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Deudā: A Resonance of Folk Poetic Tradition

Narendra Bahadur Air, PhD

Associate Professor, Durgalaxmi Multiple Campus, Attariya, Kailali
Far Western University, Nepal
Email: narendra.psair@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the folk poetic ambiance of *Deudā*, an oral art form deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Sudurpaschim Province, Nepal. Grounded in the theoretical perspectives of orality and folklore studies, the research examines the poetic qualities, cultural significance, and communal essence of *Deudā* songs. Using qualitative methodologies, including textual analysis, field observations, and interviews, the study highlights how *Deudā* encapsulates the emotions, experiences, and traditions of people. Characterized by simplicity, spontaneity, and a profound connection to communal life, *Deudā* songs are rich in lyricality, rhythm, and emotional depth, reflecting the joys and struggles of everyday existence. These songs, composed and performed orally in dialogic or collective settings, address themes such as love, nature, social justice, and political commentary. Their oral transmission preserves historical memory while allowing for variation and adaptation, making each performance a unique cultural expression. The findings emphasize *Deudā* as a living folk poetic tradition that bridges the past and present, retaining its authenticity through its deep roots in the lives of ordinary people. The collective emotions of performers and audiences shape its ambiance, fostering empathy and cultural solidarity. However, the study also identifies challenges to its continuity, including the impact of modernization and the decline of oral traditions. By situating *Deudā* within the broader framework of folk poetic traditions, the research celebrates its role as a dynamic repository of cultural heritage and a medium of

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communal expression. The study advocates for sustained efforts to preserve and promote *Deudā*, ensuring that its rich folk poetic tradition endures for future generations.

Keywords: *Deudā*, folk poetry, oral tradition, cultural identity, performance art

Introduction

Deudā is a folk song widely cherished in the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces of Nepal, where it holds a special place in the cultural life of the Khas community. It is not only a form of music but also a living tradition deeply woven into the social and cultural fabric of the region. People engage with the song in multiple ways; some sing it privately in solitude as a personal source of reflection and emotional release, while others perform it collectively through song and dance in public spaces. Its performance is highly flexible, as it can be recited informally in everyday moments or formally showcased during diverse occasions such as religious rituals, cultural programs, secular events, and festive celebrations including fairs, feasts, and weddings. Beyond mere entertainment, the song fulfills multiple purposes: it functions as a religious and cultural expression, a recreational pastime, and a creative medium for articulating individual and collective thoughts, emotions, memories, social values, and even critical commentary on communal life.

Deudā features a simple, concise, and appealing form and structure. It is typically composed as a couplet, characterized by end rhyme and a distinctive folk rhythm. Each line usually consists of fourteen to sixteen syllables, though the two lines in a couplet do not always share a semantic connection. As Upadhyay (2016) observes, "The two lines of a couplet may not match in the sense of semantic meaning but they occur for the purpose of rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration. Generally, the first line of a couplet seems to be semantically out of meaning but syntactically harmonious and obligatory" (p. 40). The first line of *Deudā* couplet often serves primarily to establish rhyme and rhythm, but there might not be association between the first and the second line. However, some skilled *Deudā* poets craft couplets in which both lines are semantically aligned, delivering a unified and meaningful message. Amma Raj Joshi (2011) remarks, "*Deudā* is originally the evaporation of human feelings in its most crude and uncontaminated form expressed without any careful artistic embellishment . . . But it does not mean that *Deudā* is devoid of artistic beauty" (p. 2). Through its various forms and structures, *Deudā* gives voice to lived experiences, fundamental emotions, and the raw instincts of everyday folk life.

Research Methodology

This study adopted an ethnographic research design to investigate the folk poetic tradition of *Deudā* songs in Nepal. Consistent with qualitative research principles, the study focused on gathering in-depth, context-rich data for analysis and interpretation.

Positioned within the interpretivist research paradigm, the investigation aimed to understand the lived experiences and cultural expressions embedded in *Deudā* performances.

The theoretical framework for the study was informed by the works of Finnegan (1977) and Ong (1982), whose contributions to the study of oral traditions and folk literature provided a lens through which the poetic and performative aspects of the song could be critically analyzed. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth of insight. The sample comprised fifteen individuals with extensive knowledge and experience of the song, representing diverse districts across the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces of Nepal. Data collection methods included telephonic and in-person interviews, personal observations, and focus group discussions. The collected data were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring patterns, symbols, and meanings that reflect the poetic significance of *Deudā* in local cultural contexts. The findings were then interpreted in light of the theoretical framework and research objectives.

