt the culture of the “civilized urban”. But these learnings do not stand in silo, as the individuals revisit their village, the refined culture moves with them, affecting the ways the culture is practiced in the village as well. The inter and intra-action in the unique assemblage of the urban environment appears to bring about shift in ways of practicing culture. It was also evident how the city culture, such as catering services, refined culture; printed flag, Darchoe, dress, food, and monastic monks were finding a place in the rural context as well— as a symbolic capital. These refined and refining of practices and culture attunes to the neoliberal politics of capitalism, competition, and consumerism, inciting the feeling of inadequate self, capital gain, and competition to excel, driving outward migration to urban and to abroad. Phenomenon of neoliberal core are layered informing choice of consumption, belonging, marking, defining, including and excluding, othering among others.

Work and Leisure in Mechanical Time

The inquiry provides insight into how the grand design of modern work and leisure creates challenge in continuing the cultural tradition in the urban environment. The challenges mostly stemming from the mechanized urban clock that ticks differently— enslaving people entangled in the urban life ways. The speed of consumption, mobility, and insatiable desires that keep piling up, appears to trap individuals in the absurdity of urban life, where people imagine themselves as happy by the predictability of life, yet easily bored by nothing new— a Sisyphus Odyssey. Hyolmo communities appear to find themselves in a similar situation; they are attracted by the opportunities and convenience of the urban environment yet feel trapped in the nostalgia of good old traditional lifeways. Although there is an effort in recreating and replicating the traditional life through the practice of culture in the urban environment, it gets difficult because of the contradicting nature of urban work and leisure.

Traditional cultures were in sync with the nature; there was a resonance with the lifeways and the ecological process. The cultural practice informed different stages of farming, mobility to rangelands, lowlands, and to different other places of cultural and survival significance. These events marked the ordinary time, and made it special, by breaking the monotonous of work, where such shift were celebrated, prayed for and linked spiritually. Such shared practices strengthened the sense of belonging among the community members. The work and leisure therefore were the marker of the social-ecological resonance- that informed both the ecological shift and the time of different cultural practices. And in similar rhythmic process, Hyolmo communities cultivated their limited land and moved their herds to different rangeland depending on the season and availability of the limited resources and as they did, they practiced different cultural rituals and ceremonies; appeasing and negotiating with the local deities, venerating different cadastral gods and goddesses, celebrating life and resources, and praying for the well-being of sentient beings such as Yando- Mando (Going up and down), Talpangti (praying for the good harvest), Serkim (praying for favorable environment), Chobu Chekhe (worship and celebration of harvest) among others . These cultural rituals and festivals ameliorated ethics and resonance with the place and spirits. Nevertheless, these resonance with the physical and the spiritual world that were realized through the practice of culture appears to slowly wane in the urban environment.

The difference between the accelerated time of modernity and the resonance time of nature has made it difficult to practice the culture in the same sense. The overdemanding work and leisure, spoil the festive atmosphere, where you do not have adequate holidays to celebrate with all your family members or where the leaves are not granted because of the policies and provisions of the organization or the nation state. The number of days of celebrating festivals is converging as the leave is granted only for a day, which is also weakening the communal bonds, as the members do not have adequate time to celebrate the festivals with other relatives.

Shifting Axiology: Becoming Ijjat dar

Cultural shift also appears to be stemming from the difference in traditional and modern values. Traditionally, the most respected individuals in the village were the Lama, a ritual hero who held different important cultural functions in village (lamaic rituals such as Nara, Cheju, death rituals, Dalpangti, Sherkim among others). The tradition of Lama was patrilineal in nature and was passed down through apprenticeship. Youths aspired to learn by volunteering and assisting the Lama. The lamas that were devoted in the secluded meditation; Lho-sum dwa sum (three years three month) meditation, were regarded with greater reverences.

Nevertheless, as the village started centering around the Kathmandu, the notion of ijat also appears to be shifting. The economy and the consumerism now appear to hold a central stage. The shared aspiration to earn and afford modern symbols has put economy in the central stage. Youths now aspire to join the modern work force, engage in urban economy, and consume the convenience of the urban environment. There is also declining desirability and propensity towards Lamaic tradition because youths now think, there is no ijat in that role. It could be true, because even the Lama is migrating out from village and joining different urban economy such as business or jobs.

Hence the reconfiguration of the notion of becoming respectable or ijat dar, that is based on consumerism and consumption has declined the inclination towards the Lamaic tradition. And as community navigate through the prestige capital, the traditional customary and Lamaic tradition are slowly declining in the modern time.

Re(de)fining the Role of Traditional Institution

From the stories, one of the driving forces of cultural shift in the urban environment appears to be resulting from the formalized institutions or the emergence of new forms of institutions. Traditionally, customary institutions called Hyul Thim

governed the socio-cultural functions and resource governance of the indigenous Hyolmo community. The head of the institution was Gowa (village head), assisted by Omji, the village administrator, and complementing this role was a spiritual institution of the Lama, that looked after the spiritual and cultural functions of the village. Except for the Lama, whose role was patrilineal, the roles of Gowa and Omji were appointed by the collective decision of the community members— usually the wise and active members were chosen for this position.

