

Dewali Ancestral Worship and Social Cohesion among the Khabatari Budhathoki Lineage in Eastern Nepal

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Abstract

Dewali is a traditional ancestral worship in Nepali communities where families honor lineage deities for protection, prosperity, and harmony. Rooted in indigenous beliefs, it strengthens kinship, preserves cultural values, and promotes social unity, continuity, and collective identity across generations within changing socio-cultural contexts. The Khabatari Budhathoki Chhetri, a lineage subgroup of the broader Chhetri community, historically held influential roles in Nepal's administration and military. The chief objective of this study is to explore how Dewali ancestral worship shapes kinship relations and social cohesion among the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage in Eastern Nepal using an ethnographic and descriptive approach to examine the socio-cultural dynamics of the Khabatari Budhathoki community, focusing on Kul Puja (Dewali) as a key ancestral ritual. Primary data were collected from five purposively selected respondents through semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted in Mulkharka, Dhankuta. The study analyzes lineage structure, ancestral worship, social participation, and everyday cultural practices. The study findings show that the Khabatari Budhathoki community preserves its genealogical identity through oral traditions, written genealogy, and Kul Puja practices. Dewali rituals strengthen lineage unity, kinship solidarity, cultural continuity, social cohesion, and collective responsibility, while faith in the Kul Devata shapes the community's spiritual and social life. This study is useful for those who wish to understand the rituals, kinship structure, and social unity within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage.

Keywords: ancestral worship, lineage deities, social cohesion, kinship solidarity, ethnographic study

1. Introduction

Dewali (ancestral or kul worship) is a traditional ritual practiced in many Nepali communities, in which families or clans worship their lineage deities and ancestors to seek protection, prosperity, and social harmony. This practice is deeply rooted in indigenous belief systems, particularly among rural and different caste groups, where it plays a vital role in maintaining spiritual and social order. Through regular rituals, offerings, and collective

participation, Dewali worship strengthens kinship bonds and fosters a sense of belonging within the community. It also serves as an important medium for transmitting cultural values, norms, and traditions from one generation to the next. Beyond its religious significance, Dewali functions as a social institution that reinforces collective identity, unity, and cultural continuity. In this way, it contributes significantly to the preservation of indigenous heritage while sustaining social cohesion in changing socio-cultural contexts (Regmi, 1978).

Clan-based *kul puja* (ancestral worship) constitutes an important socio-cultural and religious institution among many Hindu communities of Nepal, particularly within the Chhetri and the wider Khas people. It refers to the ritual worship of lineage deities (*kul devata*) and forefathers, who are believed to safeguard the well-being, prosperity, and continuity of the family. Practiced within patrilineal descent groups, *kul puja* brings together clan members to perform collective rituals, offerings, and feasts, thereby strengthening kinship bonds and shared identity. As noted by Bista (1991), such ancestral practices play a crucial role in transmitting cultural values and reinforcing social cohesion across generations. Likewise, Subba (1992) emphasizes that these rituals function as mechanisms for maintaining social order and regulating kinship relations. Therefore, *kul puja* serves as a foundational element of clan-based social organization in Nepal.

Dewali worship in Nepal represents an important dimension of folk religious tradition where ancestral spirits and clan deities are honored through ritual practices, offerings, and communal participation. According to Singh (2010), such folk traditions in Nepal reflect a deep integration of religion, culture, and social life, where rituals are not only spiritual acts but also mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion and cultural identity. In many communities, Dewali worship is closely associated with *kul* (clan) worship, where families gather to honor lineage deities believed to protect the household and ensure prosperity. These rituals often include offerings of food, animal sacrifice in some traditions, and collective prayers conducted by ritual specialists. Singh further emphasizes that these practices reinforce intergenerational cultural transmission and strengthen belongingness within ethnic groups. In this way, Dewali or *kul* worship functions as both a religious and socio-cultural institution that preserves indigenous belief systems while adapting to changing social contexts in rural Nepal (Budhathoki, 2025).