Results and Discussion

Deudā, as an oral folk lyric, occupies a vital place within the unwritten literary tradition of folklore, embodying the collective voice and emotional landscape of the common folks of Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces. Rich in lyricality and expressive depth, it emerges as a genuine poetic form rooted in the soil, sentiment, and everyday experiences of the region's humble inhabitants. Through its spontaneous composition, rhythmic flow, and dialogic structure, the song captures the joys and sorrows, struggles and aspirations of rural life. Its folk poetic essence is evident in the use of local dialects, context-based improvisation, love of nature, and resistance to social artificiality. Composed and performed predominantly by nonliterate or semi-literate villagers, the song reflects a living literary tradition that thrives on simplicity, musicality, and emotional resonance, making it a powerful medium of cultural expression and identity.

The folk poetic qualities of *Deudā* closely reflect the fundamental characteristics of folk songs as outlined by scholars such as Thapa and Subedi (1984). According to them, intensity and rhythm, warm and effective language, public-oriented impetus, micro-level reflection, authenticity, and the impression of place and timeliness are central to the folk tradition (p. 82). *Deudā* embodies these traits despite its use of simple, day-to-day language, as it powerfully resonates with the collective emotional experiences of the community and presents social realities from an intimate, micro perspective. Parajuli (2000) expands on this by emphasizing the anonymity of the composer, collective expression, simplicity, naturalness, orality, originality, spontaneity, and the diversity of expression as defining features of folk songs (p. 137 - 41). These traits manifest in *Deudā*,

which is orally composed and transmitted by singers who are often anonymous.

Deudā singers craft their verses based on context, local dialects, and communal sentiment, performing in various geographical and cultural settings across Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces. This contextual responsiveness not only preserves cultural memory but also infuses each performance with uniqueness and relevance. Subedi (2011) further reinforces this idea by stating, "When poems spread they generally tend to lose the subjectivity of the creator" (p. 1). This observation is especially pertinent in the case of *Deudā*, where songs are performed from memory, altered according to situational demands, and delivered in a manner that prioritizes collective meaning over individual authorship. The diversity in expression that emerges from this adaptive oral tradition highlights *Deudā*'s dynamic character.

Bandhu (2001) identifies melody, spontaneity, and rhythm as substantial properties of folk songs (p. 115). In line with this, the melodic utterances of *Deudā* often originate from the emotional core of the singers and are expressed either in solitude or in public performances with rhythmic variation. These oral creations, shaped by the mood, setting, and audience interaction, reaffirm *Deudā*'s place as a living, breathing poetic form that bridges the artistic, emotional, and communal dimensions of folk life.

The *Deudā* song emerges as a significant cultural medium that articulates and preserves the lived experiences of the rural communities in the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces of Nepal. As Shah (2023) notes, "Historically, Deuda has played a crucial role in fostering community bonds, preserving oral traditions, and providing local entertainment. Through its rhythmic patterns and communal performance, the Deuda dance encapsulates the essence of folk culture, preserving and transmitting the collective values and stories of its community" (p. 27). This observation underscores *Deudā*'s multifaceted role as a cultural archive, a means of emotional expression, and a vehicle for social cohesion.

Rooted deeply in folk consciousness, *Deudā* captures the rhythm of everyday life through its distinct musicality, lyrical gentleness, and the simplicity of both its structure and performance. The genre is characterized by an organic integration of key folk poetic elements, such as spontaneity, communal participation, emotional depth, and the raw portrayal of both joy and sorrow. These features highlight the song not merely as a source of entertainment but as a dynamic poetic form that reflects and responds to the sociocultural realities of the communities in which it is practiced. *Deudā* functions as a living tradition - continually evolving while maintaining its roots in collective memory and local identity.

Katuwal (2024) characterizes *Deudā* as "dialogic poetry of performance" (p. 43), emphasizing its interactive and participatory nature. As a performative oral tradition, *Deudā* functions as a ritual of communal storytelling, where each song acts as a

repository of collective histories, cultural values, and communal aspirations. Through its dialogic structure and spontaneous composition, it fosters a sense of shared identity and intergenerational continuity. In this way, *Deudā* exemplifies how oral folk traditions can serve as powerful mediums for cultural preservation and social commentary, reinforcing communal bonds while simultaneously reflecting the lived experiences and evolving concerns of the society in which it thrives.

