

Maruni Dance: A Cultural and Religious Jewel of the Magar Community in Indrasarowar Rural Municipality

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Abstract

This study explores the Maruni dance within the Magar community of Indrasarowar Rural Municipality-02, Kiteni, Makawanpur district in the Bagmati Province, focusing on its historical, cultural, and religious significance. By examining the dance's role in rituals, festivals, and community relationships, the research highlights the importance of Maruni in preserving cultural heritage. Utilizing a mixed method approach that includes surveys and interviews, the study identifies key challenges facing Maruni, such as the impact of modernization, generational shifts, and external cultural influences including urban migration and digital media. The findings reveal variations in the community's perceptions of the dance's relevance and future, with some aspects demonstrating higher levels of cultural attachment. Despite the influence of external factors, the dance remains an important symbol of Magar identity. The study concludes with suggestions for future research and policy implications to support the preservation of Maruni, addressing both cultural sustainability and contemporary challenges within the Magar community.

Keywords: cultural identity, festival, Magar community, Maruni dance, religious significance

Introduction

The origin of the Maruni dance is believed to date back to the 14th century, when it was initially performed by the Magar army under the leadership of King Balihang Rana Magar. Over time, the dance was adopted by various ethnic groups across Nepal. Maruni dance is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the Magar and Gurung communities, reflecting their rich folklore and spiritual beliefs. It plays a crucial role in expressing communal identity, strengthening social connections, and safeguarding indigenous heritage through its symbolic meanings and dynamic movements (Gurung & Rai, 2024). Traditionally, Maruni was more than just a source of

entertainment; it served as a vital means of transmitting stories and preserving cultural heritage across generations. The dance intensely represents Nepalese history and culture by blending mythology, folklore, and local legends. This article explores the Maruni dance as it is practiced within the Magar community of Indrasarowar Rural Municipality in Makawanpur District. The study seeks to showcase its lasting legacy and the profound ways it contributes to the Magar identity by researching its historical origins, cultural importance, and connection to religious practices.

This study aims to introduce Maruni dance and underscore its cultural significance within the Magar community, emphasizing its role as more than just a performative tradition. It also seeks to explore how Maruni dance is deeply embedded in Magar festivals and religious practices, reflecting the community's values, beliefs, and social identity.

Geographically, Indrasarowar is a rural municipality situated in Makawanpur District of Bagmati Province, Nepal. Covering an area of 97.33 square kilometers (37.58 square miles), it has a total population of 13,534, as recorded in the 2021 Nepal census (*Indrasarowar (Rural Municipality, Nepal) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location*, 2025). Maruni is a traditional folk dance of Nepal, originating from the Magar community.

Although Maruni dance has been the subject of various studies focused on its aesthetic and performative aspects, there is a significant gap in understanding its role as a cultural and religious practice within the Magar community of specific regions like Indrasarowar Rural Municipality. Previous studies (Adhikari, 2022) emphasize the evolving performance culture of the Magar community in Chitwan, showcasing its transformation into a hybrid form that integrates elements of both local and global cultures. These studies explore the reasons and processes through which the Magars' performance traditions adapt and navigate the intersection of cultural influences, reflecting broader dynamics of cultural exchange and adaptation.

Despite its cultural importance, limited research has explored the complex connection of Maruni dance with local festivals, rituals, and the preservation of Magar heritage. Moreover, region-specific studies highlighting variations in practices, symbols, and meanings unique to the Makawanpur District remain occasional. This study addresses these gaps by exploring the interplay between Maruni dance and its

cultural, spiritual, and social significance, offering a localized and micro perspective on this tradition. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To introduce the Maruni dance and establish its cultural significance within the Magar community.
2. To explore the role of Maruni dance in Magar festivals and religious practices.

Literature Review

The existing body of research on Maruni dance sheds light on its artistic and performative aspects, but frequently neglects its reflective cultural and religious importance. Studies like “The Folk Dances Enriching Nepali Culture” (*The Folk Dances Enriching Nepali Culture*, 2023) highlight the richness of Nepal's dance traditions. Further, it emphasizes, "Each culture possesses a unique history, story, and specialty, which are expressed through its dance. Nepal showcases remarkable diversity in folk and cultural dances that embody our multiethnic and multicultural heritage". Historically, the Maruni dance has served as more than mere entertainment; it has been a crucial medium for transmitting stories and traditions across generations. The dance embodies a vibrant representation of Nepalese culture and history by weaving together elements of mythology, folklore, and local legends (Team, 2024).