The term “Budhathoki” is recognized in existing literature as a surname associated with the Khas people within the broader Chhetri caste system of Nepal. It represents a patrilineal lineage, which plays an important role in defining social identity, kinship relations, and marriage practices in Khas-Chhetri society. According to available sources, Budhathoki is categorized as an *Ekthariya* (single-clan) lineage, indicating a unified ancestral origin and a shared genealogical structure among its members (Wikipedia, 2023). This classification highlights the significance of surname-based identity in maintaining social organization and continuity within the caste hierarchy. However, while Budhathoki is clearly established as a recognized clan, there is no specific scholarly documentation identifying “Khabatari” as a distinct or separately studied subgroup within this lineage.

The Khabatari Budhathoki Chhetri represent a lineage-based subgroup within the broader Chhetri community of Nepal. The Chhetris, originating from the Khas people, have historically occupied dominant roles in state formation, administration, and military structures (Bista, 1991). Within this framework, “Budhathoki” denotes a recognized patrilineal surname or clan, while “Khabatari” (also spelled Khapatari) refers to a sub-clan or *kul* identity that regulates kinship, marriage alliances, and ritual obligations. Although specific ethnographic studies on Khabatari Budhathoki in eastern Nepal remain scarce, broader literature indicates that such lineage identities are preserved through ancestral worship (*kul puja*), oral genealogy, and social norms governing exogamy. Their presence in eastern Nepal is often linked to historical migration during the expansion of the Nepali state.

in the 19th century, reinforcing localized adaptations within the wider Khas-Chhetri social system (Subba, 1992).

Kinship is a fundamental concept in sociology and anthropology that refers to systems of social relationships based on blood ties, marriage, and adoption, shaping family organization, inheritance, and social obligations. Scholars such as Radcliffe-Brown (1950) view kinship as a structured social system that maintains cohesion, while Lévi-Strauss (1969) highlights its role in alliance formation, and Fox (1967) emphasizes its universal significance in organizing social life. In this theoretical context, the practice of *Kul Puja* (ancestral worship) among the Khabatari Budhathoki community in Eastern Nepal represents a living manifestation of kinship relations, where shared ancestry is ritually acknowledged and reinforced. Through collective worship, gatherings, and offerings to ancestral deities, extended family members renew their bonds, reaffirm lineage identity, and sustain social unity across generations. Thus, Kul Puja functions not only as a religious practice but also as a vital socio-cultural mechanism that strengthens kinship solidarity and preserves social cohesion.

Social cohesion refers to the degree of social integration, solidarity, and connectedness among individuals and groups within a society. It is a key concept in sociology used to understand how societies maintain stability, cooperation, and collective well-being. According to Durkheim (1893), social cohesion is rooted in shared values, norms, and moral regulation, which help bind individuals together and prevent social disintegration. He distinguished between mechanical solidarity in traditional societies and organic solidarity in modern societies, both of which contribute to different forms of cohesion. Similarly, Putnam (2000) emphasizes that social cohesion is strengthened through social capital, including trust, networks, and civic participation, which enhance cooperation and collective action. In contemporary sociological discourse, social cohesion is widely understood as both a structural and relational phenomenon that reflects the strength of social bonds, inclusion, and participation within communities. It is considered essential for sustainable development, peace, and social stability.

1.1 Research Gap

Despite growing interest in indigenous ritual practices in Nepal, limited scholarly attention has been given to Dewali ancestral worship and its role in shaping kinship relations and social cohesion among specific lineage groups. Existing studies have largely focused on broader caste and ethnic religious practices, leaving micro-level ethnographic examinations underexplored. In particular, the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage in Eastern Nepal has rarely been studied as a distinct socio-cultural unit in which Dewali rituals serve as a central mechanism for maintaining genealogical continuity and collective identity. Furthermore, the intersection between ritual worship, kinship obligation, and social solidarity remains theoretically underdeveloped in Nepalese anthropology. There is a lack of empirical evidence on how contemporary socio-economic changes influence the continuity and transformation of Dewali practices. This study provides an ethnographic study of ritual practices, kinship structures, and social cohesion within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage.