The characteristics that shape *Deudā* closely correspond to the qualities of folk songs identified by Neupane (2009), who notes that oral tradition, anonymous authorship, collective storytelling, originality, simplicity, distinct rhythms, musicality, brevity, thematic variation, and repetition are central to folk poetic forms (p. 9 - 12). *Deudā* embodies these traits by allowing performers the freedom to voice personal and communal narratives across generations and contexts. The ability of the song to adapt to changing times while maintaining its authentic cultural texture affirms its position as an original form of social art. It offers a platform for expressing the emotional undertones of rural life - ranging from pathos to celebration - through a lyrical, soft-toned medium that is accessible, participatory, and emotionally evocative.

As outlined by Lamichhane (2020), folk songs are characterized by a range of traits including orality and traditionalism, collectivity, variability, simplicity, spontaneity, anonymity of the creator, emotional intensity, repetition, lyricism, musicality, and the use of indigenous folk elements (p. 146). These features are inherently embedded in *Deudā*, which reflects the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of oral folk traditions. In addition to these defining traits, Lamichhane also points to broader characteristics such as popularity among the masses, cultural legacy, rootedness in locality, performance-based expression, poetic resonance, and the use of simplified language.

Deudā resonates with all of these features, affirming its place as a robust oral-poetic tradition. In this context, G. C. and Joshi (2024) note that *Deuda* songs "exhibit diverse rhythms and styles, encompassing vocal and dance elements, thereby creating a rich tapestry of folklore traditions" (p. 2). While musical instruments such as the madal, harmonium, and flute are sometimes used to enhance its aesthetic appeal, they remain supplementary rather than essential. The core musicality of the song arises primarily from its rhythmic structure, melodic utterances, and poetic cadence, which are maintained even in the absence of instrumental accompaniment. This reinforces the song's identity as a distinctly oral and performative folk genre rooted in spontaneity and communal participation.

In its contemporary form, *Deudā* is occasionally recorded with instrumental accompaniment such as the flute, madal, and harmonium, serving as ornamental additions that enhance its aesthetic appeal. However, even in the absence of such instruments, the intrinsic musicality of the song remains intact through the effective use of alliteration,

assonance, repetition, and its characteristic rhyme and rhythm. These features contribute to its distinctive folk rhythmic structure, reinforcing its lyrical and poetic richness and placing it on par with written poetic forms in terms of expressive power.

Sharma and Luitel (2006) make an important distinction between folk song and folk poetry, noting that while they share several core features, their differences lie in performance and stylistic elements. Folk songs, they argue, are more lyrical, musical, and emotionally evocative than folk poetry. They tend to be simpler, more subjective, and heartwarming, often marked by repetition, distinct *bhākā* (rhythmic patterns), refrains, and even dance. In contrast, folk poetry leans more toward intellectual expression, freedom of content, and verse-dominant structures. Though the boundaries between these two forms are fluid, *Deudā* clearly aligns with the lyrical and performative qualities typical of folk song, making rhythm and emotional resonance central to its identity.

As an oral folk lyrical form, *Deudā* exhibits a wide range of features commonly associated with folk songs. In the context of this study, the terms *folk song* and *oral folk lyric* have been used interchangeably, given their overlapping characteristics. Joshi (2020) outlines the distinct attributes of *Deudā*: "the couplet form, use of fillers, end rhyme, composition based on situation, combination of poetry and performance, solo, duet and group performance, variety of themes and emotions, rhythmic variations, linguistic simplicity and sweetness, use of imagery, worldliness and social reality, private and public nature and crudity and refinement" (p. 59). Moreover, *Deudā* is performed in solo, duet, and group formats and encompasses a diversity of themes and emotions, rhythmic variations, linguistic simplicity and sweetness, the use of imagery, and a blend of private sentiment and public performance. It embodies elements of both refinement and raw expression, reflecting the full spectrum of human experience.

When analyzed through the lens of folk poetic tradition, *Deudā* reveals a broad array of expressive features that scholars of Nepali folk songs have identified in varied ways. Data from field interviews conducted for this study reinforce these literary qualities. Informants consistently highlighted characteristics such as the use of simple and emotive language rooted in the everyday speech of humble people, a dialogic or question - answer structure, spontaneous composition tied to contextual immediacy, and a dynamic integration of poetic form and performative function. Additionally, recurring elements include themes grounded in folk life and experience, vivid folk imagery, oral transmission, composer anonymity, repetition, rhythmic patterns, collectivity, improvisation, and brevity. These findings confirm the song's status as a living folk poetic tradition, grounded in the expressive and communal practices of the rural populace.

The performance of *Deudā* songs plays a crucial role in shaping and preserving the cultural identity of the communities in Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces. Rooted in the local traditions and lifestyles of these regions, the song not only functions as a

medium of entertainment and expression but also serves as a cultural marker, reflecting the collective memory and historical continuity of the people. Through its regular performance in communal spaces and rituals, the song sustains a sense of belonging and cultural rootedness.