Contrarily, as the customary institutions starts declining, under the modern state structure, it has also led to the emergence of many modern, formal structures in Kathmandu. The status of "formal" is obtained through registration in the association registration act, 1977, under the government of Nepal. The registered institutions are limited by the governments' protocols, on governance and resource management, and in return these modern institutions hold rights and authority to carry out different socio-cultural functions that were traditionally rendered through the Hyul-Thim.

The difference between, the traditional and modern “formal” institutions is not only in terms of registration and recognition from the state but also in the services these institutions render.

Traditionally most of the governance and cultural functions did not require payment from the community members. It perpetuated simply on the principle of commonality, mutuality and attachment or the sense of belonging amongst the community members. The labor exchange practice (Lari), the contribution of agricultural yield for the Chhepa (rituals), the voluntarism of the villagers in different role and in cultural practices, were different ways through which the culture was practiced. The songs and dances were learned and transferred as the villagers participated in different cultural ceremonies. However, these functions in urban environment are changing. Now the membership to the institution is through the payment of certain cost. Likewise, the songs and dances that were naturally learned and transferred now requires special classes and workshop, which again cannot operate without some fund. The rituals and traditions that were traditionally accepted now is being scrutinized by the Hyolmo monastic monks and few other gurus.

In the later years, the enrollment of many Hyolmo youths in this religious institution has increased. The red robe, ability to read religious texts, and performance of different Buddhist rites and rituals, under the guidance and supervision of Rinpoche and highly regarded Khenpo (Buddhist scholars) and gurus, have made the

monastic tradition virtuous. This inversely has affected the Lamaic tradition; traditional patrilineal monastic system in the village. The refined institutions for cultural practices and the monastic system that renders refined and scholarly teachings have brought the traditional practices in the scrutiny and there is lots of disciplining through the narrative of “authentic” Buddhist practices. The increasing propensity towards the monastic system and norms has also put traditional Shamanic tradition in the fringe of extinction. As the virtuous Buddhist identity of the land as beyul (Secret and sacred land, concealed by Guru Padma Sambhava, as per Nyingma tradition of Buddhism), and the declaration of the valley as no-kill zone has become a popular norm, it also criticizes the traditional shamanic or Pombo’s animistic tradition and their rituals that involved blood offering or sacrificing animals.

Hence, the discontinuation of traditional customary governance system; Hyul-thim, and the emergence of new formal registered institutions have affected the cultural function and belonging of Indigenous Hyolmo community. Likewise, the propensity of Hyolmo youths in monastic Buddhism is also shifting the traditions and ritualistic practices of the past.

Dissolving and Making Boundaries

Living in the proximity of the cultural cousins—Tibetans, Sherpas, Tamang, and other mountain communities from Buddhist heritage has helped in easy transition to the urban environment, for Hyolmo community. But as much as the shared locality and culture contributes to the feeling of belonging, there also appears an unspoken contestation, competition, of authentic self and practices. From the stories, the notion of authentic culture seems to broadly stem from the inter and intra-action with broader mountain community and the culturally rooted belonging to the Tibetan heritage.

The Tibetan culture stands as an epitome of ‘authentic’—justified by the culturally rootedness to Tibet. Moreover, because Tibet is the place where the northern Buddhism; Mahayana, Vajrayana lineage originated, it acts as a marker or reference to authentic Buddhist ways. The prevalent genealogy of Hyolmo and several other high hill and mountain communities to Tibetan heritage further places Tibet or Tibetan culture as quintessence of “authentic” and their practices as virtuous.

The shared heritage, and cultural practices also appears to put different communities, now in proximity, under competition. In negotiating ‘authentic’ there is a lot of revival, remembering, linking and learning of culture, inviting a shift in the place based traditional practices. It appears to be equally true for Hyolmo

communities, as they adopt, shift or modify their practices based on the learning from the Tibetan counterparts around them. To substantiate the argument, I once recall my mother telling me, Tibetans celebrates Losar better, because on the first day they visit different monasteries and take blessing from different Rinpoche and Lama Guru. Here the prefix 'better', further accentuates the Hyolmo perception of 'superior' and 'inferior' culture, where the Tibetan culture is treated as excellence per se.

