



## **Cultural Continuity and Identity Formation: A Study of the Gopali Community in Makawanpur District, Nepal**

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**To Cite this article:** Budhathoki, D., & Aryal, U. (2025). Cultural continuity and identity formation: A study of the Gopali community in Makawanpur district, Nepal. *International Research Journal of MMC*, 6(5), 176–188. <https://doi.org/10.3126/irjmmc.v6i5.89086>

**Submitted:** 1 November 2025

**Accepted:** 15 December 2025

**Published:** 31 December 2025

### **Abstract**

Cultural continuity enables communities to sustain identity, heritage, and traditional knowledge across generations, fostering social cohesion, resilience, and intergenerational solidarity. It protects indigenous identities, preserves cultural practices amid change, and allows adaptation while maintaining foundational cultural values. The chief objectives of this study is to examine the indigenous culture of the Gopali Newar community in Kunchhal Village, Ward No. 1, Thaha Municipality, Makawanpur District, and to investigate the efforts made to preserve and sustain its continuity. This study used a descriptive research design to explore the Gopali Newar community's identity and its sustainable cultural heritage preservation, employing purposive sampling for interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions to gather intergenerational perspectives and contextually rich, relevant data on cultural practices. In conclusion, the study of the Gopali Newar community of Kunchhal Village highlights how cultural preservation, identity formation, and social continuity are maintained through unique practices, language, rituals, and architecture. Despite pressures from modernization and socio-economic changes, the community actively safeguards its tangible and intangible heritage, fostering intergenerational cohesion, reinforcing collective identity, and demonstrating the vital role of community agency in sustaining cultural persistence. This research is significant as it documents the Gopali Newar community's unique cultural practices, language, rituals, and heritage, highlighting strategies for sustainable preservation. It informs anthropological understanding, supports minority cultural continuity, and provides insights for policy interventions promoting social cohesion and resilience.

**Keywords:** cultural continuity, Gopali community, indigenous culture, social cohesion, identity formation

## 1. Introduction

Culture is a complex and dynamic system of shared values, beliefs, knowledge, customs, traditions, norms, language, and practices that shape the ways individuals and groups interact within society. It provides a framework through which people interpret the world, develop identities, and establish social cohesion. Culture is both material, reflected in artifacts, technology, and physical expressions, and non-material, encompassing symbols, ideologies, and social practices. Scholars emphasize that culture is learned, transmitted across generations, and constantly adapted in response to historical and social change (Tylor, 1871; Geertz, 1973). Thus, culture functions as both a unifying force and a medium of transformation, guiding human behavior while reflecting diversity and resilience within communities.

Cultural continuity is a vital concept in understanding how communities sustain their identity and heritage across generations. It highlights the resilience of cultural practices, beliefs, and values in the face of globalization, modernization, and socio-political transformations. Scholars argue that cultural continuity not only preserves traditional knowledge but also fosters social cohesion, community resilience, and intergenerational solidarity (UNESCO, 2003; Battiste, 2002). Moreover, it plays a critical role in protecting indigenous identities and ensuring that cultural heritage remains relevant in changing contexts. By transmitting traditions and collective memory, cultural continuity allows societies to adapt without losing their foundational identity. Hence, it serves as both a mechanism of preservation and a dynamic process of cultural adaptation.

Cultural identity refers to an individual's or group's sense of belonging to a particular culture, shaped by shared language, traditions, values, beliefs, history, and social practices. It is both a personal and collective construct that provides meaning, self-recognition, and social positioning within a broader society. Cultural identity evolves through processes of socialization, intergenerational transmission, and interaction with other cultures, yet it retains continuity by preserving distinct markers of heritage and collective memory. Scholars note that cultural identity is dynamic, as it adapts to changing social, political, and global contexts, while simultaneously serving as a source of resilience, pride, and solidarity (Hall, 1990; Smith, 1991).