Viewed through the theoretical framework of orality, particularly Ong's (1982) conception of oral cultures, *Deudā* clearly embodies the distinctive characteristics of oral tradition. Ong outlines nine features of oral cultures: they are additive rather than subordinative, aggregative rather than analytical, redundant and copious, conservative or traditionalist, close to the human lifeworld, agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced, homeostatic, and situational rather than abstract (pp. 36–48). These features provide a comprehensive framework - the 'Ongian lens' - through which *Deudā* can be examined as a vibrant oral poetic form.

Each of these traits is identifiable within *Deudā*. The songs are composed additively, often through the layering of shared community knowledge and memory. They aggregate cultural expressions rather than break them down analytically. The use of redundancy, traditional motifs, emotional proximity, spontaneous performance, and context-specific content further affirm the song's strong alignment with the oral mode of expression. These oral features sustain its authenticity and position it as a living artifact of folk poetic heritage.

The additive structure of *Deudā* reflects one of the defining characteristics of oral cultures, as described by Ong (1982), in which ideas are developed through accumulation rather than subordination. As an orally transmitted form of folk poetry, the song originates in the spoken word, composed and performed without reliance on written texts. Over time, the content of the song evolves through continuous embellishment, improvisation, and contextual adaptation. Each performer builds upon the versions passed down by previous generations, integrating personal experiences and current social realities into the performance. This living, performative nature allows the song to remain fluid and responsive to changing cultural dynamics.

Moreover, the song exhibits an aggregative structure, in which performers draw upon a shared reservoir of collective memory, cultural references, and familiar expressions. In the absence of written documentation, *Deudā* poets rely on memorized phrases, idioms, and symbolic imagery that they rearrange during performance. Ong (1982) refers to this process as "stitching together proverbs, antitheses, epithets, and other 'commonplaces'" (p. 2), forming a kind of mental phrasebook that enables immediate composition and delivery. This formulaic structure ensures continuity while permitting creativity, reinforcing the communal and participatory nature of the song.

The transmission of traditional expressions is not only a creative act but also a preservation of cultural labor embedded in generations of oral practice. An illustrative

example can be found in the following couplet:

rāvaṅko sunaulo mirga, rāmchandrā sikāri
ubāhunā bālibaisa, ma banāi dukhāri

(Lord Ramchandra pursued the golden deer, unaware that it was Ravan in disguise; likewise, you abandoned me in the blossoming years of my youth, leaving me in sorrow.)

The *Deuḍā* couplet under discussion draws on a familiar narrative from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, wherein Lord Rāmchandra, deceived by Rāvaṇ disguised as a golden deer, inadvertently causes Sītā's suffering. In this folk poetic context, however, the verse transcends its mythological origin to reflect a deeply personal lament - a woman's sorrow over abandonment during the prime of her youth. This recontextualization of mythological symbolism into the lived emotional experiences of rural individuals illustrates the interweaving of traditional epithets with contemporary sentiments, a hallmark of *Deuḍā*'s poetic richness and cultural continuity.

Within the verse, words such as *sunaulo* (golden), *dukhāri* (sorrowful), *sikāri* (hunter), and *ubāhunā* (young) function as epithets. These stylistic elements are part of the oral formulaic repertoire that *Deuḍā* performers rely upon for spontaneous composition. Ong (1982) notes that oral cultures, lacking written records, depend on such aggregative expressions - commonly repeated phrases, symbols, and structures to preserve and transmit knowledge across generations. While these repeated patterns might appear redundant or cumbersome from the perspective of literate cultures, they serve as essential memory aids in oral traditions. The formulaic nature of *Deuḍā* thus allows poets to draw on a shared cultural lexicon, enabling immediate and context-sensitive composition while preserving the collective poetic identity of the community.

With the advent of written language, literate societies developed less reliance on the repetitive and formulaic patterns that characterize oral traditions (Ong, 1982). In contrast, oral cultures, including that of *Deuḍā*, continue to depend heavily on mnemonic strategies to preserve and transmit cultural knowledge. The central concern in these communities lies not in documentation but in the extent to which ancestral memory and tradition are preserved and performed in the present.

As an oral folk poetic form, *Deuḍā* serves as a vessel for traditional knowledge, often stored and sustained by the elder members of the community. These individuals act as living archives, maintaining the cultural memory and poetic forms that are passed down through generations. Far from being a rigid or dogmatic practice, this tradition functions as a dynamic and essential cultural ritual - one that safeguards communal identity while also allowing space for creative reinterpretation.

