

Cultural Transformation and Identity Preservation among the Hayu Community in Nepal

Drona Budhathoki¹, Supendra Karki² and Nani Maiya Karki³

Corresponding Author:

Drona Budhathoki

Email: dronammc202@gmail.com

Authors Affiliation:

1. Lecturer of Sociology, Makawanpur Multiple Campus, Hetauda, Makawanpur
2. Lecturer of Community Health, Madan Bhandari Health Science Academy, Hetauda (Email: supen17@gmail.com)
3. Assistant Lecturer of Sociology, Bagmati University, Hetauda Campus, Hetauda-4, Makawanpur (Email: news.samjhana@gmail.com)

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Abstract

The Hayu community represents one of the tiniest indigenous groups in Nepal, noted for its unique language, culture, and disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. The Central Bureau of Statistics indicates that the Hayu population is very limited, placing them among the most threatened ethnic groups in the nation. The main goal is to explore how cultural change is occurring in the Hayu community and its impact on maintaining their cultural identity. This research utilizes an ethnographic and descriptive methodology with purposive sampling to analyze the socio-cultural dynamics of the Hayu community. Qualitative data were gathered via interviews with five informed participants, field observation, and a case analysis. The results show that the Hayu still engage in specific traditions, such as Hayu Dashain and their special funeral customs. Nonetheless, conventional jobs like basket weaving and bamboo crafting are diminishing as individuals more frequently participate in commerce, building, and public sector work. Even with government acknowledgment and societal assistance, poverty, cultural decline, and susceptibility continue to be major obstacles. The research emphasizes the importance of culturally inclusive policies, organized documentation of the Hayu language and customs, and community-driven development efforts. Such actions can bolster cultural identity, promote sustainable development, and improve the enduring preservation and resilience of the Hayu community's native cultural heritage.

Keywords: Hayu community, Cultural transformation, Identity preservation, Indigenous knowledge, Socio-cultural change.

Introduction

The Hayu community is one of the smallest indigenous nationalities (Janajati) of Nepal, recognized for its distinct language, culture, and marginalized socio-economic status. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Hayu population is extremely small, making them one of the most endangered ethnic groups in the country. They primarily reside in eastern Nepal, especially in Sindhuli and Udayapur districts, and traditionally

speak the Hayu language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family (Ethnologue, 2023). However, due to increasing interaction with other communities, many Hayu people now use Nepali as their main language. Historically, their social position was shaped by the Muluki Ain, which categorized them as a marginalized group. Today, they continue to face challenges such as poverty, limited access to education, and cultural decline, making their preservation an important concern for

inclusive development policies in Nepal (Gurung, 2003).

Historically, the Hayu population has remained very small. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2001) reported around 1,800 individuals, while later estimates suggest the total exceeds 3,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). They are mainly concentrated in eastern Nepal, particularly in Udayapur district. The Hayu primarily follow Hinduism, although elements of animistic traditions still persist in daily life. Their traditional social organization is based on clan structures and regulated marriage rules. Cultural practices, including oral traditions, rituals, and indigenous belief systems, have been gradually declining due to modernization, migration, and interaction with dominant cultures. This ongoing cultural change has weakened the transmission of language and traditions to younger generations, raising concerns about cultural preservation and identity continuity within the Hayu community (Gurung). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, their small size also limits political representation and access to education and services across remote settlements today.

The issue of cultural transformation and identity preservation among the Hayu community. First, studies on historical marginalization and cultural endangerment emphasize how state policies and caste-based hierarchies have shaped the Hayu's socio-cultural trajectory. For instance, Hayu (2024) argues that the legacy of the Muluki Ain (1854), which categorized the Hayu as "Masinya Matwali," institutionalized exclusion and limited their access to education, resources, and social mobility. This historical marginalization has had long-term consequences, contributing to cultural erosion, language decline, and weakened transmission of indigenous knowledge across generations. Such literature highlights that cultural transformation among the Hayu cannot be understood without

considering the structural inequalities embedded in Nepal's socio-political history.

Ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies focus on the processes of identity negotiation and cultural adaptation within the Hayu community. Research by Rai (2019) demonstrates that despite geographic dispersion, the Hayu language retains internal consistency, indicating a strong cultural core that supports identity preservation. At the same time, scholars note that increasing exposure to dominant cultures, migration, and modernization are influencing everyday practices, leading to gradual shifts in traditions, occupations, and social values. This body of literature suggests that the Hayu are not merely passive recipients of change but active agents who continuously reinterpret and preserve their cultural identity in changing social contexts

Cultural transformation is the dynamic process by which cultures adapt to changing social, economic, political, and technological conditions. According to Anthony Giddens (1990), globalization, modernity, and reflexivity reshape traditional cultural values, practices, and identities by increasing global interconnectedness. Likewise, Arjun Appadurai (1996) explains that global cultural flows, including ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples, facilitate continuous cultural exchange. These processes produce both cultural convergence and diversity, enabling communities to negotiate, adapt, and creatively reconstruct their cultural identities while responding to the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly globalized world.

Research Questions

For the study titled "Cultural Transformation and Identity Preservation among the Hayu Community in Nepal," the research questions are framed as follows:

1. What are the major factors contributing to cultural transformation among the Hayu community in Nepal?

2. How is the Hayu community preserving its cultural identity in the context of social, economic, and cultural transformation?

Research Objective

The main objective of the study is to examine the cultural transformation is occurring within the Hayu community and it affects the preservation of their cultural identity.

Significance of the Research Study

The study of cultural transformation and identity preservation among the Hayu community in Sindhuli District, particularly in Golanjor Rural Municipality, is highly significant for both academic inquiry and practical application. This region represents a marginalized indigenous setting where rapid socio-economic change is reshaping traditional cultural practices. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and cultural capital, the study helps explain how power structures influence cultural continuity and change. Similarly, scholars like Anthony Giddens highlight the role of modernity and globalization in transforming local identities. The findings are useful for local governments, policymakers, and development organizations to design inclusive and culturally sensitive programs. They can support indigenous language preservation, strengthen community participation, and promote sustainable development. Ultimately, this research contributes to safeguarding the unique cultural identity of the Hayu community while addressing challenges of marginalization and adaptation in a changing social context.

Limitations of the Study

This research was conducted under the following limitations:

1. The study is based on limited theoretical perspectives, which may not fully explain the complex cultural realities of the Hayu community.
2. It uses a simple qualitative method, so data depth and triangulation are limited.
3. The sample size is very small (only five respondents), which reduces the generalizability of findings.
4. The study focuses only on cultural transformation and identity, ignoring other factors like the economy and migration.

Literature Review

Literature review embraces both theoretical and empirical studies.

Theoretical Review

Cultural transformation and identity preservation among the Hayu community can be understood by integrating the perspectives of Symbolic Interactionism and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. Symbolic Interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, explains that identity is continuously created and negotiated through everyday social interactions, shared meanings, language, rituals, and cultural symbols (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). In the Hayu community, these symbolic practices reinforce collective identity and a sense of belonging despite increasing external influences. Complementing this micro-level perspective, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) argues that cultural transformation is shaped by habitus, capital, and field, where social structures and power relations influence how cultural practices are reproduced, adapted, or marginalized. Habitus guides individuals' responses to social change, while access to cultural, social, and economic capital determines their ability to preserve or transform cultural traditions. Together, these theories demonstrate that cultural transformation is both an interpretive process emerging from everyday interactions and a structured process influenced by broader social inequalities and power relations (Bourdieu, 1977; Hofer, 2004). Indigenous and Decolonial Theory offers a critical framework for understanding the broader power dynamics affecting the Hayu community. Scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Walter D. Mignolo argue that

indigenous cultures have historically been marginalized through colonial and state-driven processes that privilege dominant knowledge systems. This perspective highlights the importance of cultural preservation, self-determination, and resistance against assimilation. In the case of the Hayu, identity preservation can be seen as an act of resilience and cultural revival, where community members actively reclaim language, traditions, and indigenous knowledge. Therefore, decolonial approaches not only critique historical injustices but also advocate for inclusive policies and epistemic recognition that empower indigenous communities to sustain their cultural heritage (Smith, 1999; Mignolo, 2011).

In the context of the Hayu community of Nepal, Symbolic Interactionism and Indigenous Theory together provide a comprehensive framework to understand cultural transformation and identity preservation. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, as developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, Hayu identity is constructed and sustained through everyday interactions, including the use of native language, ritual practices, and shared cultural symbols that reinforce a sense of belonging. At the same time, Indigenous and decolonial perspectives, influenced by scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, emphasize the importance of resisting cultural domination and promoting self-determination. For the Hayu, preserving cultural practices amid external pressures reflects not only adaptation but also resilience and active efforts to maintain their distinct identity within a historically marginalized social structure.