Hence, there appears to be adoption of culture from Tibetans, such as the food, calendars, clothes and ornaments. For example, traditionally Khapse (a deep-fried cookies) did not belong to Hyolmo they made Zero instead, during the celebration of losar festival. Similarly, Desa (Sweet rice), Changyul (Warm chyang with nuts and fruits) are also adopted from the Tibetan culture. Likewise, there is also growing propensity towards the Tibetan attire Chuba, a different from the Hyolmo. Lately, community also has started to refer to lunar Calendars for the auspicious day, date, time; such calendrical date and time has also broken down the synchronicity among the community members in installing flag or conducting different rituals. In the past, all the Hyolmo communities raised there Dar cho (Losar flag) on the first day of Losar, but now depending on the auspicious day for the family members, flag rising day, and other lunar positioning, community members rise flag on different days; that is of auspicious to them. The flag rituals that created an ambiance of festivity is declining in the urban space.

But as much as the social boundary with the Tibet is open, Hyolmo appears to tighten against the Tamang community. It could be because the Tamang community live in proximity and in lower altitude than the Hyolmo in Helambu region. Tamang culture that were mostly influenced by the Hinduism, and because the Tamang community were engaged in butchering animals, and their lifeways were comparatively difficult because of limited and unfertile land, the Hyolmo perception of Tamang culture appears to be inferior. But as Tamang try to revive their Buddhist culture, it has equally affected the Hyolmo. For instance, in relation to larger Tamang population, Hyolmo appears invisible. Moreover, the way Tamang celebrate festival; for instance, Losar, is public, whereas Hyolmo celebrate it behind the close door and in their tight community, making the festival appear as of Tamang alone. The complexities become evident, as the Losar greetings and wishes are extended by politicians, using the term such as Tamang Losar instead of Sonam Losar. Hence

there is also a strong resistance brewing, with now Hyolmo also engaging in different public march to claim the festival equally of Hyolmo.

Hence, the dissolving and making of the cultural boundary is leading the shift in how the cultures were traditionally practiced. The dissolving of boundary with Tibetan culture has led to the adoption of different Tibetan cultural etiquette and symbols while the making of cultural boundary with Tamang community has also led to the shift in the practices, by making the practice that were private now a spectacle and a subject of gaze to the public.

Globalization: Market, Machine and Internet

The machines, merchandise, and modern tools of convenience is shifting the traditional ways of doing things. Although the modern technologies have helped in accelerating the production, increased efficiency in making different cultural goods, but it has not reduced the burden—rather just diverted the engagement elsewhere and broken down the commonality and mutuality among the community members. The effect of modern times as reported by the participants has been listed thematically.

Market

The market is playing a significant role in shaping the culture. Commodification of cultural goods and services has made it convenient for the urban Hyolmo communities, because it fits with the need of urban routine life, and it supplements the otherwise long hour and community support in preparation. The mushrooming of restaurants and shops that sells cultural food and the emergence of rituals shop that sells ready-made ritual goods, indicates how the commercialization of culture has made it easier and reduced the time for the preparation of culture. While it has added convenience to this accelerated time, it has also posed risk of disappearing knowledge of procuring, making, storing different ritual goods and traditional *Lari* (labor exchange practices). The easy access has also reduced the dependency among the community members, leading to weakening mutuality and attachment with the forest and places of procuring the resources necessary for rituals.

While these new kinds of cultural shops are selling the traditional ritualistic cultural goods. The shop selling foods, clothes, and drinks appear to equally capitalize from the festival. It was observed there was an increasing sales and discounts in different shops, encouraging to buy and consume more. As a result, the modern refined liquors and foods appear to dominate the traditional alcohol making skills and

practices, it has made the fancy clothes cheaper and the foods from different part of the world.

Machine

One of important function of cultural practices is strengthening the community bond. However, the sense of communality and mutuality is slowly declining due to the use of machines. The efficiency of the machine has reduced the workload. In the past, the preparation of festivals took days, people practiced work-exchange within their tight community. Such gathering also created the space to strengthen the bonds, the exchange of stories, songs, and experiences among the family members preserved and transferred the knowledge, it also created a space to talk about problems and ways to address it together. Now, such sense of belonging is disappearing in the urban space. But then has the workload decreased? sadly, it has just diverted to modern work culture, where you don't have enough holiday. The machine instead of adding convenience has rather increased the feeling of alienation and reduced the feeling of festivity. There is breaking down of communality, reciprocity, and traditional work exchange practices.

Internet

Virtual celebration and exchange have become common. It was evident, while celebrating festivals, there were greetings being exchanged virtually, family members connected with their distant relatives through online medium such as messenger, Viber, WhatsApp. The long call, participating virtually, receiving blessing online were some of the ways culture was taking a new form of celebration. Apart from that people also shopped online, online ordering of food were some of the ways, Internet appears to converge the limitation and contribute to the continuation of tradition.

But as much as such digital space has ameliorated the feeling of being present, ironically it also has embarked on the feeling of alienation and absence. Such progress and development of technologies and digitization is also introducing a subtle shift in the practice of culture, where the relationships are maintained and strengthened through the virtual means. While the internet plays a major role in establishing connection among the peers and siblings it also appears to make the culture online normative.