In *Deuḍā*, tradition and innovation coexist, creating a dynamic space where cultural heritage is preserved while new forms of expression continue to emerge. While the first

line of a couplet is frequently drawn from older, familiar expressions - often selected to match the rhyme scheme - it is commonly paired with a newly composed second line that reflects the present emotional, social, or political context. This method is demonstrated in the following couplet:

rājā mari koṭ bājhaichha, dipāyalagaḍhiko
yati māyā kyā lāgdoho, yai mainā chaḍiko?

(The royal court at Dipayal lies silent after the king's demise. Why does this moment stir in me the boundless love of my beloved?)

This version preserves both the cultural imagery and the emotional undertone. The first line echoes a historical memory - referring to the decline of royal presence in Dipayal - while the second line introduces a personal and emotional reflection rooted in the singer's immediate reality. This blending of past and present exemplifies how *Deudā* maintains continuity through repetition while remaining responsive to changing contexts.

The adaptive and situational nature of oral cultures allows their expressive forms to evolve continuously in response to immediate contexts. *Deudā*, as an oral folk poetic tradition, exemplifies this homeostatic quality - where poetic content is shaped by present realities rather than rigidly preserved past forms. In oral performance settings, *Deudā* singers engage directly with their audiences, crafting verses in real time to meet the demands of the moment. This responsiveness affirms the genre's emphasis on face-to-face interaction and spontaneity.

As Goody (1987) observes, oral traditions often discard outdated content through what he describes as "the homeostatic tendencies of memory usually consign to oblivion what is no longer wanted" (p. 19). This principle applies strongly to *Deudā*, where the performative present frequently supersedes historical continuity. While the first line of a couplet usually emerges from the collective memory or traditional stock phrases, the second line is typically an immediate, situational response that reflects the performer's emotional, social, or cultural reality at the time of singing.

The performative structure of *Deudā* is inherently communal and public, distinguishing it from literary traditions that emphasize individual expression and private reflection. Rooted in oral culture, the song relies on live audience engagement, typically occurring during fairs, festivals, weddings, baptisms, and other communal events. This performance context, known as *Deudā Khel*, draws large audiences from surrounding villages, reinforcing the collective and participatory ethos of the tradition.

Although *Deudā* singers often draw from personal experiences, their performances take on a public dimension as these private sentiments are transformed into shared expressions of cultural and social identity. The songs thus operate on both personal and impersonal levels - channeling individual emotion while addressing communal concerns.

This dual function is evident in many verses, including the following couplet:

kailai hātti lāljhāḍimā, kailai hātti dānmā

bādal phāṭi ghām lāgi jhāu, bairāgikā ānmā (P. Singh, 2020, p. 75)

(The elephant alternates its presence between Laljhadi and Dang. For the desperate, may skies be clear and troubles vanish.)

This verse symbolically critiques Nepal's political landscape. The 'elephant' metaphorically represents political elites, whose movements between regions like Laljhadi and Dang imply their preoccupation with power and privilege. Meanwhile, the 'cloud' and 'sunlight' imagery expresses the desires of the marginalized - those living in despair and longing for clarity, relief, and justice. In this context, *Deudā* becomes a subtle yet powerful vehicle for voicing the suppressed emotions of ordinary people, transforming political critique into poetic form. The public articulation of such sentiments through metaphor allows the song to serve as both a mirror of social reality and a tool for collective emotional expression.

While *Deudā* is largely recognized for its communal and performative nature, there also exists a more intimate and private dimension to its expression. Songs of this kind are often sung in solitude, particularly by women engaged in everyday labor such as cutting grass, collecting firewood and fodder, or tending livestock in forests, grasslands, and paddy fields. In these isolated, routine settings, *Deudā* serves as a personal outlet for emotional release. Women use the form to articulate inner feelings of pain, longing, hardship, and unfulfilled desires - often linked to their lived experiences under social and patriarchal constraints. Unlike the performative *Deudā Khel*, these solo renditions are not intended for an audience. Rather, they are deeply reflective acts, providing a lyrical means of processing emotional burdens without external validation or recognition. Such verses carry an introspective tone and often capture the psychological landscape of rural womanhood. For instance, the following couplet conveys the emotional suffering of a woman caught in the oppressive structures of patriarchy:

mājha ghara baujukā ghara, roṭi pakāyāki

ma poyal diyāki hoina, seti bagāyāki (Joshi, *Pahāḍaki Saūrāi* 23)

(My sister-in-law made chapattis in her kitchen. For me, marriage is misery; I feel like I've been thrown into the turbulent Seti River instead of getting married.)