Empirical Literature Review

Hayu (2024) examines the endangered cultural condition of the Hayu community in Nepal, emphasizing its deep-rooted historical marginalization. The study highlights how the Muluki Ain of 1854 classified the Hayu as “Masinya Matwali,” a category that institutionalized social exclusion and reinforced hierarchical

discrimination. This legal positioning restricted their access to education, economic opportunities, and state resources, contributing to long-term socio-economic deprivation. The author argues that such historical structures have had lasting impacts, shaping contemporary inequalities faced by the community. Despite the progressive provisions introduced by Nepal’s modern constitution, including guarantees of equality and inclusion, the Hayu continue to experience systemic discrimination in practice. The paper further notes that marginalization is not only economic but also cultural, as traditional practices, language, and identity face gradual erosion (Parajuli, 2012). Overall, the study underscores the need for targeted policies and inclusive development efforts to address the persistent inequalities affecting the Hayu community today.

Studies indicate that the Hayu population remains extremely small and geographically concentrated, primarily in the Sindhuli and Ramechhap districts of Nepal, which significantly heightens their vulnerability to both cultural erosion and demographic decline. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2021), their total population is estimated at approximately 3,000 individuals, reflecting a persistent trend of demographic stagnation and gradual decrease over time. Such a limited population base poses serious challenges for cultural continuity, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and community sustainability. Moreover, their concentration in remote and underdeveloped rural areas further exacerbates their marginalization by limiting access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and infrastructure development. These structural constraints not only intensify socio-economic vulnerabilities but also weaken their capacity to cope with external influences such as modernization, migration, and cultural assimilation. Consequently, the combined effects of small population size, spatial isolation, and systemic marginalization place the

Hayu community at significant risk of long-term cultural and demographic extinction (Pandey, 2021).

Researchers emphasize that persistent poverty, geographic isolation, and inadequate infrastructure have significantly limited development opportunities within Hayu settlements (CBS, 2021; Ethnologue, 2023). These structural constraints have increasingly compelled many Hayu families to migrate from their ancestral villages to urban and semi-urban areas in search of improved livelihood options. While migration may provide short-term economic relief, it simultaneously disrupts traditional settlement patterns and social cohesion. Moreover, this movement accelerates the decline of cultural practices, weakens intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge, and reduces the use of the Hayu language in everyday life. As a result, the community faces growing challenges in preserving its distinct cultural identity. Scholars thus argue that the Hayu population is undergoing a dual process characterized by socio-economic marginalization alongside rapid cultural transformation, both of which are largely driven by structural inequality, limited state support, and uneven patterns of national development (Manandhar, 2026).

Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981) developed a foundational theory of cultural transmission, identifying three primary modes: vertical transmission (from parents to children), horizontal transmission (among peers), and oblique transmission (from one generation to non-descendant younger individuals). Their work emphasizes that ethnic culture, such as language, beliefs, and rituals, is not biologically inherited but socially learned through structured interactions. This framework is highly relevant to ethnic communities, where traditions are maintained through family socialization as well as peer and community networks. The authors argue that changes in transmission patterns, particularly due to

modernization and migration, can significantly reshape ethnic identity and cultural continuity.

Bourdieu (1977) explains cultural transmission through the concept of habitus, referring to the deeply internalized dispositions, values, and practices that individuals acquire through socialization within their cultural group. In ethnic contexts, habitus facilitates the intergenerational reproduction of cultural norms, language, and symbolic practices, thereby sustaining group identity over time. Bourdieu emphasizes that cultural transmission is not a passive process of inheritance but an active and dynamic one, shaped by social structures, power relations, and everyday interactions. Through this lens, individuals both reproduce and subtly transform cultural meanings in response to shifting socio-economic contexts. This perspective underscores that ethnic identity is neither fixed nor static; rather, it is continuously reconstructed and negotiated, reflecting broader patterns of inequality, access to resources, and changing social environments.