Chapter Summary

This chapter in response to how the culture is shifting in the urban environment highlights the negotiation of cultural practice in the urban environment

with the urban politics, architecture, laws and economic, leading to the shift in the traditional cultures. Moreover, the inquiry provides insight on how the culture has shifted from the signifier of broader social, ecological and spiritual condition to the mere occasion with no relation or resonance to what happens around them in urban environment. Such detached of meaning also appears to act as an erasure of the meaning or relationship the culture held. For example, the culture and festivals which stood as an important maker of the lifeways, mobility, constellation, season and climate does not resonate with the urban mechanical environment. Simultaneously, the chapter also sheds light on how different dynamics of urbanism is shaping the cultural practices such as the paradoxical work and leisure, Refining and Redefining cultural system from the lens of governance, how culture is negotiated with the communities living in the shared environment and the display of authentic culture, It also highlights the force of globalization; market, machine and internet and how they produce a different ways of preparing, participating, and consuming culture in the modern time.

CHAPTER VI FROM INSIGHTS TO BEING IN/AND BELONGING

Chapters Four and Five are intertwined; they are a continuous process because shift and belonging go hand in hand. It's like a Phoenix; it burns and rises from the ash, a new and revitalized. In the earlier chapter, I highlighted how different urban social norms, politics, economic and design is leading to cultural shift of the Indigenous Hyolmo community. And in this chapter, I highlight how the shift in the practice is shaping the different ways of becoming and belonging in the urban environment. This chapter, therefore, will answer my second research question "How are communities negotiating their belonging?" I have looked at the constellation of belonging from the lens of interaction between commonality, Mutuality and attachment (Czarnecka, 2022).

Hyolmo Belonging in the Urban Environment

The insights from chapter four reifies the fluid nature of urban environment where things are constantly shifting, shaping and reshaping affecting the perception of people. But as much as the shift is the product of temporal and spatial dynamics, it also appears equally true the person that is experiencing the shift is an integral part of the process. Amidst this complex entanglement of people, space and time, Hyolmo community appears to be actively engaged in shaping, reshaping and negotiating the culture in the urban context. There are several forces of modernity that the community appears submissive to, such as engaging in different urban economies; jobs, business; education; politics among others. But there also appears the strong urge to resist and retain the traditional culture through the replication of cultural practice in the urban environment. It is through the assertion of their rooted form of belonging, Hyolmo community appears to negotiate their unique identity, place, and presence in the multi-cultural urban space.

But the belonging in the urban space does not only seems to be of asserting difference, but there also appears an equal effort in finding commonality, mutuality, and attachment, a regime of belonging. From the stories of my participants, they were all engaged in different urban economy, education, unconventional institutions, and were reported to find themselves entangled in urban lifeways. Such entanglement was differently experienced by the Hyolmo people in the urban space. For some, mostly

elderly, they lamented the good old days and practices of the village. They felt they were more connected, and the community was strongly present, which they find is slowly waning in the urban space, as the ways of rituals, ceremonies and celebrations are shifting. Contrarily, many Hyolmo youths and adults were now finding attunement to the urban culture. There is lots of becoming as the individuals try negotiating belonging in the urban environment. The becoming then plays a central role in determining the belonging, for instance, in adapting to the urban lifeways, Hyolmo communities appear to engage in different urban economies; jobs, business; education; politics among others. As they take on these unconventional roles, to participate in the urban lifeways, there is contestation and conflict in keeping up with the traditional cultural values and practices.

For Hyolmo, shift has become inevitable as they try to keep up with two world—to sustain their rooted and anchored form of belonging. Therefore, the shift in practice, through adoption, negotiation, and modification has become a way of belonging, as Hyolmo community tries to survive their traditional form of being in the urban environment.

Finding Commonality

One of the most essential regimes of belonging is through shared commonality. For the relationship to exist there needs to be some form of shared values. It is therefore a common phenomenon to seek commonality in establishing relationship. The ways of seeking and navigating commonality in the urban environment among the Hyolmo community can be traced in their concentrated settlement around the Boudha stupa. In the dense and multicultural urban environment, Hyolmo communities are mostly domiciled around the Boudha stupa, that is also home to culturally similar ethnic communities such as Tamang, Sherpa, Tibetan, Tsumba, Dolpa among others, that shared the cultural resemblances with the Hyolmo community. Due to the common cultural heritage that roots to Tibet, these communities share different cultural functions that are celebrated and observed together. Such collective observation also appears to strengthen the bond and acknowledgement among diverse mountain and hill communities. The common heritage also provides the favorable space to perform different rituals.

Hyolmo communities are found to be actively engaging in finding and establishing relationship in the urban environment. It could be the fear of invisibility in the dense urban environment, the communities that had moved out to different

districts in the past are assembling under a grad identity of Hyolmo in the urban environment, remembering and reclaiming of the common heritage. Collectively forging institution and asserting their rooted form of belonging to Helambu and Hyolmo identity. The cultural institutions such as Hyolmo Gumba, has become a collective institution and ways of maintaining and asserting commonality among the community members. Such an effort to find place amongst the culturally similar types of communities explain the effort of Hyolmo communities to belong to the urban environment.