1.2 Research Objective

The chief objective of this study is to examine the interrelationship between Dewali ancestral worship, kinship relations, and social cohesion within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage in Eastern Nepal through an ethnographic approach.

1.3 Significance of the Research Study

This study is significant because it explores the interrelationship between Dewali ancestral worship, kinship relations, and social cohesion within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage in Eastern Nepal through an ethnographic approach. It contributes to anthropological understanding of indigenous ritual systems and their role in maintaining social structure and collective identity. The research fills a gap in Nepalese ethnographic literature by focusing on a specific lineage-based cultural practice that has received limited scholarly attention. It also helps to understand how traditional belief systems continue to influence kinship obligations and social cohesion amid socio-economic change. Furthermore, the findings may be useful for researchers and cultural preservation efforts aimed at safeguarding indigenous heritage and strengthening community solidarity. It provides empirical insights into how ritual practices sustain kinship networks and reinforce social cohesion in contemporary rural Nepal, enhancing academic discourse on culture, religion, and social integration in Nepal studies. This study will be useful for those who wish to understand the rituals, kinship structure, and social unity within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage.

1.4 Delimitations of the Study

This research study was carried out under the following delimitations:

1. The study was limited to Ward No. 2 of Mahalaxmi Municipality, Dhankuta (Mulkharka Tole), focusing on the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage; thus, its findings are not generalizable to other communities.
2. The research was confined to the specific objectives and methodological framework defined for this study, which limits the scope of analysis and interpretation.
3. The article was prepared in accordance with the rules and guidelines of the concerned journal and thus remains bound within those academic and publication constraints.

2. Literature Review

Literature review embraces both theoretical and empirical studies.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical framework of this study draws primarily on Structural Functionalism, Social Capital Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, and Practice Theory to analyze Dewali ancestral worship in Khabatari, Budhathoki of Mahalaxmi Municipality-2, Dhankuta district. Collectively, these perspectives conceptualize Dewali as a multi-dimensional socio-cultural and ritual system that sustains kinship relations, community solidarity, and cultural continuity in rural Eastern Nepal. From a Structural Functionalist perspective ([Durkheim, 1912](#)), Dewali is understood as a key social institution that promotes integration by reinforcing kinship ties, collective conscience, and solidarity among lineage groups, thereby maintaining social order and continuity across generations. Social Capital Theory ([Putnam, 2000](#)) further explains that ritual participation generates bonding and bridging social capital through trust, reciprocity, and mutual obligations, which facilitate informal cooperation in agriculture, crisis management, and broader communal support systems. Symbolic Interactionism ([Mead, 1934](#); [Blumer, 1969](#)) emphasizes that Dewali constructs shared meanings through symbolic elements such as ancestral offerings, ritual objects, and collective participation, thereby reinforcing kinship identity through continuous social interaction and interpretation. Similarly, Practice Theory ([Bourdieu, 1977](#)) argues that Dewali is embedded in habitus, ensuring cultural reproduction through learned and embodied practices while simultaneously reproducing social roles, kinship hierarchy, and traditional authority structures over time.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Sharma (2015) examines indigenous religious practices and seasonal festivals in Nepal, highlighting their deep-rooted connection with the socio-cultural life of local communities. The study emphasizes that these practices are not merely religious expressions but also important cultural institutions that sustain social values, norms, and collective identity. Seasonal festivals, according to Sharma, play a crucial role in marking agricultural cycles, reinforcing community cooperation, and maintaining harmony between humans and nature. The author further explains that indigenous rituals and festivals serve as mechanisms for intergenerational cultural transmission, ensuring the continuity of traditional knowledge and belief systems. In addition, these practices strengthen social solidarity by bringing people together in collective participation and shared ritual experiences. Sharma's analysis provides valuable insight into how indigenous religious traditions in Nepal contribute to cultural preservation while adapting to changing socio-economic contexts, thereby maintaining their relevance in contemporary society (Budhathoki, 2025).

