

I. ARTICLES

BHIM LAL GAUTAM
Tribhuvan University, Nepal

MADHU GIRI
Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Trajectories of language and the culture of the Gopali community in the Chitlang Valley

ABSTRACT. Language pedagogy primarily casts light on cultural trajectories of language use in certain communities. By examining these of the Gopali community in the Chitlang Valley, located 28 miles southwest of Kathmandu, this preliminary study delves into various applied aspects of language use in the area. Preliminary observations indicate that the Gopali, a subset of the Newar ethnic group, have a distinctive linguistic and cultural identity in Nepal. However, they have yet to be recognized as a separate ethnic community despite their unique language, marital exchange, origin stories, and cultural practices. Currently subsumed under the Newar subset, the Gopali language is on the brink of extinction primarily because of an increasing level of influence exerted by Nepali, Tamang and Kathmandu-based Newar accents on Gopali speakers. As the misrecognition of language and culture was historically linked with the political-economic access of the community, we observed the impact of the political economy on the Gopali of Chitlang. This paper has been developed on the basis of data elicited from various narratives, key informant interviews (KII), life histories, language surveys, and observations conducted in October, 2021. Thus, the interpretation has been made in relation to various political, social and economic relations of language use and cultural changes. In consideration of multilingualism as a norm of language education, this study has also explored the impact of multilingualism among the younger generation in the Chitlang Valley. The study can help policymakers introduce mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) to children in the Gopali community.

KEYWORDS: language shift, Guthi, the Gopali language, Gopali identity, political economy in Nepal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are specific to geographical territories. Thus, linguistic and cultural diversity emerges as a result of geographical diversity. People of different communities reside in different areas and they bring unique linguistic and cultural trajectories with them. In this paper, we have studied the trajectories of language and culture in the Gopali community of Chitlang, located 28 km South-West of Kathmandu and 195 km East-West of Pokhara. Chitlang is located in Thaha Municipality of Makawanpur district and Bagmati Province of central Nepal. It is an ancient cultural and linguistic mosaic settlement, where inscriptions dating back to the Lichchhavi Era have been found. They were discovered in Toukhel,¹ Ward No. 10 of Thaha Municipality, established by King Amshubarma (in *Sambat* 37) of the Kathmandu Valley. The inscription says that King Amshubarma gave the land to shepherds and established a settlement for them in Toukhel, Nhulgaun and Kunchhal of Chitlang. Some historians believe that these people are called Gopalis as the descendants of rulers of the Gopal Bansi². Currently, Chitlang hosts multiple languages and cultures such as Tamangs in former Ward No. 1, Brahmin-Chhetri, Newar and Magars in former Ward 2, 7, 8, and 9 and standard Newar dialects and cultures in former Ward 3, 4, 5, and 6. It has become a truly multilingual valley where we find different castes, ethnicities, and language communities.

Chitlang is the nearest and most popular tourist destination for inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley and tourists shortly visiting the capital city with limited time and resources. Thus, one of the vibrant historical and cultural valleys of Nepal has been drastically changed because of ongoing developments and frequent migrations in recent years. More importantly, frequent visits by domestic and international tourists have amplified the urgency of the conservation of the historical, linguistic, cultural, and natural diversity of Chitlang. At present, it is difficult to preserve the language and culture of the Gopali because of various socio-political reasons, including migration, media and globalization.

Gopali culture and people are listed as one of the distinct and unique ethnic communities in Chitlang. They have been a potential subject of close observation and in-depth investigation by many scholars. Gopalis, who consider themselves descendants of Gwalas, once moved to Sonitpur (currently Thankot locality of Kathmandu) from Gujrat of India (Dwarika) during *Dwapar Yuga*³ with Lord Krishna. When Lord Krishna established the Gopal Kingdom in the Kathmandu

¹ Former Ward No. 6 of Chitlang VDC.

² Gopal Bansi was the first ruling dynasty of the Kathmandu Valley.

³ A pre-Vedic period in the ancient Indian time and time of Mahabharata.

Valley (in Chitlang), he returned to Dwarika. The Gopal or Gwalas ruled for a long time (521 years and nine generations of kings) before they were defeated by the Mahispaal (Buffalo herders) and the Kirant Kings⁴.