Identity formation is the developmental process through which individuals construct a coherent sense of self by integrating personal experiences, social roles, cultural influences, and values. It involves both internal reflection and external interaction, as individuals negotiate who they are in relation to others and to society. This process is shaped by family, peers, education, culture, and historical context, making identity both personal and social. Scholars emphasize that identity formation is not static but dynamic, evolving across the life course as people encounter new challenges and opportunities. It plays a crucial role in fostering self-understanding, belonging, and psychological well-being, while also influencing social participation and group affiliation (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2007).

Identity formation is the dynamic process through which individuals and groups construct a sense of self by integrating personal experiences, cultural traditions, and social contexts. In Nepal, this process is deeply shaped by caste, ethnicity, language, religion, regional origins, and political transformations. For instance, among the Gurung community, historical processes of power, knowledge, and migration have significantly influenced identity formation and redefinition (Gurung, 2023). Identity is not static; it adapts to shifting socio-economic, cultural, and political environments while maintaining elements of continuity. It provides individuals with self-understanding, dignity, and social recognition, while also influencing group solidarity, national belonging, and debates on inclusion and representation within society.

## **1.1 Research Gap**

Thaha Municipality, Ward No. 1, Kunchaal Village in Makwanpur District, Nepal, is predominantly inhabited by the Gopali Newar community. While previous studies have addressed aspects such as the community's language, socio-cultural conditions, domestic violence, and agro-tourism, a significant gap remains in research focusing specifically on their indigenous cultural heritage. Limited scholarly attention has been given to the documentation, preservation, and transmission of the Gopali community's unique cultural practices, rituals, and traditional knowledge. Consequently, this study seeks to investigate the community's distinctive cultural identity, the challenges it faces in the context of modernization and social change, and the strategies necessary to ensure the continuity and sustainability of its indigenous cultural heritage.

## **1.2 Research Objective**

The chief objectives of this study is to examine the indigenous culture of the Gopali Newar community in Kunchhal Village, Ward No. 1, Thaha Municipality, Makwanpur District, and to investigate the efforts made to preserve and sustain its continuity.

## **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding and preserving the indigenous culture of the Gopali Newar community, a relatively understudied subgroup within Nepal's diverse social fabric. By documenting their unique cultural practices, social structures, and traditional knowledge systems, the research provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which cultural heritage is maintained and transmitted across generations. Furthermore, it highlights the challenges faced by the community in sustaining their cultural identity amid socio-economic and modernization pressures. The findings can inform policymakers, cultural organizations, and scholars in designing targeted interventions for cultural preservation, promoting inclusive heritage management, and fostering community awareness about the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural assets for future generations.

## **1.4 Delimitation of the Research Study**

This research study was carried out under the following delimitations:

1. The study is limited to the Gopali Newar community residing in Kunchhal Village, Ward No. 1 of Thaha Municipality, Makwanpur District, and omits Gopali Newars living in other regions of Nepal.
2. The research focuses exclusively on the cultural practices, social structures, and preservation efforts of the Gopali Newar community, excluding other ethnic or social groups in the area.
3. The study examines current efforts and practices related to cultural preservation, without providing a longitudinal historical analysis, due to constraints of time, resources, and accessibility.

## **1.5 Literature Review**

Literature review embraces both theoretical and empirical studies.

## **1.6 Theoretical Review**

Symbolic theory, rooted in the works of sociologists like George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman, underscores how human interactions are mediated by cultural symbols, shared meanings, and interpretation. This theory posits that actions stem from the meanings individuals attribute to objects, events, or behaviors, meanings shaped by social interactions

and continuously redefined. Language, gestures, rituals, and cultural artifacts serve as powerful symbolic tools, structuring communication and fostering shared understanding. Herbert Blumer's extension of symbolic interactionism highlights its applicability in analyzing micro-level social phenomena, emphasizing the dynamic and subjective essence of human interactions. (Blumer, 1969). Applying symbolic theory to Kunchhal village, its cultural symbols, such as temples, festivals, and culinary traditions, illustrate how shared meanings sustain identity and cohesion. The Ganesh Temple and Gokhureswor Mahadev, the structure of Gopali House, act as cultural anchors, fostering collective memory through rituals and gatherings. Festivals, such as the 12-year dances, Kartik Bhajan, Kumari festival, Dewali festival, Ghantakarna, Maha Puja, serve as living symbols, transmitting values and historical continuity. The unique Newari cuisine and organic practices embody the community's adaptation to its environment while preserving traditions. Additionally, natural symbols like blooming rhododendrons and autumn landscapes emphasize the community's connection with nature. Together, these elements highlight how symbols mediate the village's rich cultural narrative, aligning with symbolic theory's focus on rituals and shared meanings.