The woman in the song privately expressed her deep emotions. It reveals the breadth of *Deudā*'s capacity to function as both a communal performance and a solitary reflection, enriching its value as a multifaceted folk poetic form.

As a form of oral poetry, *Deudā* is inherently situational and grounded in the lifeworld of its performers and audiences. Unlike written poetry, which often leans toward abstraction and detachment, *Deudā* maintains a direct connection to the concrete realities

of everyday existence. Its content is shaped by lived experiences and social observations, allowing it to reflect the cultural, economic, historical, and political dimensions of the community in real time.

The close alignment between *Deudā* and the human lifeworld stems from its ability to represent knowledge through tangible images and social experiences. This situational quality enables it to capture the nuances of daily life and articulate the underlying tensions within society. A vivid example of this can be seen in the following couplet:

kasaikhi kampani mālā, kasaikhi potyānāi

kasaikhi bāsmati dhāna, kasaikhi kodyānāi

(Some wear necklaces of gold, others mere strings with glass beads; some dine on fragrant Bāsmati rice, while others survive on coarse millet.)

This verse offers a stark portrayal of economic disparity and class-based injustice. The gold necklaces and premium rice symbolize wealth, luxury, and social privilege, while the glass bead necklaces and millet signify poverty, deprivation, and struggle. Through such symbolic contrasts, *Deudā* brings issues of inequality to the forefront in a form that is emotionally resonant and socially intelligible. This example underscores the capacity of *Deudā* to function not only as a medium of aesthetic expression but also as a commentary on socio-economic realities. Its accessibility and grounded imagery allow it to serve as a mirror to rural life, giving voice to the marginalized and making the abstract tangible through the poetic articulation of everyday conditions.

As a form of oral poetry, *Deudā* often carries an agonistic or argumentative tone, where verbal exchange is central to the performance. Rooted in spontaneous social interaction, it promotes aesthetic conflict through poetic duets. These duets, performed by male or female participants in pairs or groups, serve as a competitive platform for showcasing wit, emotion, and cultural knowledge. Following Ong's (1982) idea of oral cultures favoring combative dialogue, *Deudā* exemplifies how knowledge remains embedded in lived experience. Duet performances frequently involve poetic challenges or informal contests, reflecting the tradition's interactive and communal spirit. An illustrative example of such a poetic exchange is presented in the following verses:

Man: *ṭapkā lāgi tamākhuki, samrāi lāgi naiki*

samrāi ta sabaiki hunchha, samrāi ṭhuli kaiki?

(I crave tobacco deeply, reminded of the bamboo pipe used in a hookah. People often yearn for many things - but what do they truly long for?)

Woman: *paillā samrāi āmā bāuki, wā pachhiūḍo bhāiki*

bhāiko māyā para sārī, gali khānyā sāiki

(People first long for parental love, then seek affection from siblings. Eventually, they

yearn most for the love of a romantic partner.)

Man: *hoina hoina taso hoina, tyo kurā ta hoina*
jijkota pairāle rā̃jyo, ubkāidinyā koina

(No, that's not the case. A landslide buried Jijkota, and no one came for the rescue.)

Woman: *inmerā bhanyā kurā, bhandia bhandia*
keikurā tamarā bhanchhu, kuraḍi sundia

(Please share my suggestion with everyone. I'm repeating what you've already said, so listen carefully to my words.)

Man: *hajāri phulaini huni, joli bhāmaraki*
samrāita sabaiki huni, samrāi ūmaraki

(Two bumblebees sit on a marigold flower. People may cherish many things, but they hold a special love for their youth.)

Woman: *yo pirtā chhodḍaina bhanchhe, kāgatamā saichha*
ma bhanno din jānyā huna, ūmar jānyā raichha

(She wishes to honor the love she once vowed in writing. I feel that with time, it's not just the days we lose, but the vitality of youth.)

This exchange is an example of a *Deudā* duet. It concludes with the shared realization that, above all else, people hold their youth as the deepest object of love.

The empathetic and participatory character of *Deudā* affirms its role as a quintessential oral art form. The interactive nature of *Deudā Khel* highlights the strong connection between performers and audiences. Singers actively adapt their style, content, and tone in response to audience feedback, demonstrating a shared emotional and cultural space. Audience participation is essential; without it, the performance often lacks momentum or may be delayed, as observed during field visits. In many cases, audience members themselves join the performance, blurring the line between spectator and participant. Greater audience engagement not only sustains the performance but also inspires performers to create more dynamic and contextually relevant compositions.