In the Gopali community of Makawanpur District, cultural continuity plays a vital role in shaping collective identity and preserving indigenous knowledge systems. Cultural practices such as ritual performances, kinship relations, and traditional occupations are transmitted across generations through everyday social interactions and community participation. This process of transmission strengthens a shared sense of belonging and reinforces ethnic identity among community members. At the same time, identity formation is not static; it evolves in response to socio-economic change, migration, and external cultural influences. Drawing on the concept of social learning, individuals tend to adopt culturally valued behaviors that are widely practiced or associated with respected figures within the community. Thus, the Gopali community demonstrates a dynamic balance between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary realities, ensuring both continuity and

transformation of identity over time (Budhathoki and Aryal, 2025).

Boyd and Richerson (1985) developed the dual inheritance theory, which explains that human behavior is shaped by the interaction of genetic and cultural evolution. According to this perspective, cultural traits such as language, norms, beliefs, and customs are transmitted across generations through social learning processes, including imitation, teaching, and social reinforcement. The theory emphasizes that culture evolves much faster than biological inheritance, allowing human societies to adapt rapidly to changing environmental and social conditions. Cultural transmission is therefore considered adaptive, dynamic, and context-dependent. This framework is particularly useful for understanding ethnic communities, as it explains how cultural identity can persist while simultaneously undergoing transformation. It highlights that cultural continuity is maintained through learned behavior, yet modified through interaction, innovation, and external influences (Budhathoki, 2024). Thus, dual inheritance theory provides a strong analytical foundation for studying cultural transformation and identity preservation among indigenous and marginalized communities.

Budhathoki (2025), in his study *Cultural Influences on Consumerism and Lifestyle Choices: An Analysis of College Students in Makawanpur, Nepal*, explains cultural transformation as a key factor shaping consumer behavior and lifestyle patterns among youth in Nepal. The study shows that traditions, social norms, and media exposure significantly influence how young people adopt new consumption practices while still maintaining elements of their cultural identity. Cultural transformation occurs through the interaction of local values with global influences such as digital media, modernization, and changing economic conditions. The research highlights that youth in Makwanpur increasingly integrate global lifestyles into their daily practices, such as fashion, leisure

activities, and social interaction, while still being guided by local cultural expectations. This reflects a gradual shift from traditional to hybrid cultural patterns. The study, therefore, links cultural transformation directly with identity formation, showing that consumption practices are not only economic but also deeply cultural and socially constructed (Karki, Khadka and Manandhar, 2026).

Henrich and Boyd (1998) analyze how biased social learning influences the transmission of cultural traits within ethnic communities. They emphasize that individuals do not learn cultural behaviors randomly; rather, they are guided by specific cognitive and social biases. Conformist bias leads people to adopt practices that are widely shared within their group, reinforcing collective identity and social cohesion. At the same time, prestige bias encourages individuals to imitate respected or high-status figures, further stabilizing valued traditions. Through these mechanisms, cultural knowledge, beliefs, and rituals are effectively passed from one generation to another. The authors argue that such patterned learning processes ensure the persistence of ethnic traditions while also allowing gradual adaptation to changing social environments (Nepali, 2018). Thus, cultural transmission operates as a dynamic yet structured process, balancing continuity with transformation across generations.

Policy analysis indicates that the Hayu community remains structurally marginalized despite existing government initiatives. Current policies are fragmented and lack cultural sensitivity, failing to address the community's socio-economic and cultural vulnerabilities. There is an urgent need for integrated and targeted interventions (Subedi and Shrestha, 2024). Prioritizing cultural and linguistic preservation through systematic documentation is essential to safeguard endangered heritage. Education policies should incorporate mother-tongue instruction, scholarships, and residential support to improve access and retention. Health services must be expanded through mobile outreach

and culturally informed care, while social protection schemes should be adjusted for inflation to ensure adequacy. Furthermore, livelihood programs should connect traditional skills such as bamboo-based crafts with market-oriented opportunities to enhance income generation. Political inclusion policies must ensure proportional representation and capacity-building for leadership roles. Overall, coordinated, inclusive, and culturally responsive policy frameworks are required to promote sustainable development and reduce structural inequalities faced by the Hayu community in Nepal (Hayu, 2024).