Forging Alliances

The Indigenous Hyolmo community is forging alliances with other Indigenous communities in urban environment. Community members believe alliances help to amplify the voices and adds to the visibility of Hyolmo. Forging Alliances therefore appears to stimulate a difference or distinct ethnic identity by making the social boundaries more conspicuous and secondly by expanding and relating the common experience with the broader Indigenous communities helps to forge bigger alliances. Hyolmo were the 13 Indigenous communities to be registered with the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)—now with more than 60 members—and got registered two years after the establishment of the institution. Likewise, the effort to preserve culture through the formation of different institutions such as Nepal Hyolmo Society Service Association (NHSSA), Nepal Hyolmo student association, Nepal Hyolmo women association, media and several other institutions also highlight the community's effort in forging and negotiating belonging in the urban environment.

Likewise, the services these registered institutions rendered such as recommendation letters for political association or to claim quotas in education and work has helped many Hyolmo individuals to navigate through opportunities in the highly competitive urban space. These institutions also became a focal point for other international diasporic association and institution to partner and collaborate with in working for and with the communities. For example, in times of disaster or earthquake these institutions were actively engaged in distributing relief.

Hence, the process of forging alliances has helped in negotiating belonging by amplifying the voices and visibility of the Hyolmo communities in the urban environment and at the same time strengthening the social boundaries for the communities. The effort to strengthen social boundaries can also be deciphered in the

increased concern for the protection and continuation of culture and in dissemination of workshops and training on different cultural activities such as songs, dances, musical instruments among others.

Hence it is through the display of distinct self; unique culture, heritage, identity and through the strong willingness to become a part or broader ethnic communities experiencing similar social exclusion and historical marginalizations, the belonging is negotiated in the urban environment.

Place-making

One of the ways, Hyolmo communities were found to resolve alienation in the urban environment was by establishing relationship with the place by building tangible structures. Such establishments shift the relationship with the ordinary space, making them important cultural hub. Hyolmo Gumba (Monastery), situated in Tinchuli, Kathmandu-06 is the example of community marking their ordinary space into cultural center. The place provides the space to practice different cultural function in the urban environment. Many of the Hyolmo monastic traditions and rituals such as marriage, death, and other ceremonies such as Che ju and Nara in urban environment are now held in the monastery.

Such place making has not only brought the community together, but it has also helped to address the cultural complexity when living in the heterogenous community. Such as death rituals and other ceremonies that tend to be sensitive. The place marking and collective identify has also played a significant role in assembling, the diasporic communities that had moved to different districts in the past. The coming together and asserting a common identity has also strengthened the collective belonging among the Hyolmo community.

The different cultural functions and ceremonies bring the community members together; It creates an atmosphere to catchup and strengthen communal relationship. The place therefore plays complementing role in increasing the social capital, as the community gather and interact and become aware of the opportunities and ways to navigate through them.

Just like the monastery that render the cultural function there is also increasing number of other formal institutions of Hyolmo communities, that functions to protect culture, advocate for the Hyolmo identity and belonging, and works as a legit institution to referee Hyolmo individuals for different opportunities, reservations and quotas. Some of such institutions are, 'Nepal Hyolmo Social Service Association',

Nepal Hyolmo Student Association, Hyolmo women association among others. Although these are different from traditional Customary institutions; Hyul Thim, they render services of cultural continuation and protection, in a more institutionalized way. Such as classes for Hyolmo songs, dances, making tungna among others.

Placemaking, therefore has helped in strengthening both the collective and individual forms of belonging. The collective belonging has helped in strengthening the social boundary and relationship with the traditional territory, likewise, the individual pursuit of belonging is strengthened by the social gatherings and exchange; a social capital, and through different services that helps to navigate through the urban opportunities to realize anchored form of belonging.

Being Present Virtually

In this globalized and modern time, digital technologies have become deeply entangled to our everyday life. The people have become more connected than ever yet equally detached. With the increasing migration and detachment from the root and families, digital technologies appear to fill the gap. The cultural practices therefore have made its way to the digital space. It was also evident during the celebration of Losar festival among Hyolmo communities. The virtual connectivity, exchange of wishes and attendance through the digital medium has become more common with apps such as WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger; the blessing, wishes, gifts, pictures are easily transferred through these means. Such virtual online connection has created an experience of first-hand participation. For many families, whose children are living abroad it has become a ritual and a part of their everyday life where at least once a day they connect virtually.

Hence, digital means has helped in perpetuating the relationship with the place and people, through virtual participation. It has to large extent helped in practicing culture in a home away from home, living with diverse community and governance. But as much as such digital space has ameliorated the feeling of being present, ironically it also embarks on the feeling of alienation and absence. Such progress and development of technologies and digitization is also introducing a subtle shift in the practice of culture, where the relationships are maintained and strengthened through the virtual means.