### **1.7 Empirical Literature Review**

Bhandari's (2021) study, *Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review*, examines the complex processes through which Nepali immigrants living abroad construct and negotiate their cultural identities. The research highlights that identity formation in diaspora is influenced both by the heritage and traditions of the country of origin and by continuous engagement with the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the host society. Bhandari emphasizes that cultural identity in diasporic contexts is not static; rather, it is fluid, adaptive, and continuously redefined through transnational interactions, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and negotiation of belonging. The study underscores the dual role of heritage preservation and intercultural adaptation in shaping the cultural consciousness and collective identity of Nepali diaspora communities.

Cultural identity is fundamentally rooted in the concept of "heritage as a dynamic process," a perspective that shifts the focus from static collections of objects or traditions to an evolving, socially constructed phenomenon. This conceptual framework underscores that cultural heritage is not a fixed entity; rather, it is shaped by human interaction, reflecting the social values, practices, and identities of communities (Harrison, 2013). It posits that heritage evolves, adapting to the changing priorities, needs, and perspectives of those who engage with it. One of the key contributions of this theory is its recognition of the dual nature of heritage as both material and immaterial. Material heritage encompasses tangible entities such as monuments, artifacts, and historical sites, while immaterial heritage includes elements like language, oral traditions, and rituals (Budhathoki, 2025). These two dimensions are interdependent, with each influencing how heritage is perceived, preserved, and transmitted across generations. Moreover, the process of preserving and interpreting heritage is inherently political and context-dependent (UNESCO, 2003).

Pandey (2021), in *Maintaining Ethnic Boundary: The Ethnogenesis of Madhesi Identity in Nepal Tarai*, explores the processes through which diverse communities in the Terai region have been socially and politically "ethnicized." The study highlights how Madhesi identity is actively maintained and reproduced through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, political mobilization, and the assertion of distinct cultural practices. Pandey emphasizes that identity formation in this context is both a response to historical marginalization and a strategy for collective recognition and political representation. The research illustrates that ethnic identity is not inherent but socially constructed and negotiated, reflecting broader dynamics of power, boundary-making, and socio-political contestation.

Such insights underscore the significance of understanding identity as a dynamic and relational process within multi-ethnic societies (Budhathoki, 2025).

Smith (2006), in *Uses of Heritage*, argues that heritage functions not merely as a passive legacy from the past but as an active construct that shapes collective identity and fosters social belonging. His analysis foregrounds the influence of power relations, highlighting how different groups claim, contest, or reinterpret heritage to serve cultural, political, or ideological objectives. The selective acknowledgment of certain narratives or artifacts often marginalizes alternative perspectives, framing heritage as a site of negotiation and conflict (Elyasi & Yamaçlı, 2023). This perspective has critical implications for conservation and interpretation, emphasizing inclusivity and representation in heritage practices. By viewing heritage as a dynamic process, Smith challenges static notions of authenticity, suggesting that authenticity emerges from communities' lived experiences and evolving engagement with their heritage.

The research *Socio-Cultural Identity of Dalits in Karnali (Nepali, 2018)* explores the intricate ways in which Dalit communities in the Karnali region develop and manage their socio-cultural identity. The study emphasizes the dual nature of identity, shaped both by societal expectations and by individual or collective acts of resistance. Facing widespread caste-based discrimination, many Dalits deliberately obscure elements of their caste identity to navigate social, political, and economic constraints. The findings highlight the influence of structural inequalities, historical marginalization, and local cultural norms on the formation and expression of identity. Moreover, the study illustrates that identity is fluid, negotiated, and contextually situated, reflecting broader dynamics of social hierarchy, resilience, and agency among marginalized populations in Nepal (Budhathoki, 2025).