Methods and Materials

This study adopts an ethnographic and descriptive approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the community's socio-cultural dynamics and lived experiences. A purposive sampling technique was employed for the selection of participants. The research focuses on multiple dimensions, including population structure, clan/lineage organization, religious rituals, funeral practices, occupational transformation, political participation, and experiences of displacement. For qualitative data collection, information was gathered through interview schedules with five individuals from the Hayu community who possess in-depth ethnic and cultural knowledge. In addition, field observation was conducted to document cultural practices and living conditions, and a case study method was applied involving one participant, Dhanbir Hayu (37). This facilitated a nuanced analysis of both continuity and change within the community.

Data for this study were collected on December 23 and 24, 2025, in Ward No. 6 of Golanjor Rural Municipality, Sindhuli District, Bagmati Province, which was selected as the field site. To further substantiate the findings, photographs of the study area and video recordings from the interviews have also been securely preserved.

Study at a Glance

Golanjor Rural Municipality in Sindhuli District of Bagmati Province, Nepal, provides an important geographical and socio-economic setting for studying rural transformation and cultural dynamics. Established in 2017 through the merger of seven former Village Development Committees, it spans 184.13 square kilometers and has a population of about 18,737 (2021 census). The area is predominantly agrarian, supported by emerging high-value agriculture and improved connectivity through the B.P. Highway, which links the Kathmandu Valley with the Terai region. It also has more than 60 educational institutions, reflecting gradual human development. Within this context, the study of Cultural Transformation and Identity Preservation among the Hayu Community in Nepal becomes highly relevant, as the Hayu, an indigenous group in the region, are experiencing shifts in livelihood, language, and ritual practices due to modernization and migration. Therefore, Golanjor serves as a key research setting to examine how development processes interact with indigenous cultural continuity and identity preservation in rural Nepal (Golanjor Rural Municipality, 2024).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents a systematic analysis of the socio-cultural, economic, political, and ritual dimensions of the Hayu community. The analysis is based on an ethnographic interpretation of cultural practices, occupational shifts, governance participation, and a case study of displacement. The findings highlight both continuity and transformation within the Hayu social system, reflecting broader processes of cultural adaptation under conditions of marginalization.

Religious and Ritual Practices

The religious system of the Hayu community reflects a syncretic blend of Kiranti animistic traditions and Hindu influences. One of the most significant ritual practices is the Hayu Dashain or

Mahakali Devi Puja, performed at a sacred tree and stone platform. This ritual involves the symbolic sacrifice of a pig and is conducted once every five or twelve years, depending on local customary cycles. The infrequent yet intensive nature of the ritual demonstrates its role as a major collective event that strengthens group solidarity, reinforces ancestral reverence, and reaffirms spiritual identity. From a sociological perspective, such rituals function as mechanisms of social integration. The collective participation of households in ritual preparation and performance reflects Durkheimian notions of collective conscience, where religious practices maintain social cohesion. The sacred tree and stone shrine also indicate an ecological dimension of indigenous spirituality, where natural objects are embedded with religious meaning. However, increasing exposure to dominant Hindu practices and modernization has gradually influenced ritual interpretation, leading to subtle changes in symbolic meaning and participation patterns (Field survey, 2025).

Funeral and Mortuary Practices

Funeral practices among the Hayu reveal a strong cultural emphasis on ancestry, purity, and gendered ritual symbolism. Traditionally, the deceased were buried on their own land in locations visible from the household, symbolizing continued spiritual presence within the family space. This practice underscores the belief in ancestral continuity and the enduring connection between the living and the dead. In contemporary contexts, however, a gradual shift toward cremation along riverbanks is observed, influenced by broader Hindu funeral customs and spatial constraints. Despite this transformation, several traditional elements persist. Gender-specific rituals are still maintained: male deceased receive one mana of rice and a rooster, while female deceased are offered one mana of rice and a hen placed on the chest before burial. These symbolic offerings represent gendered social roles and the cultural interpretation of life transitions.

Additionally, the ritual purity of daughters and married women (chelibeti) is emphasized during funeral rites, where a white tika is applied. This practice reflects broader South Asian cultural notions of purity and pollution, while simultaneously reinforcing internal community identity boundaries. Overall, mortuary practices illustrate a gradual cultural transition while maintaining core symbolic frameworks (Field survey, 2025).