Summary

Amidst, the contested space of multi-ethnic urban environment, where the cultural practices belief, politics, architects, interact, the belonging than becomes the

subject of complex adaptive system which is constantly negotiated, forged, or asserted. Hyolmo communities appear to be actively engaged in the making and unmaking social, cultural and political boundaries. The practice of culture and rituals, the claiming of different urban space for gathering or asserting the Hyolmo identity, the perpetuation of cultures through classes and sensitization are through different ways Hyolmo are reasserting their cultural roots and belonging in the urban context.

CHAPTER VII FROM INSIGHT TO DISCUSSION

This section deals with the discussion on the insights of this study- How do Hyolmo people experience the cultural shift in the urban environment and how do they negotiate their sense of belonging in the urban environment based on previous literatures, studies and theories.

Cultural Shift and Belonging in My Study

There were different forces of globalization, modernization, socio-political, and economic dimensions that were acting as a stimulus for cultural shift in the urban environment (Appadurai, 1990; Baerenholdt et al., 2004). These shifts conditioned by urban landscape, social-political differences, impede the assemblage of people, place, and resources, essential for the culture to be practiced as it is, and seize opportunities of becoming what they might have become in their traditional territory (Ashcroft, 2001, p.8). Despite the constraints, Hyolmo community were actively engaged in forming, strengthening, claiming and refusing assimilation to the grand urban design.

As Murris, (2022) maintains that destruction is a condition of the possibility of construction. Cultural shift in the urban environment is a condition to which belonging is a response, resisted or forged in the urban condition. While the rooted form of belonging is contested, and continued, the anchored form of belonging is forged through renegotiation to the demand of space and time (A survival strategy?). The shift and belonging are closely entangled, and a continuum process, I therefore use the binaries, cause and effect, in my inquiry to explain the phenomena of shift and belonging and how they are closely entangled, rather than trying to justify the good and evil in the process of becoming.

Cultural Shift of Hyolmo

Hyolmo culture is a web of relationship that expands beyond different human, non-human, spiritual, and cosmic dimensions. But in recent decades this web or relationships are eroding, as people migrate out. The mainstreaming of identity has assembled the communities that had migrated to different districts in the past, under a grand place based identity as a Hyolmo (Torri, 2019), in the urban space, But as much as the community is converging under the collective identity, rooted to their ancestral land, there also is evident of unpleasant urban experiences; rupturing commonality,

mutuality and attachment. Most of the participant's experience of the cultural complexity emerged from their inability to resonate with the accelerated modern time, like what Rosa, (2016) suggests, as they try to replicate or reproduce their traditional cultural practices.

From the lens of belonging, cultural shift appears to take place from an effort to retain the traditional or rooted form of belonging and secondly it emerges as they try to adapt with the urban ways or what Czarnecka, (2022) calls, anchored form of belonging. Although the anchoring to city appears a conscious choice, or what my participant suggested as an inevitable phenomenon (conversation with Mr. Mingmar), it is equally a conspiracy of the modernization project (Liechty, 2010) which incites the terror (Lefebvre, 2016, p. 143), of getting stuck or fear of missing out (FOMO), among rural communities.

Hence, there are different forces of modernization that are entangled with the social, cultural, political, and economic environment in the urban context. It is within these complex webs of relationship, Hyolmo communities are worlding with heterogenous urban communities. Apart from the communities in the proximity, their interaction is also shaped by the bigger social, political and economic forces, affecting how they practice culture, when they practice, where they practice and for how long do they practice. Nevertheless, the community are not just passive absorber or reactor to this bigger force because they demonstrate a strong resistance through forging alliances, asserting and claiming space, displaying and performing their indigeneity.

Discussion on Theories

I have used two theories in my study, Figuration theory and Resonance theory. Both theories are intertwined in a sense, figuration informs how the people and culture restructures themselves in relation to the broader urban context, while the resonance theory perceives the accelerated nature of the modern time as dissonating experience and suggests resonance as an answer. The suggestion Rosa (2016) prescribes on ways to resonate quite resembles the global wimp of becoming Indigenous. While the accelerated Anthropocene has drawn attention on Indigenous ways of relating to the nature as solution, it perceives the need to become Indigenous as only a response to the Anthropocene, completely obliterating the historical marginalization and exclusion of Indigenous peoples (Chandler & Reid, 2019).

Moreover, I find these theories limiting in their ability to explain the unfair exchange, cultural erasure, and epistemicide experienced by the Indigenous Hyolmo

communities, in experiencing shift and becoming in the urban context. For instance, figuration theory explains how the individuals navigate the structures, build relationship and eventually gets influenced by the existing structure and assimilates to the dominant structure, although it talks about interdependence and relationship, it sees such interaction having no effect on the existing structure, rather it is the individual or communities that are exposed to the structure getting shaped.