Siwakoti's (2014) study, *Identity Formation among the Santal Ethnic Group of Nepal*, examines how the Santal community constructs and maintains its ethnic identity through shared cultural symbols, including language, religion, and traditional practices, alongside modern organizational efforts such as the Nepal Adivasi Santal Utthan Sangha (SIUN). Focusing on the period following Nepal's political transitions in 1990 and 2006, the research highlights the Santals' deliberate promotion of the Santali language, Sarna religious practices, customary attire, and livelihood strategies to reinforce cultural distinctiveness. Despite pressures from modernization and external sociocultural influences, the Santals actively negotiate their identity by integrating traditional norms with contemporary institutional mechanisms, reflecting resilience and adaptability in preserving ethnic heritage within a transforming socio-political landscape.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine the identity of the Gopali Newar community and their role in the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage in Makwanpur, with a focus on Thaha Municipality-1, Kunchal Village. A combination of data collection methods, including interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions, was utilized to obtain a holistic understanding of cultural practices and conservation efforts. Interviews were conducted using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with detailed and relevant insights aligned with the study's objectives in 2025. Participant observation involved close engagement with the community over two days and one night, allowing an in-depth understanding of daily life and cultural preservation measures. Focus group discussions facilitated dialogue among youth, middle-aged, and elderly community members, capturing intergenerational perspectives on cultural heritage. The descriptive design, combined with non-probability purposive sampling, ensured the collection of rich, contextually relevant data. This approach highlighted both the challenges

faced and the strategies employed by the Gopali Newar community to safeguard their cultural heritage continuity.

## **2.1. Ethical Considerations**

Given the sensitive and emotionally charged nature of certain observations, these aspects were meticulously analyzed and presented. The study maintained strict confidentiality and anonymity for all participants, upholding their privacy while respecting cultural norms and values.

## **2.2 Study Area at a Glance**

Kunchal, a picturesque village in Thaha Municipality-1 of Makawanpur, Nepal, has been gaining recognition for its cultural and historical richness through the combined efforts of the Trekking Agency Association Nepal (TAAN), Nepal Tourism Board, and Village Tourism Promotion Forum Nepal (VITOF Nepal). Notably, it was declared one of Nepal's top three tourism villages during the 38th World Tourism Day in 2017. Renowned for its vibrant Gopali Newari culture, hardworking community, and agricultural economy, Kunchal offers a unique Gopali homestay experience for both domestic and international tourists. Its proximity to Tribhuvan Rajpath and the establishment of well-organized homestays reflect the villagers' collective efforts to promote sustainable tourism. Visitors to Kunchal can enjoy its distinct traditions, such as the authentic Newari cuisine featuring local specialties like brown rice, making it an ideal destination for cultural immersion and rural tourism (Budhathoki, 2024).

## **3. Data Analysis and Presentation**

This study focuses on the identity of the Gopali Newar community, examining their indigenous cultural practices, social structures, and traditions. It analyzes the challenges threatening the continuity of Gopali's indigenous culture and highlights the strategies, rituals, and community efforts that sustain and preserve their unique cultural heritage across generations.