Occupational Transformation

The occupational structure of the Hayu community has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades. Traditionally, the Hayu were primarily engaged in bamboo basket weaving (doko and namlo production) and subsistence agriculture. These occupations were closely tied to forest-based resources and local ecological knowledge systems. However, contemporary livelihood patterns demonstrate increasing diversification. Many Hayu individuals are now engaged in construction work, small-scale trade, and wage labor. A smaller but growing number have entered formal employment in government service, including positions such as ward members, assistant engineers, and personnel in the army and police forces.

This occupational shift reflects broader processes of economic restructuring, rural-urban migration, and state-led inclusion policies. From a development perspective, such diversification indicates adaptive resilience. However, it also signals the gradual erosion of traditional knowledge systems, particularly bamboo craftsmanship, which previously formed a core cultural identity marker. The transition from subsistence-based to wage-based livelihoods highlights both opportunities and vulnerabilities in the socio-economic transformation of the community (Field survey, 2025).

Political Participation and State Support

Political participation of the Hayu community remains limited but is gradually improving. Representation in local governance structures has begun to emerge, with individuals such as Ram Bahadur Hayu serving as ward members in Ramechhap Municipality. This development indicates increasing political visibility, although representation at higher levels of government remains minimal. In terms of state support, the government provides a monthly subsistence allowance of NPR 3,000 to economically disadvantaged members of the Hayu community. This form of social protection acknowledges their classification as a highly vulnerable indigenous group. However, the effectiveness of such support remains limited due to inflation, administrative constraints, and a lack of complementary livelihood programs. From a policy analysis perspective, current interventions are largely symbolic and welfare-oriented rather than transformative. There is a need for institutional mechanisms that promote meaningful participation in decision-making processes, rather than mere financial assistance. Political inclusion, therefore, remains an emerging but underdeveloped dimension of Hayu socio-political life (Field survey, 2025).

Case Study: Displacement and Cultural Belief Systems

A significant case of displacement was observed in Golanjor Rural Municipality-6, Sindhuli, where 21 Hayu individuals abandoned their ancestral settlement following the illness of a community member. According to local belief systems, illness is sometimes interpreted as a sign of spiritual imbalance, ancestral displeasure, or environmental misfortune rather than purely biological causes. In response to this perceived spiritual crisis, the group collectively decided to relocate overnight to Pokhara, leaving behind their long-established settlement and livelihood base. This incident reflects the strong influence of traditional epistemologies in

shaping collective decision-making processes within the Hayu community.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the event highlights how deeply embedded belief systems continue to guide responses to health-related challenges, particularly in marginalized indigenous groups with limited access to formal healthcare services. The rapid displacement also exposes underlying vulnerabilities, including inadequate health awareness, limited trust in biomedical institutions, and social insecurity. Anthropologically, this case demonstrates the dual role of indigenous knowledge systems: while they provide cultural meaning, social cohesion, and collective identity, they may also generate unintended consequences such as abrupt migration and disruption of livelihoods. Furthermore, it raises critical concerns regarding the effectiveness of public health communication, the need for culturally sensitive interventions, and the importance of strengthening state engagement with indigenous knowledge systems to ensure both respect and well-being (Field survey, 2025).

Cultural Transformation and Identity Preservation of the Hayu Community

Cultural transformation and identity preservation among the Hayu community in Golanjor Rural Municipality of Sindhuli District are shaped by a continuous interaction between traditional practices and modern influences. The Hayu people maintain their cultural identity through language, rituals, oral traditions, and community-based social practices. However, globalization, migration, education, and exposure to external cultures are gradually influencing their traditional way of life. Despite these changes, many cultural elements such as festivals, kinship systems, and customary beliefs are still preserved within households and community gatherings. Identity preservation is largely supported by elders who transmit indigenous knowledge to younger generations through storytelling and daily practice. At the same time, younger generations are

increasingly adopting modern lifestyles, creating a blend of traditional and contemporary identities. This dual process reflects both cultural continuity and transformation. Therefore, the Hayu community demonstrates resilience in maintaining its cultural identity while adapting to changing socio-economic conditions, making it an important case for studying indigenous cultural dynamics in Nepal (Field survey, 2025).