Folk dances serve as more than artistic expressions; they are cultural artifacts that represent a community's traditions and values. Passed down through generations, these dances mirror their time's historical context and social norms. Additionally, the portrayal of femininity and masculinity in folk dances is closely tied to cultural practices and beliefs, shaping societal perceptions of gender (Ötken, N., 2011). As Ramesh (2023) highlights in “*Dance and Society: An Exploration of Cultural Expression and Social Impact*,” dance transcends mere entertainment and functions as a vital cultural expression that mirrors the values and beliefs of different societies. The Maruni dance is more than just a form of entertainment; it is an energetic cultural expression reflecting the Nepalese community's traditions, beliefs, and values. Deeply embedded in festivals and celebrations, this dance plays a key role in uniting people and preserving the community's cultural identity. Beyond its artistic appeal, Maruni serves as a lens through which societal emotions, challenges, and hopes are vividly conveyed, offering profound insights into the lived experiences of the people (Team, 2024).

Festivals and Religious Practices in the Magar Community

Among the Magar community, those from Bara Magarat have an informal cultural institution known as Bheja, whereas the Magars from Aathara Magarat have a similar institution called Pancha-Taluk or Pancha-Amal, which consists of five democratically elected members. These institutions play a crucial role in overseeing traditional religious activities, organizing social and agricultural festivals, implementing reforms in customs and traditions, strengthening social and economic structures, managing communal resources, resolving disputes, and coordinating activities related to recreation and social solidarity (Religion and Culture of Magar, 2024). Furthermore, this ritual's cultural and spiritual significance seems to be diminishing as modernization increasingly influences younger community members. Various religious traditions have historically prescribed specific gender roles and restrictions. However, contemporary discussions within religious communities continue to explore gender equality and the participation of women in leadership positions. Engaging with these issues is essential for fostering more inclusive and equitable societies (*How Religion Shapes Cultures, Values, and Social Structures in Different Societies – Multifaith Education Australia*, 2024). In addition, religion significantly shapes cultures, values, and social structures by influencing practices, providing moral guidance, and organizing communities. Recognizing its impact fosters interfaith dialogue, diversity, and peace. Maruni is a traditional dance performed by both men and women, who are adorned in vibrant attire, sparkling ornaments, and nose rings. Among the Eastern Magars, the Maruni dance is structured into multiple segments, including “*Jhyaure, Saran Maruni, Sorathi Garra, and Khyali*”. The dance begins with performances intended to bring prosperity to the household, followed by concluding segments that mark the successful completion of the dance ritual (“Maruni,” n.d.). Furthermore, Jit Bahadur Thapa Magar, a *Guruba*, the head of the *Saraswoti Guthi Sanrachhan Samiti*, emphasizes that Maruni dance traditionally features male performers dressed in female clothing. These performers move in accompaniment with the rhythmic beats of the *madal* and *jhyali* while enacting narratives from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. According to him, this dance form serves as a medium for worshiping goddess *Saraswoti* and *Bhairung*, highlighting its deep-rooted religious significance. Additionally, he notes that Maruni dance plays a

vital role in preserving and sustaining religious traditions, cultural expressions, and traditional attire within the community.

Research Methods

This study uses a quantitative research design, incorporating ethnographic and participatory approaches. Ethnography provides an in-depth understanding of the cultural context, while participatory methods actively involve community members as collaborators in the research process (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, tools for data collection were designed, including interview protocols and an observation checklist. Information was gathered using the purposive sampling method to ensure the inclusion of experts with in-depth knowledge of the study area. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed when required (Kitchin & Tate, 2013).

A questionnaire was utilized to gather responses from dancers, musicians, and individuals directly involved in Maruni cultural dance to assess their perceptions of peer assessment. The data was collected through MS Forms after participants had completed peer evaluations for two specific tasks: a group discussion and a mock interview. The study focused on two distinct topics: *“Perception of Maruni Dance and its Religious Significance”* and *“Perception of Maruni Dance in Magar Culture”*. A total of 104 participants were involved, out of which 43 completed the questionnaire.