### **3.1 Identity of Gopali Community**

The Gopali caste, a distinctive subgroup within the Newar community, constitutes a socio-cultural entity whose heritage, traditions, and collective identity have received limited scholarly attention. Prior studies emphasize the critical need for systematic documentation of their cultural practices, social organization, and settlement patterns to elucidate intra-community diversity within Newar society. The Gopali caste represents one of Nepal's ancient indigenous communities, with historical roots tracing back to pastoral migrations from regions such as Gokul, Vrindavan, and Mathura in present-day India. Originally cowherds, the Gopas and Gopis settled in areas surrounding the Kathmandu Valley, including Matatirtha, Banasthali, Machhegaun, Thankot, and Kirtipur, which were suitable for cattle grazing and human habitation (Yogi, 1956; Right, 1972). Their settlement patterns contributed to the establishment of early cowsheds and ritual sites, including areas near present-day Tribhuvan International Airport and the Pashupatinath temple, reflecting a close integration of pastoral practices and religious traditions. Over time, these groups interacted with other ethnic communities, including the Kirant, Mongol, Netigro, Agneya, Dravida, and Aryan groups, thereby contributing to the early cultural synthesis of Nepal (Karki, 2068; Adhikari, 2073). Folklore, oral traditions, and ritual practices, such as milk offerings to the Pashupatinath Shivalinga, preserve their historical identity and cultural memory (Gopali, 2014, 2024). Traditionally vegetarian and marked by caste identifiers like the Janai, the

Gopalis adapted their dietary and social practices to the regional environment. Recognized as aboriginal inhabitants, they retain distinct linguistic, cultural, and religious traditions, embodying the characteristics of Nepalese tribal groups (Parajuli, 2012; Bantha Magar, 2064, and Field Survey, 2025).

### **3.2 Indigenous Gopali Culture**

The cultural heritage based on the Gopali communities of Kunchhal Village is as follows.

#### **3.2.1 Unique Architectural Design Homes**

The unique architectural design of Gopali homes illustrates an intricate integration of practicality, spirituality, and cultural symbolism. The three-storey structure has livestock on the ground floor, family quarters on the middle level, and a kitchen on the top floor, demonstrating a functional adaptation to environmental and social needs. The spatial hierarchy also mirrors the symbolic hierarchy of purity, with the sacred kitchen occupying the highest level. The reverence for deities such as Goddess Laxmi reflects how religious belief permeates domestic life. Furthermore, the use of locally sourced materials emphasizes sustainable construction practices aligned with ecological values, positioning Kunchhal as an example of eco-cultural tourism rooted in tradition (Field survey, 2025).

#### **3.2.2 Prohibition against Chickens**

A distinctive aspect of Kunchhal's cultural tradition is the strict prohibition against keeping or consuming chickens. This taboo, rooted in reverence for Lord Ganesh, reflects deep-seated notions of ritual purity and moral discipline guiding community life. The belief that contact with chickens invites impurity and misfortune demonstrates how religious symbolism shapes daily conduct and collective identity. By maintaining this prohibition, the Gopali community preserves its spiritual integrity and distinguishes itself culturally from surrounding agrarian groups, reinforcing boundaries of faith and tradition (Field survey, 2025).

#### **3.2.3 Guthi System**

The Guthi system stands out as a vital social and religious institution, organizing communal activities such as festivals, rituals, and funerals. The annual *Guthi Parva*, celebrated on *Manshir Shukla Purnima*, serves as a ceremonial reaffirmation of collective belonging. The roles of *Thakali* (leader) and *Guthiyars* (members) reflect a structured hierarchy and responsibility within the institution. Through shared rituals, food, and song, the Guthi reinforces intergenerational solidarity and moral order. This communal governance structure ensures that social duties, religious devotion, and mutual assistance remain interconnected pillars of Gopali life (Field survey, 2025).

#### **3.2.4 12-Year Dance (12 Barse Nach)**

The 12-Year Dance (12 Barse Nach) is a remarkable cultural expression linking myth, performance, and spirituality. Performed every twelve years with 55 participants, it encapsulates the Gopalis' mytho-historical consciousness and tantric ritualism. The coordinated roles of *Naike*, *Kaji*, and *Dhami* illustrate ritual specialization and the transmission of sacred knowledge. Its elaborate choreography and rhythmic patterns not only embody devotion but also reinforce collective memory and ancestral continuity. This festival exemplifies how performative traditions function as living archives of cultural knowledge (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.5 Kartik Bhajan**

Kartik Bhajan, celebrated during the sacred month of Kartik, reflects the community's deep devotion and spiritual rejuvenation. Daily bhajan sessions and collective rituals, guided by the village guru, cultivate unity, moral discipline, and the transfer of cultural values across generations. This devotional tradition not only strengthens communal bonds but also inspires active participation among younger members in safeguarding cultural heritage and continuity. The shared spiritual experience thus reinforces harmony, faith, and collective identity within the community (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.6 Dewali Worship**