Folk poetry, including *Deudā*, is marked by its oral composition, transmission, and performance. Finnegan (1977) identifies these three dimensions as key indicators of orality in poetry, noting that "some oral poetry is oral in all these respects, some in only one or two" (p. 17). *Deudā* poetry exemplifies this framework, as it is created, shared, and performed through oral means, reflecting the traditional characteristics of oral literature.

The first distinguishing feature of *Deudā* poetry is its mode of composition. Unlike written poetry, which is typically authored through deliberate reflection by an identifiable poet, *Deudā* poetry is composed spontaneously during performance. The poet-singer

draws upon creativity, memory, imagination, and emotional experience in real time. Finnegan's (1977) study of the Yugoslav heroic epic offers a relevant parallel, noting that "the poet in a sense composes his heroic epics at the actual moment of performance, relying on a known fund of conventional 'oral formulae'" (p. 18). This observation is applicable to *Deudā* as well, where composition is inherently performative and improvisational.

In duet performances, *Deudā* poets spontaneously compose verses in direct response to the prompts or questions posed by the opposing group. This immediate creation is not solely the product of practice or imitation, but rather the result of a blend of cognitive and creative faculties. As Finnegan (1977) emphasizes, the oral poet's ability to compose on the spot relies on factors such as imagination, memory, wit, critical thinking, and prompt responsiveness. These attributes are clearly evident in *Deudā* composition, where the poetry emerges organically during performance, without written references or identifiable authorship. The anonymity of the composer and the absence of written documentation further underscore the oral and collective nature of *Deudā* tradition.

The second key distinction between oral and written poetry lies in the mode of transmission. While written poetry is preserved through print and accessible to future generations in written form, oral poetry depends solely on verbal transmission. In the case of *Deudā*, this transmission occurs through spoken performance and intergenerational sharing. Although the oral transmission of *Deudā* is sometimes carried out with remarkable consistency, its non-written nature places it at risk of loss. As a form rooted in the cultural fabric of the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces, *Deudā* has been passed down for centuries, serving not only as a poetic tradition but also as a vessel for conveying communal values, social behaviors, and unspoken truths. This makes its continued oral preservation both culturally vital and precarious.

With the advancement of modern communication and transportation technologies, a trend of blending of oral and written poetic forms has emerged in Nepal. Tools such as the printing press, radio, tape recorders, television, video cameras, the Internet, and social media have transformed the ways in which cultural expressions like *Deudā* are created and shared. This shift has influenced the traditional use of local language, wit, and creativity in *Deudā* poetry, leading to the production of lighter, hybrid forms. These newer versions often lack the depth, authenticity, and cultural richness of the indigenous song, diminishing its traditional flavor, wit, and symbolic resonance. Nonetheless, traditional couplets continue to reflect the longstanding cultural and social values of Nepalese society, preserving a connection to its oral heritage amidst modern influences. The following couplets exemplify this preservation of heritage, reflecting the age-old

traditions and collective wisdom passed down through generations:

rājāmari rāni sati, nepāl paśupati

jo merā karmamā chhaina, uikai māyā ati

(The widow-queen performed the *sati* ritual at Pasupati Aryaghat after the king's demise. I yearn for the love of someone never meant to stay in my life.)

kannako paṭukā tero, mailāi phaṭko hānyā

hātako rumāla mero, māyājāla bānyā

(I remember your waistband swaying as a farewell. I clutch my handkerchief to hold onto our love.)

The first verse reflects a historical period in Nepalese society when even royalty observed the inhumane *sati* tradition, where widows were forced to self-immolate on their husband's funeral pyre. Although this practice was abolished long ago, its continued presence in *Deudā* poetry highlights how oral traditions preserve cultural memories across generations. The oral nature of *Deudā* allows such outdated yet significant themes to survive in poetic form. Similarly, the second verse, which refers to the act of bidding farewell with a waistband, exemplifies how traditional customs are transmitted and remembered through oral poetry, reinforcing *Deudā*'s role as a carrier of cultural heritage.

The third defining feature of oral poetry is its realization through performance. In the absence of a written record, the survival and impact of oral forms like *Deudā* depend entirely on their performative enactment. *Deudā* exists as a verbal art form that gains meaning and continuity only when performed. In its duet form, the immediate social context and emotional atmosphere evoke spontaneous poetic creation, allowing performers to respond to situations with relevance and sensitivity. As Finnegan (1977) notes, performance can convey more than just the verbal text—it embodies emotion, context, and cultural cues that deepen audience engagement (p. 19). Thus, performance is not only a vehicle of transmission but also a space where *Deudā* gains its full expressive and communal power. The performative nature of *Deudā* poetry minimizes the temporal and spatial distance between the composer and the audience, creating a shared, immediate context for meaning-making.