To facilitate data collection, 15 groups were formed, each consisting of 4 to 5 members. The group composition varied for each task, ensuring diverse interactions. Each group took turns performing the assigned tasks and assessing their peers using predetermined guidelines. The interview task was designed based on participant feedback, ensuring it was more straightforward compared to the rubric used for the group discussion.

Following the completion of these tasks, participants were provided with a questionnaire to express their opinions on peer assessment. The questionnaire comprised 9 Likert scale questions and four open-ended questions. The Likert scale included five response options: “1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, and 5-Strongly Agree”. The multiple-choice questions aimed to scale participants’ perspectives on various aspects of the peer assessment process.

Thematic analysis is a widely used yet often under-recognized qualitative method in psychology. It provides a flexible approach for identifying themes or patterns in data,

aligning with various epistemological perspectives, and includes guidelines for rigorous application, along with its advantages and limitations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). MS Word, Excel, and SPSS 20 were used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

The study confirms that Maruni dance is deeply rooted in the cultural identity of the Magar community, with a strong consensus among respondents (Mean: 4.84). Practiced for centuries, it remains one of the most vibrant traditional dances in Nepal. More than just entertainment, Maruni dance holds deep religious and ritual significance, particularly among the Magars. It reflects their spiritual beliefs, with a high agreement among respondents (Mean: 4.60). The dance is performed from *Bhadra Purnima* to *Dhanya Purnima*, highlighting its sustained importance in religious traditions. Despite modernization, its religious significance is still largely preserved (Mean: 4.19). Watching Maruni performances during this period plays a vital role in helping individuals reconnect with their cultural roots (Mean: 4.44). However, generational shifts and changing cultural dynamics have raised concerns about the gradual erosion of traditional practices.

The study included respondents aged between 23 and 70, with an average experience of 19.12 years in Maruni dance, highlighting diverse generational involvement. The variability in responses regarding the frequency and context of performances suggests that Maruni is now practiced beyond religious contexts as well. In Indrasarowar Rural Municipality, localized variations in Maruni's practice reflect its adaptability. The structure of performances includes distinct segments such as "*Jhyaure*, *Saran Maruni*, *Sorathi Garra*, and *Khyali*," showcasing its intricate cultural layers. A key feature of Maruni is male performers traditionally dressing as females, emphasizing its role in storytelling and deity worship.

While Maruni remains significant, concerns were raised about the younger generation's declining participation due to external cultural influences. Efforts in cultural preservation, including community initiatives and documentation, are crucial for sustaining this heritage. The study underscores Maruni dance's pivotal role in preserving the cultural and religious traditions of the Magar community in Indrasarowar Rural Municipality. Despite modernization challenges, Maruni continues to be a living tradition that connects people to their heritage, social values, and spiritual beliefs.

Addressing generational gaps and promoting awareness through cultural programs can further ensure its survival and growth. Further analysis is presented below:

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Age and Number of Years involved

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age	43	23	70	41.51	13.620
No. of years involved in this sector	43	1	50	19.12	15.356
N = 43					

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data shows a diverse age distribution and years of involvement of respondents in the sector. The age of participants ranges from 23 to 70 years, with a mean age of 41.51 years and a standard deviation of 13.620. This indicates that the respondents come from a diverse age group, with a mix of younger and older individuals contributing their perspectives. The standard deviation displays some variability, meaning that while some respondents are relatively young, others are significantly older in involving themselves in Maruni dance practices.

Regarding experience in the Maruni dance practices, the number of years of involvement ranges from 1 to 50 years, with a mean of 19.12 years and a standard deviation of 15.356. This indicates that, on average, respondents have nearly two decades of experience, though the high standard deviation suggests considerable variation. Some individuals have only recently joined the sector, while others have been involved for entire lives.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Perception of Maruni Dance in Magar Culture

S. No.	Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Maruni dance is a crucial part of Magar cultural identity	43	4.84	.374
2	Maruni has been practiced for centuries in Nepal.	43	4.53	.631
3	The dance is mainly performed during festivals and social events.	43	4.07	.704
4	Maruni is one of the most vibrant traditional dances in Nepal.	43	4.33	.644
5	Maruni's cultural value is well-known throughout Nepal.	43	4.26	.492
N = 43				