As some historians and anthropologists have noted, the Gopal rulers belonged to the *Nep* ethnic group, and *Par* name was derived from the group who tamed buffaloes. The *Nep* and *Par* ethnic groups were interested in herding cows and buffaloes, respectively. It is now considered that the word *Nepal* is derived from *Nep* and *Par* and it means herders of cows and buffaloes. Buffalo herders naturally preferred to live near forest areas and pastures for fodder for their cattle. They lived in the vicinity of the Chitlang Valley: Tistung, Palung, Thankot, Balambu, and Kisipidi. Eventually, Gopali people, entering from the Kathmandu Valley to the northern part of Makawanpur, settled in Bajrabarahi, Chitlang and Daman. Other localities of their permanent residence include: Kunchhal, Gahate, Kulgaun, Papung, Toukhel, Nhulgaun and Shikharkot of Thaha municipality. In Chitlang, they have lived in Taukhel and Nhulgaun for a long time. According to Hari Bahadur Gopali (49) of Toukhel, around 80 households are now settled in this place.

In the first ever ascendancy of Nepal, the Gopal dynasty established a system of governance on this territory. The Gopali ethnic group remained powerful in the Kathmandu Valley till the beginning of the *Licchavi* era⁵. They continued their settlements in various areas of the Kathmandu Valley along some of the villages of Chitlang. At that point, Gopali people, shifting slightly northwest of the valley, settled in Machhegaun, Balambu, Kirtipur, Thankot, Chitlang, Tistung and Palung in search of jobs and pastures for their cattle.

Language revitalization can promote individual languages and cultures. Language teaching can work as a vehicle to transmit or introduce different cultures and languages of different territories. As a result, we can use teaching as a means of bringing indigenous languages and cultures to the forefront. The Gopali language and culture should be promoted and maintained through teaching, and its trajectories should be reflected through different resources and materials.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are various narratives of the origin and classification of the Newar culture and language in and around the Kathmandu Valley. D.R. Regmi (1960) noted that the Newars existed as early as the sixth century BC and that they be-

⁴ Historians and anthropologists believe that Kiratas ruled over the Kathmandu Valley from about 900 BC to 300 AD.

⁵ The Licchavi dynasty ruled in the Kathmandu Valley from around 450 to 750 AD.

longed to the confederacy of the Vrijji clans. He argues that the term Newar did not connote any particular racial type at the moment. It is purely a geographical concept that signifies anyone who lived in the valley irrespective of their racial origin and features (Regmi 1960). In line with his claim, David Gellner (2005) argued that there was a religious and cultural plurality among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley during the Lichhavi and Malla periods. In the eighteenth and even during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, many ancestors of Newars, who today identify as Hindu Shresthas, had Buddhist priests and Buddhist allegiances (Gellner 2005). Similarly, Regmi (1960) noted that the Newar conveyed the sense of an ethnic group in the most ancient days, but afterwards this group was subjected to multiple racial adjustments, e.g. adopted different types of migrants, from Austroids to Dravidians and then to Mongols and Aryans. Gopal Singh Nepali (1965) also argued that the Newars have specific caste and social stratification with a specific culture, religion and language.

On the basis of the above-mentioned literature, it can be assumed that the Newars were culturally different communities and their migration around the valley changed their culture, language and identity. In line with this front of linguistic variation, Charles Tylor (1994) argued that the recognition of this minority group is important for the proliferation of its language and culture. Anthropologists have also noted that the language and culture of these communities transformed through the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and assimilation. For example, Barth (1969) and Fisher (2001) argue that ethnic boundaries of language and culture were changed in the context of politics and livelihood strategies of the people. Dominant language and culture not only lured people but also pressured them to adopt the mainstream language and culture. In the case of the classification of caste and ethnicity, Susan Bayly (1995), Barnard Cohn (1999) and Nicholas Dirks (2001) argue that the classification and objectification of the minority group were political projects, which we can notice in the Gopali language within the Newar category.

Both Gellner (2005) and Toffin (2007) agree that the Newars adopted the cultures and rituals of the powerful Hindu Shah Kings to secure their favour after the unification movement (1743–1769). In the Kathmandu Valley, many Shresthas who traditionally had Vajracharya priests, switched to Brahmans and adopted forms of Hinduism closer to those of the now dominant Parbatiya during the Rana and Shah Regimes (Gellner 2005). Gautam (2018, 2020, 2021, 2022a) describes various sociolinguistic aspects of the Newar language with a special focus on the study of language use and attitudes based on recent migrations, urbanization and development activities after the 1990s political change in Nepal. In light of this, we can also explore the Gopali language of the Chitlang Valley on the basis of Newar history and cultural variations.

3. THE STUDY CONDUCTED

This research was primarily based on data collected in a questionnaire (Gautam 2021), key informant interviews (KII) and ethnographic observations. Apart from primary data, other necessary data have also been taken from different secondary sources on recent trends in multilingualism and language contact in Nepal.