The Dewali worship, observed annually after Akshaya Tritiya, embodies cooperation, reciprocity, and shared ritual responsibility. Its rotational hosting system and communal contributions highlight a collective moral economy rooted in trust and mutual support. Similarly, Chuni Worship symbolizes both spiritual devotion and social incorporation, marking the initiation of new members into the Guthi. Ritual acts such as releasing chickens and offering a goat signify purification, renewal, and moral order. Together, these ceremonies sustain social hierarchy, reinforce unity, and ensure cultural continuity within the Gopali community (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.7 Kumari Worship**

The Kumari Worship ritual emphasizes reverence for feminine divinity, embodying ideals of purity, prosperity, and protection. A community-crafted effigy of the goddess becomes the focal point of collective devotion, as offerings and prayers express profound respect for women's sacred roles. This annual ceremony illuminates the gendered dimensions of ritual life, where spiritual power is personified through the female form. Within Gopali cosmology, the Kumari symbolizes both divine presence and moral guardianship, reinforcing the cultural sanctity of feminine spirituality (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.8 Bhosala Festival**

The Bhosala Festival, sustained through Guthi land cultivation, unites agricultural productivity with communal festivity and social cooperation. Its egalitarian food distribution system, determined by family size, embodies fairness, equality, and collective prosperity. The formal recognition of newly inducted Chimi members symbolizes inclusion and social mobility within ritual hierarchies. Moreover, collective labor activities such as cleaning irrigation canals and village paths integrate religious celebration with practical community development, reflecting the harmony between faith, work, and social responsibility in Gopali cultural life (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.9 Si Nukhuwa and Jhaldiko**

Festivals such as Si Nukhuwa and Jhaldiko illustrate the deep interconnection between agriculture, spirituality, and communal life. Si Nukhuwa, organized by the Bola lineage group, expresses collective gratitude for fertility, harvest, and ancestral blessings. Similarly, Jhaldiko celebrates the completion of rice planting through ritual offerings, animal sacrifice, and communal feasting. Both festivals reinforce social solidarity, lineage unity, and mutual cooperation while embedding agricultural labor within sacred and moral frameworks. They sustain the rhythm of agrarian life and collective identity (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.10 Ghantakarna Festival**

The Ghantakarna Festival embodies communal protection and purification against malevolent forces through symbolic rituals. Effigy burning, noise-making, and the placement of sacred

twigs on doorways reflect collective efforts to dispel evil and restore spiritual balance. This ritual performance dramatizes the community's belief in moral order, cleansing, and renewal while reinforcing unity and cooperation among villagers. Through symbolic catharsis, the festival reaffirms collective strength, shared values, and the enduring bond between ritual, faith, and social harmony within the Gopali community (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.11 Gaijtra and Janai Purnima**

The paired observances of Janai Purnima and Gaijatra illustrate the Gopali community's harmonious balance between sacred renewal and social humor. Janai Purnima emphasizes purification, protection, and spiritual renewal through sacred thread rituals, while Gaijatra converts mourning into collective expression through satire, song, and costume. This transformation of grief into laughter serves as a communal healing process, demonstrating resilience, creativity, and emotional openness. Together, these festivals unite spiritual discipline with cultural vitality, affirming the Gopalis' adaptive worldview and strong sense of shared humanity (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.2.12 Dashian and Tihar**

The Dashain and Tihar festivals, though widespread in Nepal, hold distinctive significance among the Gopali Newars. Dashain, or *Mahani*, emphasizes familial hierarchy and reverence for the goddess Durga, linking domestic life to divine power. The ritual division of goat meat and the exchange of *Tika* and *Jamara* symbolize intergenerational continuity. Tihar, celebrated through *Mha Puja* and *Bhai Tika*, reinforces both self-purification and sibling bonds. The exchange of gold or symbolic gifts during *Bhai Tika* underscores the community's recognition of women's familial and spiritual roles (Field survey, 2025).