I therefore, find the tone of both the theories flat, they simply explain the process of figuring or shift and resonance as a response to the condition (urban in my case) but does not seriously consider the effect of such conditioned shift on the communities. I think resurgence theory can be instrumental for the study of shift and belonging from the decolonial lens, in the future studies.

Reflecting on Methodologies

Indigenous Research methodology helped me in exploring different ways of knowing, I used Shawn Wilson's (2009), "Research is a ceremony: Indigenous Research Method" and Lind Smith (2009), Decolonizing Research methodology as my references for methodology and methods.

The relational accountability was my research philosophy. The paradigm gave me a lens to look at the culture from relational lens, which helped me understand my culture better. I think if we see things from relational lens, becoming accountable and ethical, it changes us from inside, hence "if the research doesn't change you, you are not doing it right" (Wilson, 2009), sounds right to me.

The Indigenous Research methodology helped in bringing the voices of my community, their experience and their understanding of cultural and shift in the urban context. The openness and acceptance of the Indigenous ways of knowing also meant I was able to use Hyolmo method such as, Tongba Tum, and Chhepa as a method. These indigenous methods created space to make the data collection more engaging, as it followed the community ways of sharing.

Chapter Summary

Cultural shift in the urban environment becomes a chaotic nod of interrelatedness. The people find themselves interacting and influenced by several global, national, and community inter and intra action. The influence is not always tangible but sometimes an intangible force; unspoken competition, a need to be recognized, acknowledged, accepted, appears to just equally shape the cultural identity and belonging in the urban environment.

Hence, from the chapter it can be concluded that the shift and Belonging go hand in hand. The culture stands both solid as a rock and fluid as a river, in the urban space. The adoption of fluidity appears to incite violence to the communities trying to practice culture in the urban environment.

CHAPTER VIII SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATION

In this fluid time, the only thing that is permanent is the shift itself. The human civilization is undergoing unprecedented acceleration due to the tools of globalization and modern needs that demand faster consumption, mobility, and information. Such acceleration has led to an increased feeling of alienation and not belonging. The culture that works as an adhesive, that binds the community together, that plays a significant role in perpetuating the traditional norms and values, that enhances the sense of belonging, is in peril.

By studying the phenomenon of inter and intra action between the people and urban space and the practice of culture, it addresses two fundamental but interrelated questions regarding the ways the culture is shifting and how belonging is negotiated. The insights suggests that the cultural shift in the urban context is inciting violence on Hyolmo ways of being. The force of modernization, fueled by globalization in the urban space creates a gas chamber effect, where any and everything about the Indigenous is gradually annihilated; A slow poison that is gradually stripping Hyolmo of their culture and identity. Although the Hyolmo community demonstrates a strong resistance against such assimilation through forging alliances, or through keeping culture alive and continued in the urban space, they are not far from danger of extinction.

Reflecting on Journey

One of the conspicuous memories I have of my late grandfather is of the time when I was massaging his back and leg on that fine winter sunny afternoon. It was like a routine; I would massage him and at the end he would always give me some pocket money. And every time in our therapeutic session, he would share stories, his memory of his first visit to Kathmandu, his father and grandfather who moved to Chhimi from the neighboring village, his uncles who went exodus as they moved out of the village to Rasuwa. There were lots of stories, maybe he wanted to pass on those memories to me. But I was young and selfish, it was the reward that attracted me more than the stories.

I was on my terrace looking at the Boudha stupa, pondering on my research topic, that was when I suddenly remembered the story my grandfather had told me

about the Boudha stupa, of how it came to be. The stupa always fascinated me; there are so many memories tied to this place. For me the stupa is a home, I have friends that I grew up with living in its proximity, I have memories of different places and turns, water sprouts, and trees, I know them since as long as I can remember. I grew up running around the watchful eyes of the stupa. The stupa has seen me grow; it has seen me through different stages of my life, it will continue to remain and witness my generation after generation.

But the Boudha stupa had different association for my grandfather. The Boudha is a reminder of his distance from home, it is a reminder of the different world, a state, a market, that he rarely visited to barter potatoes, radish, apples or other locally produced goods in the village. As I was wondering how much the place has changed it also made me realize how much it has changed us. From the stories of my ancestors who were here in different historical point of time, to this generation where I grew up as an insider, I feel a strong sense of transformation in the way we experience this place. The notion of shifting relationality piqued my interest to understand the cultural shift in urban environment and how the belonging was established or negotiated in this densely populated multi-ethnic urban centers.

Challenges

One of the major challenges for the continuation of Indigenous culture in the urban environment is the accelerated nature of the modern time. Although the culture has remained in motion and readjusted to the demand of the shifting time and space, the rate of shift of the modern time is concerning. The people, idea, materials, interaction are moving at an accelerated rate, making it difficult for individuals to keep up and resonate with the shift. The inability of people to keep up and make sense of the absurdity, that demands you to work more to be free, only to find yourself working in the free time, or your interest on controlling or making things predictable only to find you getting bored by the predictability of your life, is the greatest tragedy of this modern generation.