Dewali, also known as *Kul puja* or *Masto puja* in certain regions, is an important clan-based ancestral ritual practiced among Khas-Brahmin-Chhetri communities in Nepal. This ritual is performed to honor *kul devata* (lineage deities) and ancestral spirits, who are believed to safeguard the family, ensure prosperity, and protect members from misfortune (Sapkota, 2012). It represents a significant aspect of traditional belief systems where ancestral reverence plays a central role in maintaining family identity and cultural continuity. Dewali rituals are usually conducted at specific times with offerings, sacrifices, and collective participation of kin members, reinforcing unity within the lineage. Through these practices, the community strengthens its connection with ancestors while preserving inherited customs across generations. Thus, Dewali functions not only as a religious observance but also as a cultural institution that sustains kinship solidarity and social cohesion within Khas-Brahmin-Chhetri society in Nepal (Badal, 2021).

Anthropological discussions on Kul Puja (*Dewali*) emphasize its complex nature as a ritual system involving ancestor worship, symbolic sacrifice, and religious devotion. Scholarly studies show that these practices are deeply embedded in social organization and cultural identity, particularly among Brahmin-Chhetri and other caste and ethnic groups in Nepal. Although the forms and rituals vary across communities, they consistently function to strengthen kinship ties, reinforce lineage solidarity, and maintain established social structures. Kul Puja also serves as a space where religious belief and social identity intersect, reflecting broader debates on tradition, modernization, and cultural continuity. Anthropologists argue that such rituals are not merely religious acts but also social mechanisms that reproduce hierarchy, belonging, and collective memory within communities. Thus, Dewali/Kul Puja remains a significant field of study for understanding Nepal's socio-cultural and ritual diversity (Adhikari & Gellner, 2016).

Toffin (2008). Ritual practices such as Kul or Dewali worship play an important role in shaping cultural identity and social structure within Nepali communities. Research indicates that Dewali/kul puja operates as a significant cultural mechanism for maintaining social identity, intergenerational continuity, and collective belonging among kin groups. Through regular ritual participation, families and clans reinforce their shared ancestry and historical roots, which strengthens emotional and social bonds within the lineage. Oral traditions, myths, and ritual narratives associated with kul deities further contribute to preserving collective memory and cultural heritage across generations. These practices also provide a sense of moral order and unity within the community by linking the present generation with ancestral spirits. In this way, Kul/Dewali worship functions not only as a religious practice but also as a vital institution for sustaining social cohesion and identity formation (Manandhar, 2020).

The Dewali worship, observed annually after *Akshaya Tritiya*, symbolizes cooperation, reciprocity, and collective ritual responsibility within the community. Its rotational hosting system and shared contributions reflect a moral economy based on trust, mutual support, and communal participation. Similarly, *Chuni* Worship expresses both spiritual devotion and social inclusion by formally initiating new members into the Guthi institution. Ritual activities, including the release of chickens and the offering of a goat, represent purification, renewal, and the preservation of moral and social order. Together, these ceremonies play a significant role in maintaining social hierarchy, strengthening community solidarity, and preserving cultural traditions among the Gopali Newar community of Thaha-1, Kunchhal, Makawanpur, Nepal. These ritual practices also reinforce intergenerational continuity, ensuring that indigenous beliefs, customs, and communal values remain actively sustained within contemporary society (Budhathoki and Aryal, 2025).