## **3.3 Challenges of Indigenous Gopali Culture**

In the Gopali Newar community, the following challenges affect cultural continuity and identity formation:

### **3.3.1 Youth Migration**

The major challenges faced by the Gopali Newar community are youth migration. Many young people from Kunchhal Village have moved to cities and abroad for employment, leading to reduced participation in traditional rituals, festivals, and communal practices. Their absence has weakened intergenerational cultural transmission and reduced enthusiasm for *Guthi* gatherings, dances, and ancestral worship. Migration has also created a shortage of traditional artisans and performers. Consequently, Gopali's cultural continuity is at risk unless youth engagement and awareness initiatives are effectively promoted (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.3.2 Financial Constraints**

Financial limitations are a major barrier to preserving Gopali's cultural heritage. The community depends on subsistence farming and small-scale trade, leaving little income for festivals, rituals, or renovation of traditional structures. Families often prioritize basic needs like education and healthcare over cultural activities. The lack of institutional or government funding has further weakened preservation efforts. Without financial support, traditional artisans struggle to sustain their crafts. Sustainable funding mechanisms and community-based projects are essential to protect and promote Gopali's cultural heritage (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.3.3 Lack of Sufficient Government Support**

A major challenge in preserving Gopali Newar culture is the lack of effective government support. Although recognized as an indigenous group, the Gopali community receives minimal attention in national cultural and development programs. Bureaucratic inefficiency, weak policy implementation, and limited local representation hinder progress. Government initiatives mainly focus on major Newar centers, neglecting smaller communities like Kunchhal. As a result, preservation efforts depend largely on local residents, emphasizing the urgent need for policy inclusion and institutional support (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.3.4 Poor Communication and Coordination**

Weak communication and coordination among community members and local authorities hinder cultural preservation efforts. The absence of an organized cultural committee results in fragmented initiatives and limited collective action. Effective communication is crucial for organizing festivals, managing communal assets, and transmitting oral traditions, yet poor coordination often leads to confusion and conflict. Gaps between the community and governmental or non-governmental bodies restrict access to resources and support. Strengthening internal communication and establishing coordination with external stakeholders are vital for sustaining Gopali's cultural heritage (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.3.5 Lack of Tourism Promotion**

The lack of effective tourism promotion has limited the economic potential of the Gopali culture in Kunchhal Village. Despite its unique architecture, rituals, and natural beauty, poor infrastructure and minimal publicity have prevented it from becoming a cultural destination. Tourism could generate income, employment, and cultural pride, but inadequate facilities and planning hinder progress. Government and private sector support in developing eco-cultural tourism could revitalize the local economy while preserving the Gopali community's indigenous heritage (Field survey, 2025).

### **3.3.6 Declining Community Engagement**

The declining community engagement poses a serious threat to Gopali's cultural sustainability. Modernization and globalization have led many youths to favor modern lifestyles over traditional values. Festivals once celebrated collectively now lack enthusiasm, and traditional music and dances are fading. The erosion of communal practices like Parma weakens intergenerational knowledge transfer. Revitalizing engagement through cultural education, workshops, and heritage programs is essential to restoring pride and preserving Gopali traditions (Field survey, 2025).

## **3.4 Efforts of Continuity of indigenous Culture**

The Gopali community maintains a distinct identity, culture, and traditional attire, alongside tangible and intangible heritage. The community actively undertakes various measures to preserve and ensure the continuity of these cultural and material assets for future generations.

- In Kunchhal village, traditional house architecture has been preserved in its original form, with no modern constructions. Despite the rise of a new Gopali generation, these historical structures remain intact, reflecting the community's commitment to cultural continuity.