Resonance requires the assemblage of so many uncontrolled aspects of life, for people to find attunement. Although my study suggests resonance as a way of belonging, it does not have answer to how can someone resonate to this chaotic city life, where so many things are happening all at once. Hermut Rosa, whose theory I have used here, prescribes different ways people can find resonance, but I find his suggestions superficial, because it does not account the socio-economic and political

background, and places resonance as attunement of the subject and the world that he is interacting with.

Conclusion

Culture is fluid and is constantly shifting, nevertheless the rate at which the shift is happening is concerning. Traditionally, culture evolved within certain geography, the shift was what the community experienced collectively and seek solution that worked for everyone. There was a high sense of ethics, and accountability as they progressed through the solution. But the nature of shift in modern time appears to be beyond the control of the individual or the community. People appear to have lost control on their agency, and appears to be enslaved to the time, that demands consumption and gratification leading to different social issues such as alienation, depression, weakening communal bonds among others.

Although the Hyolmo community appears to resist the current of modern time and to some extent they have been able to, they also appear to be paying a high cost, as their traditional cultural practices are now shifting to align with the modern values. There is an increasing traces of commodification, of cultural goods, the culture appears to now shift from the private celebration to the public display, the shortened length of rituals and festivals echoes the quick gratifying nature of the modern time, the refinement of culture resonates with the aesthetic seeking nature of modern time— where things needs to appear good to outsider as well.

Hence, in this highly globalized- modern times, the culture of Indigenous Peoples is in peril. The culture is shifting outward from the traditional core, and as it shifts it is also weakening communality as people find it difficult to keep up with two worlds that stands polar to each other.

Limitation of the Study

Although, I have mentioned Hyolmo culture in the very generic way, there is also a subtle difference among the villages (hyul thim- village norm) in the ways culture is practiced. Similarly, my study does not demarcate between the Buddhist and indigenous cultures. Due to the spiritual entanglement of Buddhism and animism, it gets difficult to differentiate the point of departure between the Buddhist and animistic rendition. May be through deeper exploration these differences can be pinpointed, but since my study was not directed towards understanding the difference, I have used them interchangeably or as Indigenous cultural characteristics. The

limitation can also be in the number of my participants, as I interviewed only five participants.

Implication of the Study

The insight of this study suggests Hyolmo people experience the cultural shift in the urban environment and in response to the shift they negotiate their sense of belonging. This study reimagines, the Indigenous culture and knowledge, as not something that is frozen in time or stagnant, but something, that is continuously evolving as it interacts with the world outside. In doing so it also suggests how the external stimulus from the environment can lead to the complexity of belonging. This study also opens the opportunity for further exploration for finding ways to resonate in multicultural environment and in accelerated time. Moreover, as there is an increasing propensity on Indigenous knowledge system, future studies can also look at how the Indigenous knowledge in modern time is finding attunement and how such knowledge can contribute to the sustainable futures.

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ANNEX I: CHECKLISTS

Social Institutions:

- Tell me about Hyolmo social service
- Can you tell me what are the different activity Hyolmo Gumba Does?
- Can you tell me about its structure and their roles?
- How many members are there? How many villages does it cover? Can you estimate the total hyolmo population in nepal? Or in total?
- Is the activity solely cultural ?
 - Can you please tell me in order the festivals that the institutions should conduct every year? (or pooja)– Classify based on (Rituals, ceremony, Festivals)?
 - Are the festivals carried out in the same sense like in the village?
 - Do you use technologies to promote or cover wider audiences?
 - What are teh response from the hyolmo diaspora living abroad?
 - How are the youths engaged?
 - How are the womens engaged?
 - Are there any festivals or rituals solely dedicated to women?
 - What are the cultural complexities among Hyolmo from different part of Nepal?

Has the institution also been associated for the political purpose? Or politicians?

- or also there are other development work?
- What are the challenges for the cultural practices? (prove in terms of technology, politcal, economy, urban culture)
- Apart from practice, what are the different efforts put to revive, restrengthen, or to conserve the culture in the urban space?

Talk about the Hyolmo population in census.

What effect can it have?

Has the

Rituals of celebration: Have you noticed any similar shifts in the ways traditional practices are held in the urban environment?

Can you share few experiences where you felt the authenticity of the culture has shifted?

Are there any rituals or ceremonies that are place-based? How are they changing?

How often do you engage in the rituals and ceremonies taking place in the urban environment/ or village?

In your opinion, what are the major challenges for youths in learning culture ?

About songs and dances, musical instrument, traditional tools and technologies:

How much have they evolved and what do you think of the shifts?

How often do you visit village? Do you also participate in village rituals or cultural practices? Have you noticed any shifts or heard about how the rituals have shifted over time?

What do you think are the major challenge of observing rituals in the urban environment?