In October 2021 both authors visited the Gopali settlements for a fortnight. They approached Hari Bahadur Gopali, an ex-teacher, political activist and leader at Taukhel in the Chitlang Valley. After two days of rapport building, he introduced the authors to the Gopali community and enabled their stay there. Thanks to this introduction, they could not only visit historical sites and public places in the Chitlang Valley but also were allowed to observe rituals, cultural practices and daily lives of the Gopali people. Furthermore, they interacted with other communities neighbouring with the Gopali people. They got in contact with women, men, elderly people, school students in the community to explore their language and cultural shifts among various age groups and generations. A local Gopali language speaker and a typical Newar from Kirtipur supported the authors in differentiating between the Gopali and Newar linguistic and cultural practices.

The questionnaire (Gautam 2021) was written in the English language; however, the medium for data collection was the Nepali language. The questionnaire included 20 questions to explore multilingualism and language shift in the Gopali community. The KII were purposively selected on the recommendation of the Gopali people from the Chitlang Valley. Out of the total 30 informants, only 15 sampled informants were asked about their use of languages for different activities in their day-to-day lives. Both authors also used notebooks and a recorder to store data. The recorded data were transcribed and translated into English. All informants' consent was ensured before data collection data and the pseudonyms were used in the discussion of the research findings.

Table 1. The informants in the present study

SN	Informants places of residence	Informants' gender		Total no.
		Male no.	Female no.	
1	Taukhel	13	7	20
2	Bisunkhe	3	2	5
3	Kalantu	3	2	5
Total		19	11	30

Source: authors' field notes (2021).

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: THE GOPALI LANGUAGE

The Gopali language is a variety of Newar which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Gopali people use this language for communication within their community and among family members, which means its use is limited mostly to oral communication. Gopali differs from the standard Newar in accent, vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence structure and lexicon. It is currently undergoing a language shift towards Nepali, English and Hindi because of various sociopolitical reasons. For example, while listening to the young Gopali speakers during the authors' field visit, they observed examples of code-mixing including Nepali, Hindi, English and Tamang words. Gopali is spoken with a long accent which is difficult to understand even for the Newar speakers living outside Chitlang. Various phonological features, including vowel deletion, can be noticed in its pronunciation. People other than Gopali noticed that the language is spoken differently with many supra-segmental features like stress and intonation. For example, *khuche* (Eng. a dog) becomes *khche* (with the deletion of /u/). The authors' preliminary observation indicates that a detailed further study is required to get complete information on the linguistic variation and characteristics of the Gopali language.

4.1. Multilingualism and language contact

On the basis of the field observation and the survey data, it can be concluded that multilingualism is very common among Gopali people living in the Chitlang Valley. They use different languages for different domains and activities. Table 2 below shows the languages used in different activities.

Table 2. Language used in different activities by the Gopali people (all figures in percentages %)

Domains	Gopali (G)	Nepali (N)	Both (G+N)	English	Hindi
Religious festivals	26.64	13.32	46.62	-	-
Cultural programs	26.64	13.32	46.62	6.66	6.66
Birth ceremonies	33.33	19.98	66.66	-	-
Marriage ceremonies	19.98	13.32	53.28	-	-
Death ceremonies	33.33	26.64	59.94	-	-
Cultural festivals	33.33	33.33	53.28	-	-

Source: authors' field notes (2021).

Table 2 shows the use of multiple languages in various activities related to the religious and cultural domains of the Gopali people. What can be gleaned from it is that the frequency of the use of Gopali is comparatively higher than that of Nepali but it is less so than that of the bilingual use of Gopali and Nepali in all the different domains. When asked about the reason behind this linguistic variation, one of the informants (Ramlal, 67 M) said with exasperation: “What to do, sir? Most of the young people in our community like to speak Nepali and consequently we have also started speaking more Nepali” (Gopali: *k garnu sir hamro umer sammakale bolchhan tara ahileka ketaketiharu nepalimai bolna man garchan.hunda hunda haami pani po badhi nepali bolna thaliyo ta*). Ramlal’s response confirms what is a frequent occurrence in numerous minority communities around the world. They are forced to speak languages of the societal majority because of migration and other social-cultural influences (Gautam & Poudel 2022a; Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. 2023: 62–64, 75–77). On top of that, Hari Gopali, the chief of *Guthi*⁶, claims that elder Gopali people mix the Gopali language with other tongues, including Nepali and English, especially in communication with children and young people in the community. Younger generations in the Chitlang Valley tend to speak more Nepali and English than Gopali itself because of increasing tourism in the region, their exposure to the mass media and extensive use of social media. Hari Gopali reasons that the unification of the state and administration requires a command in the Nepali language which is the official link, or *lingua franca* even, among various communities living in the Chitlang Valley and outside.