Ethnographic studies in Nepal show that ancestral rituals such as Dewali are deeply embedded in indigenous cosmological belief systems, where ancestors and deities are considered active spiritual forces influencing daily life (Budhathoki, 2025). These supernatural forces are believed to shape human well-being, including health, prosperity, protection, and social harmony within the community. Such rituals are not merely symbolic performances; rather, they are rooted in lived cultural experiences, collective memory, and shared belief systems. They are also closely linked with land ownership, lineage continuity, and ritual obligations that connect family members across generations. Through these practices, communities preserve cultural identity, reinforce moral values, and maintain social relationships within kinship networks. In this context, ancestral worship serves as an important cultural mechanism for sustaining tradition, strengthening communal solidarity, and ensuring intergenerational continuity in Nepali society (Fisher, 2001).

3. Methods and Materials

This study adopted an ethnographic and descriptive research approach to develop a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics and everyday lived experiences of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage, with particular emphasis on Kul Puja (*Dewali*) as a central ancestral ritual practice. Primary data were collected from five purposively selected participants who possess in-depth knowledge of lineage traditions and ritual practices related to Dewali worship, using a purposive sampling technique. The fieldwork for this study was conducted in May 2026.

The study analyzed key aspects such as population structure, clan and lineage organization, ancestral worship practices, occupational status, and social participation. For qualitative data collection, a semi-structured interview schedule was used with knowledgeable members of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage in Mahalaxmi Municipality-2 Mulkharka Tole, Dhankuta. In addition, participant observation was employed to document the procedures of *Kul Puja* (Dewali), patterns of social interaction, and everyday cultural practices. During the field visit, data were systematically collected, and interview records were carefully organized and securely maintained for analysis. Field observation was also conducted to enrich the understanding of the community context and ritual practices.

3.1 Study at a Glance

The ancestral settlement area of the Khabatari Budhathokis included in this study is located within the Mahalaxmi Municipality of Dhankuta District in Koshi Province, eastern Nepal, and lies in the culturally and geographically diverse mid-hill region. The community is concentrated in Ward No. 2, Mulkharka (formerly Ward No. 7 of Marek Katahare VDC), where rural lifestyles, strong kinship ties, and community-based social structures are prominent features. Dhankuta District extends between 26°53' to 27°19' north latitude and

87°8' to 88°33' east longitude, with altitudes ranging from 300 to 2500 meters, creating a varied topography. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood, with crops such as maize, rice, and millet, along with cash crops like ginger, cardamom, fruits, and vegetables. Despite the influence of education, migration, modernization, and development, traditional customs, religious practices, and community values remain strongly preserved, making this settlement an important site for studying rural life, social change, and cultural continuity (Budhathoki, 2024).

3.2 Ethical Considerations

During the course of the study, careful attention was paid to religious and cultural sensitivities while conducting interviews, observations, and interactions with participants. These issues were analyzed and presented with due caution and academic responsibility. Furthermore, the study was conducted with fully respect for cultural norms, beliefs, and values, ensuring the ethical protection of participants' privacy and dignity.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section of the study examines the Dewali (*clan deity worship*) ritual practices of the Khabatari Budhathoki community. The study highlights the community's enduring tradition of ancestral worship and its lineage-based social organization, which have been preserved over generations. It further explores the genealogical history of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage, the ritual practices associated with clan deity worship, kinship solidarity, and the dynamics of communal and social cohesion within rural society through a thematic and analytical approach.