Results Analysis

The analysis of the Hayu community reveals a complex pattern of cultural continuity and gradual transformation across religious, economic, and social domains. Ritual and mortuary practices remain central to collective identity, where festivals such as Hayu Dashain and Mahakali Devi Puja continue to reinforce ancestral reverence and social cohesion through communal participation and symbolic sacrifice. However, these practices are increasingly influenced by dominant Hindu traditions and modernization, resulting in subtle shifts in meaning and ritual expression. Similarly, funeral practices demonstrate a transitional phase in which traditional burial customs coexist with emerging cremation practices. Despite such changes, core symbolic elements such as gender-specific offerings and purity rituals continue to preserve cultural identity and reinforce internal social boundaries (Bourdieu, 1977). Overall, these findings suggest that while external influences are reshaping religious and ritual life, foundational belief systems remain resilient.

In the economic and political domains, the Hayu community exhibits adaptive resilience alongside persistent structural marginalization. Occupational transformation from traditional bamboo craftsmanship and subsistence agriculture to wage labor, construction work, and limited public service employment reflects broader processes of modernization and rural livelihood diversification. However, this shift also indicates the gradual erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. Politically,

representation is slowly emerging at the local level, but remains limited in higher governance structures, while state-provided allowances offer only partial relief from economic vulnerability. The case of community displacement in Sindhuli further highlights how cultural belief systems continue to shape collective responses to illness and insecurity, often in the absence of adequate healthcare access and institutional trust. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the Hayu community is navigating a dual process of cultural preservation and socio-economic transformation under conditions of continued marginalization.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of the Hayu community in Sindhuli District and Golanjor Rural Municipality reveals a complex interplay between cultural continuity and transformation across socio-cultural, economic, political, and ritual dimensions. Religious and ritual practices such as Hayu Dashain and mortuary traditions demonstrate strong cultural resilience, where collective participation and symbolic meanings continue to reinforce social solidarity and ancestral identity. However, gradual influences from dominant Hindu practices and modernization have led to subtle changes in ritual interpretation and participation. Similarly, occupational patterns have shifted from traditional bamboo craftsmanship and subsistence farming to wage labor, trade, and limited formal employment, indicating both adaptive resilience and the gradual erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. Political participation is emerging but remains limited, with only partial representation and welfare-based state support, which is insufficient for long-term empowerment. These findings collectively show that the Hayu social system is undergoing structural transformation while still maintaining core cultural elements.

At the same time, the case study of displacement highlights the deep influence of indigenous belief systems in shaping collective decision-making,

especially in contexts of health and uncertainty. Such practices reflect both cultural meaning-making and vulnerability due to limited access to modern healthcare and institutional trust. Overall, the study confirms that cultural transformation among the Hayu is not a process of complete loss but of negotiation and adaptation. Identity preservation is sustained through oral traditions, kinship systems, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, primarily led by elders, while younger generations increasingly adopt hybrid cultural identities influenced by globalization and education. Thus, the Hayu community demonstrates cultural resilience amid marginalization, making it a significant case for understanding indigenous identity dynamics and socio-cultural change in Nepal

Based on the study Cultural Transformation and Identity Preservation among the Hayu Community in Golanjar Rural Municipality–6, Sindhuli District, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. The local government in Golanjar Rural Municipality should promote targeted programs for preserving the Hayu language, rituals, and traditional knowledge through education and cultural documentation.
2. Strengthening inclusive policies is necessary to increase political representation and expand livelihood support beyond small welfare allowances, ensuring long-term socio-economic empowerment.

3. Awareness programs on health, education, and modernization should be introduced to reduce overdependence on traditional beliefs and support informed decision-making within the Hayu community.

Author Contributions

The first author, Drona Budhathoki, serves as a dedicated faculty member in Sociology at Makawanpur Multiple Campus, Hetauda, where he has been contributing to postgraduate education for more than two decades. Since 2023, he has regularly published research articles. In this study, his primary responsibilities included developing the fundamental research framework and preparing the academic manuscript. The second author, Supendra Karki, has experience teaching in various educational institutions and working in a government hospital. He is currently involved in teaching Community Health at Madan Bhandari Academy of Health Sciences, Hetauda. In this research, he played an active role in conceptual development and primary data collection. He worked closely with Budhathoki in shaping the research design and refining the analysis and discussion sections of the study. The third author, Nani Maiya Karki, has extensive experience in journalism and has been teaching Sociology at Hetauda Campus since 2021. This manuscript is the result of the thoughtful collaboration of all three authors. The authors jointly reviewed the work and approved it for publication.

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