4.2. Language shift and change

As mentioned earlier, most of the causes of language shift among Gopali speakers are rooted in various socio-historical reasons (Gautam 2012, 2019, 2022b). The elder generations in the Gopali community blame earlier language changes on the incumbent government policy during the *Panchayat* Era (1961–1990). It forced them to use the Nepali language instead of their ancestors’ (heritage) language. This resulted in Gopali’s speaking multiple languages, such as Nepali, English, Hindi and Tamang, especially when they move to the urban areas from their traditional homelands (extending from Taukhel to Chitlang), and afterwards to the Kathmandu Valley. However, during their

⁶ The *Guthi* is a system that has been part of the Newar social system in the Kathmandu Valley since the 5th century BC.

field survey the present authors observed a recent significant language shift in the Gopali community resulting from other factors. Most recently, the Chitlang Valley has become one of the most popular tourist destinations for the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. The road connections from Thankot to Markhu and Dakshinkaali shortened the travel to two or three hours, which has changed the lifestyles of the local population. The authors also observed that most children at the ages between four to twelve years watch Hindi TV cartoons at home. Furthermore, youths who frequently decide to move out of the community prefer Nepali and English to their first language (Gopali) whereas politicians and entrepreneurs prefer Nepali to their heritage languages in casual conversations with other people. At the same time, during the field trip it was observed that around 98% of the cellular phone users spoke Nepali in their conversations. The use of different languages by Gopali people in the domains classified under the umbrella term media and entertainment is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The use of different languages by Gopali people in media and entertainment (all figures in percentages %)

Domains/Languages	Gopali	Nepali	Hindi	English
Watching television	-	53.28	53.28	13.32
Listening to the radio/music	-	79.92	53.28	13.32
Listening to interviews	-	66.66	13.32	6.66
Reading newspapers	-	100	-	19.98

Source: authors' field notes (2021).

Table 3 shows that Nepali, Hindi and English are used by the Gopali people of the Chitlang Valley. The use of the heritage language, i.e. Gopali, is very infrequent. In that sense, Gopali people are oblivious to the gradual extinction of their indigenous heritage language because of an increasing level of impact of the mass media and entertainment outlets in this speech community. This is a matter which can raise concerns as, generally, such a shift in language may bring a gradual shift and change in the visibility as well as identity of the speakers (Gautam & Poudel 2022b). These narratives, with a substantial amount of supporting data, contradict the common assumption that local languages are the main sources of communication and the key to intercultural understanding among people living in the same surroundings (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej et al. 2022). This may only be true only for communities which are robust and resilient.

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY: GOPALI CULTURE

Gopali belongs to the common Newar culture but it observes different traditions and practices in the Chitlang Valley. On the basis of the observations conducted during their field trip, the present authors conclude that there are distinct cultural practices in this region. They observed, for example, unique songs and dances in various rites and rituals together with occasional feasts and festivals. The Gopali main folk dances are: *Hile Naach* (Eng. Dancing with mud), and *Gai Jatra* (a special festival of the Newar community). The Gopali have also been able to maintain *Barabarse Nacha* (a typical dance staged every 12 years), *Bade Nacha* (a kind of dance devoted to God Bajrabahrahi), and *Soyat Vinayak Nacha*. They also perform different varieties of folk songs, such as *Baramase*, *Tamimye* and children songs on different occasions and in various places. Members of this community also sing and dance according to the season and lunar position, which they celebrate with different cultural interests.

5.1. Food and dress

In the morning, Gopali people eat their traditional food called *Dhindo* (porridge-like food made of corn and millet flour) with vegetable curry, lintel and tomato pickles. They prefer beaten rice, bread and milk tea in the day snacks. People working in the field prefer *Thon* (fermented rice beer) and *Bajee* (beaten rice) in the afternoon. Food varieties for the evening include seasonal vegetables, meat, rice, *Gundruk* (fermented mustard leaves), *Sinabali* (fermented radish). While Gopali children and students prefer biscuits, noodles and readymade bread available in the local market, elderly Gopali prefer *Mali* (made of flour), roasted corn, curd, buffalo meat and *Thon*. Most of them drink liquor during festivals and family rituals. One can observe that elder Gopali people prefer their traditional food items, whereas youths and children prefer rice and fast foods. When asked to share their traditional dishes with the present authors, they were reluctant to do this. At that point, they might have speculated that the educated and residing in the urban area scholars do not prefer *Dhindo*. They also said that their traditional foods are not as delicious as Newar dishes in Kathmandu.