4.1 Genealogical Background

The Khabatari Budhathoki constitute an important lineage branch within the broader Budhathoki clan of Nepal and are primarily associated with the Khas Chhetri community of eastern Nepal. According to the unpublished genealogy of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage, Dhanbir Budhathoki, who lived eleven generations prior to the present researcher, migrated from Chisapani village of Khotang District to the present-day Ward No. 2 of Mahalaxmi Municipality, Dhankuta District (formerly Marek-Katahare Village Development Committee, Ward No. 7). Genealogical records indicate that Dhanbir had four sons: Jasraj, Hansraj, Gajaraj, and Kabiraj. While the descendants of the eldest son, Jasraj, continued to reside in the ancestral settlement, the descendants of the other three sons gradually dispersed to different parts of eastern Nepal, including the districts of Tehrathum, Sankhuwasabha, Morang, Jhapa, Panchthar, Ilam, and Sunsari. Likewise, within Dhankuta District, the community has established a notable presence in areas such as Tankhuwa, Sangurigadhi, Aankhisalla, and Chhathar Jorpati, reflecting the extensive geographical expansion of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage. Furthermore, genealogical records reveal that some descendants of the ninth generation migrated as far as Assam (Rauta) in India, indicating that the lineage has extended beyond the national boundaries of Nepal. Despite this geographical dispersion, Mulkharka is widely recognized as the original ancestral homeland of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage. Consequently, the present study was conducted in this locality.

At present, fifteen households of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage continue to reside permanently within the study area, while twelve additional households, whose members originated from the same locality, have migrated to the Terai and urban centers of Morang, Jhapa, and Sunsari districts in search of education, employment, and improved livelihoods. Despite this spatial dispersion, members of the lineage maintain a strong sense of kinship and collective belonging, identifying themselves as descendants of a common ancestor and

custodians of a shared patrilineal heritage. Regular participation in the lineage deity worship (Kul Puja) by relatives living in different geographical locations reinforces emotional ties and social obligations among lineage members. Kul Puja thus serves not merely as a religious ritual but also as a significant cultural institution that fosters lineage cohesion, collective identity, and social solidarity across generations. The findings indicate that oral traditions and shared ritual practices have played a crucial role in preserving the intergenerational continuity and identity of the Khabatari Budhathoki community ((Field Survey, 2026)

4.2 Dewali Ritual Practices

Dewali (Kul Puja) is an important religious and cultural tradition of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage, symbolizing lineage unity and reverence toward ancestors. In this ritual system, lineage deities are collectively worshipped by all kin members of the Budhathoki clan, with each household expected to participate through offerings, worship, and sacrificial rites. The principal lineage deity is regarded as the eldest among the eighteen *Bhai* (brotherly lineages) and is considered the most powerful *Khaparmasta Kul*, known as *Aadhabara Khaparmasta*. The principal shaman (*Mul Dhami*) is referred to as “Masto,” while the second-ranking shaman is known as “*Bar Bhanja*.” The tradition also emphasizes the collective representation of the *Nau Bahini Cheli* (nine sister deities), during which all nine sisters are symbolically invoked, although *Bindabasini* and *Kailasbasini* are specifically mentioned by name. Within this ritual system, *Bandevi*, *Lateejhankri*, and *Shikari* are regarded as guiding spiritual forces, while members of the *Imabaju (Naulo)* clan serve as family representatives and custodians. On the day following the main clan worship, participating households gather to perform a collective ritual known as *Naulo Puja* (a kind of God). Historically, the Budhathoki ancestors performed Kul Puja with primary devotion directed toward *Sitaladevi*, a practice that continues to the present day, where *Sitaladevi* remains the central focus of worship. In the surrounding areas, idols or symbolic representations of *Ram Sita*, *Hanuman*, *Radha-Krishna*, *Vishnu*, and *Laxmi* have also been established, reflecting the integration of broader Hindu deities into local ritual practices.

The Dewali Kul Puja is generally performed at an ancestral sacred site on a designated ritual occasion, specifically on the Panchami lunar day following Baisakhi Purnima, once every three years. The tradition originated in 2045 B.S. (1988 A.D.) from a lineage of nine households and has continued uninterrupted up to 2083/01/25 B.S. (May 8, 2026 A.D.), by which time the eleventh Kul Puja had already been completed. During the 2083 ceremony, a total of 27 households from the same lineage, along with one extended family group, participated in the ritual observance. This cultural practice brings together kin members from different settlements, fostering collective ritual participation and strengthening kinship solidarity, cultural continuity, and lineage identity. It also serves as a platform for intergenerational interaction, shared responsibility, and the reinforcement of ancestral devotion, thereby sustaining the cultural heritage and social cohesion of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage in contemporary times. (Field survey, 2026).