- Rupchandra Gopali has published the *Gopali Dapha Bhajanmala* book to preserve and transmit the Kartik Bhajan and other devotional hymns sung within the Gopali community to future generations.
- Efforts are underway to secure financial support for the reconstruction of the Ganesh Temple from the local Thaha Municipality, the Bagmati Province Government, and the Federal Government.
- The Guthi owns land, with its income covering operational expenses, while any deficit is shared rotationally by community members. Families take turns funding activities, ensuring the preservation of cultural traditions like Kartik bhajans and twelve-yearly ritual dances.
- In the Gopali community, all collective cultural activities follow regulations set by the Guthi head. Consistent adherence by members has played a crucial role in ensuring the sustainable preservation of their cultural heritage (Field survey, 2025).

#### 4. Result Analysis

Applying symbolic interactionism to the Gopali Newar community reveals how cultural symbols mediate social life and sustain collective identity. Temples, festivals, architectural forms, and ritual practices serve as anchors for shared meanings, reinforcing social cohesion and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The three-storey Gopali homes, sacred prohibitions such as the avoidance of chickens, and the Guthi system exemplify how spatial organization, moral norms, and communal governance are intertwined with cultural symbolism. Festivals and rituals such as the 12-Barse Nach, Kartik Bhajan, Kumari Worship, Deuwali, Ghantakarna, Dashain, and Tihar function as living archives, transmitting historical consciousness, ethical values, and spiritual knowledge. Additionally, the integration of agricultural cycles, ecological practices, and seasonal symbolism highlights the community's adaptation to its environment while preserving intangible heritage. These findings align with Blumer's (1969) emphasis on the dynamic and interpretive nature of social interactions, illustrating that identity is actively constructed through continuous engagement with cultural symbols and communal practices.

The study also identifies multiple challenges that threaten the continuity of Gopali culture. Youth migration, financial constraints, limited government support, weak coordination, inadequate tourism promotion, and declining community engagement undermine ritual participation and knowledge transmission. Consistent with broader literature on heritage and identity (Bhandari, 2021; Smith, 2006; Siwakoti, 2014), these findings suggest that cultural identity is fluid, socially negotiated, and contingent upon both internal communal efforts and external support. Preservation requires sustainable funding, intergenerational engagement, and institutional recognition to maintain both material and immaterial heritage. Overall, the analysis underscores the interplay between symbolic structures, collective memory, and socio-economic factors, highlighting the need for integrated strategies to sustain the Gopali Newar community's rich cultural legacy.

#### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of the Gopali Newar community of Kunchhal Village highlights the intricate interplay between cultural preservation, identity formation, and social continuity. The research demonstrates that the community's unique practices, language, rituals, and architectural heritage serve as pivotal markers of identity, fostering a sense of belonging and intergenerational cohesion. Despite facing pressures from modernization, migration, and socio-economic transformations, the Gopali community has actively engaged

in safeguarding its tangible and intangible cultural assets through both formal and informal mechanisms. Symbolic interactionism further illuminates how shared meanings and cultural symbols mediate social behavior, enabling community members to interpret and reinforce their collective identity. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of documenting and supporting minority cultural practices as a means of promoting social inclusivity and resilience. These insights not only contribute to anthropological and sociological understandings of indigenous communities but also inform policy interventions aimed at sustainable cultural heritage preservation. Ultimately, the continuity of the Gopali Newar culture reflects a dynamic negotiation between tradition and modernity, emphasizing the vital role of community agency in shaping cultural persistence.

## 6. Recommendation

Based on research documents and field study findings, the following recommendations are proposed for preserving and promoting the Gopali community's unique culture and civilization.

- Gopali culture, as an indigenous heritage, is unique and must be preserved to maintain the community's identity, including language, rituals, music, and traditional practices.
- The younger generation should learn cultural knowledge, skills, and experiences from elders, ensuring continuity of both tangible and intangible heritage.
- Cultural tourism, homestays, and local indigenous goods should be promoted, supported by local and state governments and media programs, to sustain the culture and reduce youth migration.

## 7. Acknowledgments

We extend my sincere gratitude to the Tribhuvan University Grants Commission and Makawanpur Multiple Campus, Hetauda, for the invaluable opportunity to develop this article. We would like to express our profound appreciation to the informants who participated in this research, as well as to Mr. Rupchandra Gopali, for his assistance in facilitating connections with the informants.

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