According to Hari Gopali, this local community have their own traditional and ritual dresses but they have been replaced by readymade fancy clothes. Only occasionally is it possible nowadays to meet elderly people wearing their traditional dresses. The present researchers did not see children or youths wearing

traditional dresses. A traditional female clothes are *Hakku Patasi* (a black home-made sari), a white home-made *Jani* (also called *Patuka*, which is worn around the waist), *Putulan* (a kind of blouse), and *Gacha* (a shawl). Girls and women wear varieties of silver and golden ornaments, and beads made of silver coins. Using gold ornament is a recent phenomenon among Gopali women. Traditional Gopali male dresses include *Tapalan* (a home-made garment like Nepali Daura), *Khesa tupuli* (a cap made of *khesa*), *Jani* (a white waist-cloth) and a coat. Men also wear half pants, *suruwal*, *Istakot* and shoes made of leather, clothes and straw materials or *Nalu* (a plant fibre). School children and youths wear readymade clothes available in the market.

Informants, including Hari Gopali, are worried about the loss of their traditional dresses as they are identity markers of the local community. According to the informants in this study, Gopali children and youths do not wear traditional dresses because of the modern education system and westernized lifestyles. Modern education has become the marker of social advancement and educated persons prefer to wear fashionable and readymade clothes.

5.2. Gods and festivals

The Gopali primarily worship the following Gods: Bhimsen, Ganesh Mahadeva and Krishna. They believe in the place-specific God Mahadeva called also *Champakeshor*, *Gaikeshor*, *Unmenteshor*, and *Pandukeshor*. Similarly, they also worship local Gods/Goddesses, including Chuni, Satkany, Panchkanya, Snakes, water and special trees.

Bhakta Gopali (48 M) revealed to the authors that the Gopali follow and celebrate various local Hindu and Newar festivals along with Gopali ones. Because of their closer interaction with the Newar community, they celebrate Newar festivals together with *Gathemangal*, *Gaijatra*, *Yanya Punhi*, and *Byanjankegu*. However, they do not celebrate and practice *Jankko*, a Newar ritual of elderly people. Hari Gopali said that centuries-old Gopali deities have been forgotten and the community started worshipping Newar Gods. In this sense, they have undergone the process of Newarization. Additionally, it is very difficult to convince the youngest generations to speak their heritage language and cultivate their ancestors' culture. One of the Gopali youths who participated in the present study claimed that they celebrate festivals of all people living in Chitlang and outside. For example, these days, some Gopali also celebrate the birthdays of their children, which is not a Gopali tradition. In recent decades, some of the Gopali people have converted to Christianity.

5.3. Guthi system

One of the powerful socio-cultural institutions of the Gopali community and transformation of language, culture and collective memory, Guthi operates as a politico-judicial body to regulate the decision-making process on socio-cultural and governance issues of the community. The activities of the Guthi are different from one locality to another. The major function of the Guthi is to create unity among Gopali by organizing different social-cultural functions for collective solidarity.

In Guthi there are five *Naikes* (the heads of the community) from five main settlements and five *Thakali* (the oldest males in the community) from all settlements. Other functionaries of the Guthi are three *Bahidar* (record keepers) from the three main settlements and the Guthi members called *Chhimies*. All of these social practices and sacred functions strengthen and recharge the socio-cultural unity in the region, a sense of fraternity, and solidarity among the Gopalis. For example, the Guthi organises *Chunnishikari Puja* three times a year, one month-long *Dapha Bhajan* in October, *Kumari Puja*, *Gokeshor Puja* on the day of *Shree Panchami*, and *Bhosala Puja* at the beginning of the Nepali New Year.

Traditionally, Guthi was androcentric in character, i.e. it comprised only male members. Later, it became inclusive, with both male and female members included in the general body of this social institution. Although Hari Gopali claimed that there is no gender discrimination in their social and cultural practices, male members have exercised a greater socio-cultural status, privilege and decision-making *Gautamity*⁷ in the Guthi system.

In the past, when the community was completely based on agriculture and livestock husbandry, it relied on a labour exchange system. The system of reciprocity of labour was not only limited to agricultural activities but was also practised in the construction of houses, feast arrangements, caring for the sick and collective activities in the village. By exchanging labour, the Gopali were involved in the reciprocity of labour and feast rather than making money or securing profit in any form. Migration and commercialization of labour resulted in a deficit for traditional agricultural work which became socio-problematic for the community when the new generation left the traditional professions. However, the community still practice reciprocity in making food and feasting among the community members. For example, the community members work for the host family voluntarily.

⁷ The name of the Guthi system in the Gopali community.