4.3 Devotion to Kul Devata

Among the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage of the study area, *Kul Puja* (ancestral worship) and strong faith in the Kul Devata (clan deity) are deeply rooted cultural traditions that continue to shape the social and spiritual life of the community. The lineage members believe that the ancestral deity protects family members from illness, misfortune, and various life difficulties while ensuring physical and mental well-being, educational progress, moral development, economic prosperity, agricultural productivity, and livestock protection. The community also prays for the safety and success of relatives living abroad, the stability and happiness of married daughters in their marital homes, and the protection of children and

future generations. Within this belief system, the Kul Devata is regarded as the spiritual guardian of the lineage who preserves harmony, unity, and brotherhood among relatives and continuously safeguards the households of lineage members.

Along with faith and devotion, the community emphasizes the importance of fulfilling ritual responsibilities and respecting the Kul Devata throughout the year, rather than only during Kul Puja ceremonies. Offering incense, maintaining ritual purity, and observing traditional customs are considered important duties of every lineage member. The belief that blessings cannot be attained without fulfilling one's responsibilities is strongly reflected in these practices. During times of crisis or difficulty, ritual specialists lead worship ceremonies while strictly following ritual regulations, taboos, and ceremonial procedures. This ancestral belief system not only serves as a religious practice but also functions as an important social institution that strengthens kinship relations, reinforces collective identity, and maintains continuity between past and present generations within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage (Field survey, 2026).

4.4 Role of Kul Puja in Kinship Solidarity

The clan worship (Kul Puja) practiced by the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage plays a central role in shaping kinship structures and lineage relations. Rooted in a shared belief in common ancestors, this ritual brings together members of the extended family (*bandhu*) to reaffirm their genealogical ties and collective identity. The practice operates within a patriarchal lineage system in which descent is traced through the male line, and participation is organized accordingly. During the ritual, family hierarchies and generational ranks become clearly visible, with senior members assuming leadership roles while younger members follow established norms and responsibilities. This cultural practice also strengthens social cohesion, reinforces ancestral reverence, and ensures continuity of tradition across generations within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage in contemporary Nepali society and identity formation processes.

The gathering also provides an important opportunity for renewing social relationships, resolving disputes, and strengthening cooperation among relatives. It brings together all kin members of the lineage at the same place and time, creating a rare occasion for relatives who may not have met for many years to reconnect emotionally and socially. Rather than visiting relatives individually, community members meet collectively during the clan worship ceremony. In the contemporary context, many younger generations have migrated abroad for foreign employment; nevertheless, they often attempt to return home during the period of Kul Puja in order to maintain their connection with their ancestors and lineage. In this way, the ritual contributes to the continuity of the lineage and the preservation of social order. Thus, Kul Puja functions as an important social institution that sustains kinship solidarity and preserves the social fabric of the community. (Field survey, 2026).

4.5 Dewali Worship and Social Cohesion

To understand the Dewali ancestral worship practiced within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage, community participation and collective identity emerge as central dimensions. The Dewali rituals function as a shared cultural practice that unites members of the lineage while strengthening cooperation, emotional bonds, and a sense of belonging. During the observance of the Dewali worship, all villagers are invited to witness and participate in the ritual activities. Invitations are extended not only to people from the local village but also to neighboring communities to enhance the significance of the ancestral worship, receive sacred offerings (*prasad*), and celebrate collectively through singing and dancing. The invited guests formally take leave only after receiving sacred offerings (*prasad*).

and participating in the communal gathering. Individuals from all castes and religious backgrounds are welcomed and respectfully honored during the occasion.