Unlike written texts that rely on delayed interpretation, *Deudā* is understood in the moment, shaped by the performance setting, the relationship between performer and listener, and the surrounding social and emotional environment. Factors such as rhythm, tone, voice, and context guide both the creation and interpretation of the poem. The poet-performer's individual style—reflected through dramatization, facial expressions, gestures, tempo, and vocal modulation—significantly influences the atmosphere and emotional resonance of the performance. This dynamic interaction between performer

and audience is central to the effectiveness and cultural vitality of *Deudā* poetry.

The diversity of forms, rhythms, and expressions in *Deudā* affirms its status as a dynamic folk-poetic art. Its performance varies across occasions and contexts, reflecting oral poetry's inherent fluidity. As Dundes (1999) notes, folklore is marked by "multiple existence and variation," including differences in names, sequences, and structural elements (p. 7). Such variations - syntactical, rhythmical, and sequential - are evident in the spontaneous nature of *Deudā* composition. Its flexible performance setting further supports this fluidity. As Kandel (2012) observes, folk songs like *Deudā* resist rigid categorization and are adapted to diverse places and situations (p. 36). Accordingly, *Deudā* is performed in both private and public spaces, shaped by the intent and context of the event.

Deudā poetry uses metaphorical language and folk poetic elements to express deep emotional experiences such as pain, joy, struggle, and resilience. The above mentioned examples illustrate this idea. Historically, the song evolved as a means to cope with grief and life's hardships. As Kalibhakta Pant (2012) outlines, folk songs have multifaceted functions: they inspire courage, creativity, and awareness; support emotional development in children; strengthen marital and social bonds; reduce fatigue during labor; and serve as a source of recreation and emotional healing (pp. 12–15). *Deudā* reflects these qualities by offering both entertainment and moral guidance. It teaches, consoles, empowers, and transforms - encouraging the timid, energizing the strong, enlightening the ignorant, and instilling wisdom and emotional resilience across all walks of life. *Deudā* plays a vital role in both personal development and community cohesion.

Conclusion

Deudā stands as a vibrant embodiment of Nepal's folk poetic tradition, rooted deeply in the lived realities, oral culture, and expressive instincts of the people of Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces. As revealed through this study, *Deudā* is not just a form of entertainment but a profound cultural and poetic expression that carries the rhythm of communal life, social memory, and regional identity. Its oral transmission, anonymous authorship, rhythmic spontaneity, and performative nature reflect its place within the rich domain of folk poetry.

The essence of *Deudā* lies in its simplicity and its immediacy - crafted in the moment and shaped by the social, emotional, and political circumstances of its performers. Composed in couplets with end rhyme and local dialects, it captures the joys and sorrows, resistance and resilience, humor and hardship of everyday life. *Deudā* embraces the characteristics typical of oral cultures, as noted by Ong and Finnegan: it is additive, aggregative, redundant, participatory, homeostatic, and deeply situated in the human lifeworld. These attributes enable *Deudā* to function as both a repository of

historical memory and a dynamic instrument of present-day expression.

The folk poetic value of *Deudā* is further reinforced by its emotional depth, its musicality, and its social embeddedness. Whether sung in solitude by women in the fields or performed in a spirited public contest, *Deudā* resonates with authenticity and community spirit. Its dialogic structure, often manifesting in duets, fosters verbal artistry, intellectual spontaneity, and aesthetic competition. Through metaphor, repetition, imagery, and folk rhythm, it conveys meanings that transcend mere entertainment to engage with social critique, emotional catharsis, and communal bonding.

Moreover, *Deudā's* adaptability and variation - its ability to be reshaped in each performance - underline its dynamic character as folk poetry. The interplay of tradition and improvisation allows it to evolve with changing contexts, while still preserving the cultural essence of the communities it springs from. Despite the increasing influence of modern communication and media technologies, *Deudā* remains a resilient expression of indigenous knowledge and poetic wisdom.

Thus, *Deudā* is a living folk poetic tradition that encapsulates the collective voice of the marginalized and celebrates the aesthetics of orality. It deserves scholarly attention, cultural preservation, and institutional support not only for its literary and artistic merits but also for its role in fostering social cohesion, cultural pride, and identity. Sustaining *Deudā* means safeguarding a poetic tradition that continues to inspire, educate, and empower generations through its heartfelt expressions of life in its most unadulterated form.

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