5.4. Gopali rituals

While comparing Gopali and Newar rituals, we find many similarities and differences. Hari Gopali drew the authors' attention to the life cycle rituals. Observable differences are the rituals of *Ihi* (marriage of a girl with Bel, an auspicious fruit) and *Bara* (a ritual of keeping the girl in isolation after *Ihi*), which initially were the core customs in the Newar culture. Gopalis do not observe *Ihi* and *Bara* rituals in Chitlang. Instead of these ceremonies, Gopali girls practise fasting and a new dress-wearing ritual which is called *Gunyu-cholo* (a set of traditional lady's dresses). Giving *Gunyu-Cholo* to a girl is a Hindu caste girl pre-menstrual ritual. Both *Ihi*, *Bara* and *Gunyu-Cholo* are observed before the first menstrual period.

According to Hari Gopali, the rites and rituals of the Gopali are beyond the Newari socialization as the community learned cultural and economic practices not only from the Newar and Hill Hindu castes. They were an independent, resourceful and integrated community with very rich ritual and cultural uniqueness. In the course of the state formation, the political, economic and cultural downfall of the Gopali started. Their language and culture were ignored because of the politics of marginalization (Gautam 2022b) in the history of Nepal and they adopted language and cultures from outside their community. Hari also added that the issue of recognition fueled culture and language minoritization. In his own words: "Gopali are not Newar but the government pushed us under the category of Newar". Consequently, Gopali identity has not been officially recognized by the Nepalese government and the minority is currently subsumed into the larger category: Newar. The hybridity of recognition was articulated both in the language and culture of the Gopali people.

5.4.1. Birth ritual

The Gopali observe a four-day long ritual of birth purification called *Macha Byanki*. During the birth of a child, they call a midwife called *Derima* (a lady having special knowledge and skills to handle the occasion). The first floor of their traditional house is considered a labour room during the delivery. Both a newborn baby and mother should sleep on paddy straw on the ground floor. On the fourth day, their caste priest purifies the mother, her baby, the house and the whole kinship group. Then the newborn baby is exposed to the sun outside. The locals also offer varieties of food to the God of Sun and other Gods, commencing the mother's change of diet after the labour.

The system of traditional birth rituals changed when Gopali people started visiting health posts and hospitals so the ritual of laying on the ground floor on

paddy straw is nowadays discontinued. According to the information obtained in this study, the new generation does not follow the traditional cultural rules of the Gopali because they have learned new birthing and baby care knowledge from schools, campaigns and trainings in the community outside. These days, those who follow traditional birthing rites are considered backward and uneducated.

5.4.2. Hair cutting (Bhusha Khaya)

The first hair-cutting ritual is usually performed on a boy at the age of six to twelve years. According to Ramji Gopali, this initiation rite is an imitation of the Newar and Hindu high caste ritual. Most of the Gopali do not perform *Bartabandha* (boy's initiation) rituals if the hair-cutting ritual is performed. Local people consider this initiation ritual as a relatively recently adopted celebration. The maternal uncle and the father's sister play the main roles on this occasion. Usually the hair-cutting ritual takes place on *Bartabandha*. However, if this happens that any of them cuts the boy's hair earlier than *Bartabandha*, the hair should be kept safely and offered to the water in the stream or river on an auspicious occasion. This signifies that the hair should not be cut and thrown away casually for the first time.

5.4.3. Marriage (Bya)

The marriage practices of the Gopali are similar to the Hindu marriage system. There used to be a child marriage system but nowadays boys and girls at the age of 16 years are considered mature for marriage in Gopali culture. In reality, thanks to education and social awareness campaigns, nowadays Gopali people enter marriage around the age of 20 within and outside their community. The informants in the study also mentioned that sometimes arranged and elopement marriages are observed within the community. If a couple opt for an elopement, the boy's relatives organize a special ritual and feast (*Leratei*) with the consent and acceptance of the girl's parents. While most of Gopali marriages are bonded in the traditional system, love and inter-caste marriages are also becoming popular.

5.4.4. Death ritual (Si)

In terms of its structure and functions, *Si-Guthi* is similar to the this observed in the Newar community in the Kathmandu Valley. Because of the existence of a strong Guthi system, the Gopali *Si-Guthi* manage all the funeral and death

rituals (meaning that all households in Taukhel are members of *Si-Guthi*). All members of *Si-Guthi* should participate in a death procession with a piece of firewood. Each member of the *Si-Guthi* is assigned with a role and a ritual task. In the case of a household's absence in the procession and ritual, the *Guthi Gautamity* can punish the entire household.

After the death of a person, their family members and close relatives should mourn for thirteen days. In the past, this ritual was practised by Newar priests from the Kathmandu Valley. But these days, they may invite both Newar and Hindu priests, depending on their availability. Like in the Upper Hindu cast, the death of a senior member of the family requires that the family mourning period lasts for a year. This process includes a variety of grieving activities and the deceased's sons and daughters wearing white clothes as a symbol of memory and loss of the relative.

6. TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND LIVELIHOOD

The Gopali have practised traditional knowledge of agriculture and medication for centuries. Management of drainage irrigation, using water power for stone grinding of corn and cereals, making fermented food and vegetables, and practicing traditional medicine and *Baidhya* (pharmacist) were remarkable traditional knowledge of the people. This is evidenced, for example, in many water-run grinding machines (*Pani-Ghatta*) spotted near Taukhel and Chitlang. According to the local people, the taste of organic food from the water mill is different from commercial food offered in the market. One can also see *Sinabali* (fermented radish) drying in the sun in the area.

Agriculture is the main livelihood occupation in the Chitlang Valley. The Gopali agriculture system is still based on the oxen-pulled plough. The produce includes paddy, potatoes, wheat and maize for serial food, and cabbage, chilly, radish and various seasonal vegetables as monetized crops. The local people categorize the lands based on the types of crops they produce. Irrigated plain terraces are considered fertile where rice, potato, cabbage and maize are produced on the second type of land. Millet, wheat, corn, and beans are produced on slope and unirrigated lands.

The Gopali have special knowledge of resource management and animal husbandry, the latter remaining a traditional occupation in the valley. It was directly connected with the fertility of the land for sustainable agriculture. The land they have lived on is generally plain and fertile as well as closely connected with pasturelands and forest. Pasturelands and forests are resources to keep large numbers of livestock. The Gopali used to keep animals in sheds (*Goths*) dispersed

across different locations before the valley experienced intensified migration. The location of the *Goths* was usually far away from households. Nowadays, many Gopalis have left their tradition of building Goth because of the decreasing availability of pasturelands and forest areas. They took to other ways of living like teaching or doing business (e.g. retail, driving). Some of them decide to look for work in Kathmandu or migrate abroad in search of employment.

7. POLITICAL ECONOMY AND GOPALI IDENTITY

As a generic term, political economy means how state decisions and policies are influenced by more politically and economically powerful groups in a particular society. Political-economic paradigm in anthropology ranges from the evolution of political society to the role of ideology in the political-economic processes including hegemony (Gramsci 1971). Morton Fried (1967) focused on the analysis of political-economic relationships on the evolution of society from egalitarian to stratified societies. His approach relied heavily on Polanyi's (1957) ideas of reciprocity and redistribution to account for the political integration of each society. Distribution of state resources is important to the community to deploy resources of power strategically to their own political and economic ends. This is well reflected in the Gopali community of the Chitlang Valley as governing bodies are now urging the local governments to preserve their culture and language and to commodify their traditional skills and cultures through tourism and economic activities.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009: 12) embrace that identity is a powerful organizing bond in social life today. They note that "the amount of energy individuals expended claiming, cultivating, expressing or bemoaning the lack of identity in the sense of belonging is among the most compelling of contemporary concerns" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009: 12). During the field visit, the authors heard from Hari Gopali: "We were virtually ignored in the past. However, after the restoration of democracy and the establishment of federal Nepal, we are prioritized by the outsiders rather than the governmental bodies. These days, people from different places visit us and listen to the stories of the Gopali people in Chitlang Valley". Hari's report indicates that the Gopali people in the Chitlang Valley have now clearly understood the value and recognition of their language, culture and history. This statement also indicates the dissatisfaction of the local community with being virtually ignored by the government and in legislature.

Bourdieu's political economic theory of "symbolic power" and "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) could also be applied to analyze individual and structural violence (humiliation, dishonour, insignificance and misrecogni-

tion) of the Gopali community in everyday life. This distinction between direct, coercive violence and structural violence correlates with the distinction made by Bourdieu (1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) between “primary” and “secondary” forms of power. The latter is termed “symbolic power” and “symbolic violence”, in which people exercise power without the direct application of physical force. The Gopali of the Chitlang Valley have been assimilated within the single category of the Newar community which reflects the issue of power relationship.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Language and culture have traditionally been closely linked with many aspects of communication (Thomason 2015: 26). The collective knowledge that indigenous people and other non-indigenous people possess is the most valuable treasure of multilingualism. In a multilingual context of teaching and learning English in Nepal, the trajectories of the language and culture of different communities constitute the contents and resources for teaching. Gopalis of Chitlang have been found as distinct linguistic and cultural communities though they come under the subsets of Newar communities. The Gopali of the Chitlang Valley are different from others in their social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and orientations. Their historical and cultural trajectories have been predicted and exoticized without proper research on-site. As the present study indicates, their local cultures, language use, and stories of settlement differ across the villages in the Chitlang Valley. In many ritual practices, they are close to the Newar, but the Gopali practice them differently in Chitlang. For example, while *Ihi* (a girl's marriage to *Bel*) and *Bara* (a ritual of leaving the girl in isolation for some time) are mandatory rituals of the Newar, the Gopali do not observe these rituals. Instead of *Bara*, they have the tradition of fasting for five days and giving *Gunyu-cholo* (a set of traditional ladies' dresses) to the girl.