Such practices reinforce not only kinship ties among relatives within the lineage but also broader social solidarity within the community. The occasions of Dewali worship among the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage serve as a symbolic mechanism that brings together socially dispersed members of the community and promotes social cohesion. Furthermore, communal participation in these rituals helps preserve and transmit traditional norms, cultural values, and social practices across generations. In this way, the Dewali ancestral worship plays a significant role in shaping collective identity and fostering social harmony within the studied community. It also strengthens mutual cooperation, emotional attachment, and a sense of belonging among members, while reinforcing respect for ancestors and shared heritage. Through repeated observance, the ritual contributes to maintaining cultural continuity and sustaining social integration within the lineage group in contemporary society. (Field survey, 2026).

5. Result Analysis

The findings of this study reveal that the Khabatari Budhathoki community has maintained a strong genealogical identity based on a shared patrilineal ancestry, which is preserved through oral traditions, written genealogies (*vanshavali*), and ritual practices (Adhikari & Gellner, 2016). Although many lineage members have migrated from the original settlement to urban and Terai regions, the sense of belonging to a common ancestor remains highly significant. The study further shows that Kul Puja (*Dewali*) functions not only as a religious ceremony but also as an important mechanism for ensuring intergenerational continuity, strengthening lineage solidarity, and sustaining collective identity (Sapkota, 2012). The continuity of this tradition from nine households in 2045 B.S. to twenty-seven households in 2083 B.S. clearly demonstrates the enduring cultural significance and institutional stability of ancestral worship within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage (Budhathoki & Aryal, 2025).

The analysis further indicates that faith in the Kul Devata profoundly influences the social, cultural, and spiritual life of the community. Dewali rituals play a crucial role in strengthening kinship relations by bringing dispersed relatives together, reinforcing family structure and hierarchy, renewing emotional bonds, and promoting cooperation among lineage members (Durkheim, 1912). The participation of relatives, neighboring communities, and individuals from diverse caste and religious backgrounds reflects the inclusive and socially cohesive nature of this tradition (Sharma, 2015). Moreover, the ritual system serves as an effective medium for transmitting traditional values, customary norms, and cultural responsibilities to younger generations, including those living abroad. Therefore, Dewali worship is not merely an act of ancestral devotion but also a vital socio-cultural institution that sustains social harmony, lineage solidarity, and cultural continuity within the Khabatari Budhathoki community.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that Dewali (Kul Puja) among the Khabatari Budhathoki community is a vital institution for preserving genealogical identity, kinship solidarity, and social cohesion. Rooted in a shared patrilineal ancestry, the community maintains its lineage continuity through oral traditions, written genealogy (*vanshavali*), and ritual practices. Despite extensive migration to urban and Terai regions, members continue to recognize a common ancestral origin and actively participate in Kul Puja rituals. Dewali worship, performed periodically at ancestral sites, functions not only as a religious practice but also as a mechanism for reinforcing collective identity, intergenerational continuity, and social

integration. The ritual system facilitates emotional bonding, hierarchical organization, and cooperation among dispersed kin members while transmitting cultural values and customary norms to younger generations, including those abroad. Furthermore, inclusive participation during rituals strengthens broader community cohesion beyond lineage boundaries. Overall, the study demonstrates that Kul Puja operates as a dynamic socio-cultural institution that sustains ancestral devotion, reinforces social relationships, and ensures the continuity of cultural heritage within the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage.

7. Recommendation

The study conducted on the *Dewali* (clan worship) practices of the Khabatari Budhathoki lineage residing in Mulkharka Tole, Ward No. 2, Mahalaxmi Municipality, Dhankuta District of eastern Nepal has yielded the following recommendations:

1. The religious rituals of Dewali (*Kul Puja*), oral traditions, and genealogical records should be systematically documented and preserved in an organized manner.
2. The younger generation should be actively engaged in Kul Puja and other traditional practices to strengthen lineage identity and continuity.
3. Since Dewali Kul Puja is performed every three years, the establishment of a permanent temple for its observance would help resolve recurring practical difficulties and provide a sustainable long-term solution through a fixed ritual site.

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