Charles Tylor (1994) argued that the recognition of the minority group was important for the proliferation of its language and culture. Linguists and anthropologists have also noticed that the language and culture of minorities transform through the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and assimilation (Barth 1969; Fisher 2001). They argued that ethnic boundaries of language and culture were changed in the context of politics and livelihood strategies of the people. This is mirrored in what happened to the Gopali, who have been subsumed into the Newar category by the government although they are linguistically and culturally distinct. At the same time, individual members of the community have been shifting towards Nepali, English and other languages because of the pressure of the mainstream tradition and culture.

The data gathered during the observation conducted by the present authors and from the key informants provide evidence that the region inhabited by the Gopali is rich in folklore; the people themselves maintain a traditional social structure, social solidarity, and long-standing norms and values. The loss of traditional knowledge, culture and folklore has been observed as an unintended consequence of education and labour migration. The younger generation is less willing to preserve traditional knowledge, practices and cultural dances. In this regard, this study implies that linguistic and cultural traditions can be maintained in a community by integrating them into school curricula and syllabi. They should represent the trajectories of different languages and cultures of different communities so that the students can familiarize themselves with their heritage and be encouraged to take further initiatives.

Unlike socio-cultural practices, various shifts and changes are noticed in the language use and attitudes (Gautam & Adhikari 2023) among the Gopali. They tend to mix Nepali, Newar, Tamang, Hindi and English words in everyday conversation while conversing Gopali, which leads to this language's lesser use. In this context, it is strongly recommended to start mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in schools across the valley along with a local curriculum that would reflect the socio-historical uniqueness of the Gopali people and community. Thus, this study has significant implications for devising multilingual pedagogy to preserve and promote different languages and cultures. Such changes are fully sanctioned by the Constitution of Nepal (2015), which confers the right to basic education in the mother tongue (Article 31.1), the right to use the mother language (Article 32.1), and the preservation and promotion of local tongues (Article 32.3).

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Trajektorie języka i kultury społeczności Gopali w Dolinie Chitlang

ABSTRAKT. Nauczanie języka powinno przede wszystkim uwzględniać kulturowe trajektorie stosowania języka w danych społecznościach. Niniejsze badanie poświęcono różnym aspektom językowym i kulturowym w obrębie społeczności Gopali zamieszkującej Dolinę Chitlang, położoną 28 mil na południowy zachód od Katmandu. Wstępne obserwacje wskazują, że Gopali (społeczność w ramach grupy etnicznej Newar) stanowi odrębną tożsamość językową i kulturową w Nepalu. Jednak nie została ona jeszcze uznana za osobną grupę etniczną, pomimo charakterystycznego języka, historii, pochodzenia i praktyk kulturowych. Obecnie język Gopali jest zagrożony wyginięciem głównie z powodu rosnącego wpływu wywieranego przez inne języki używane w Dolinie Katmandu. Autorzy badania zaobserwowali, że błędne zakwalifikowanie tego języka i kultury jest historycznie powiązane z aspektami polityczno-ekonomicznymi i ma wpływ na zmiany, których doświadcza lud Gopali. Niniejszy artykuł został opracowany na podstawie danych uzyskanych w wywiadach narracyjnych, wywiadach z kluczowymi informatorami, *life stories* (historii życia), badań językowych i obserwacji przeprowadzonych w październiku 2021 roku. Interpretacji danych dokonano w odniesieniu do różnych politycznych, społecznych i ekonomicznych relacji oraz zmian kulturowych. Uznając wielojęzyczność za normę edukacji językowej, w niniejszym projekcie zbadano również wpływ wielojęzyczności na nowe pokolenie w Dolinie Chitlang. Badanie może pomóc decydom w wprowadzeniu wielojęzycznej edukacji opartej na języku ojczystym (MTB-MLE) w społeczności Gopali.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: zmiana języka, Guthi, język Gopali, tożsamość, ekonomia polityczna, edukacja.

BHIM LAL GAUTAM

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

bhim.gautam@cdl.tu.edu.np

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3343-6292>

MADHU GIRI

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

madhu.giri@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7782-0439>