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data provides valuable insights into the perception of Maruni dance within the Magar community and beyond, highlighting a strong consensus on its cultural significance in Nepal. The highest-rated statement, "Maruni dance is a crucial part of Magar cultural identity," received a mean score of 4.84 with minimal variation (Std. Dev: 0.374), indicating widespread agreement on its deep-rooted role in Magar traditions. Similarly, the statement "Maruni has been practiced for centuries in Nepal" had a high mean score of 4.53, though with a slightly higher standard deviation (0.631), suggesting that while the majority recognize its historical significance, individual perspectives may vary based on historical knowledge. The statement "The dance is mainly performed during festivals and social events." received the lowest mean score (4.07) and the highest standard deviation (0.704), indicating more variation in responses. This could be attributed to Maruni's performances extending beyond festivals to cultural shows and races. Meanwhile, the perception of Maruni as "one of the most vibrant traditional dances in Nepal" scored 4.33 (Std. Dev: 0.644), showing strong agreement. However, some respondents may have different exposure to other traditional dances. Lastly, "Maruni's cultural value is well-known throughout Nepal" had a mean score of 4.26 with a standard deviation of 0.492, reflecting general acknowledgment of its significance but with slight variability, possibly due to differing levels of awareness outside the Magar community.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Perception of Maruni Dance and its Religious Significance

S. No.	Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Maruni is mostly performed during the Tihar festival.	43	3.67	1.169
2	Maruni reflects the religious beliefs of the Magar community.	43	4.60	.583
3	Maruni's religious significance is still preserved today.	43	4.19	.764
4	Watching Maruni during religious festivals helps connect people to their roots.	43	4.44	.502
N = 43				

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data shows the cultural, religious, and social significance of Maruni, a traditional dance of the Magar community. Participants generally agreed that Maruni is predominantly performed during the Tihar festival, as indicated by a mean score of

3.67. However, the relatively high standard deviation of 1.169 advocates some variability in responses, which may reflect regional or cultural differences in the timing of Maruni performances. Participants strongly agreed that Maruni reflects the religious beliefs of the Magar community, with a high mean score of 4.60 and a low standard deviation of 0.583, emphasizing its role as both a cultural and spiritual expression. Additionally, the data shows that the religious significance of Maruni is largely preserved today, with a mean score of 4.19, though the moderate standard deviation of 0.764 indicates some variability, possibly due to concerns about the erosion of traditions or differences in preservation efforts across regions.

Furthermore, the participants strongly agreed that watching Maruni during religious festivals helps individuals reconnect with their cultural roots. This sentiment is reflected in the high mean score of 4.44 and a low standard deviation of 0.502, highlighting the dance's significance in preserving cultural identity and continuity. In an era of rapid modernization, where traditional practices are at risk of disappearing, Maruni serves as more than just a performance—it stands as a living testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Magar community. Supporting this perspective, one respondent noted that the Maruni dance begins on the day of *Bhadra Purnima* and continues until *Dhanya Purnima*, lasting for two days.

Conclusion and Implications

The Maruni dance remains a vital cultural expression of the Magar community. The study focuses on its enduring significance in preserving the cultural and religious identity of the Magar people in Indrasarowar Rural Municipality. Despite modernization, the dance continues to hold profound spiritual and ritual importance, performed from Bhadra Purnima until Dhanya Purnima of Mangsir Purnima. While generational shifts and external cultural influences pose challenges, Maruni remains a crucial connection to heritage, social values, and communal traditions. Its adaptability is reflected in the diverse generational involvement and localized variations in its practice, with distinct segments such as *Jhyaure*, *Saran Maruni*, *Sorathi Garra*, and *Khyali* showcasing its intricate cultural layers. The tradition of male performers dressing as females further emphasizes its role in storytelling and immortal worship. However, concerns over declining youth participation highlight the need for cultural preservation initiatives, community engagement, and documentation efforts. Ensuring its continued

practice through awareness programs and generational transmission will be essential in sustaining Maruni as a living tradition that connects the Magar community to their historical and spiritual roots.

The preservation and promotion of Maruni dance have several important implications. Acknowledging Maruni as a key element of Magar cultural identity can help guide efforts to safeguard and celebrate this tradition both locally and nationally. Cultural initiatives and educational programs can use this recognition to foster a stronger sense of cultural pride among younger generations. Furthermore, the variation in Maruni's performance across festivals and events presents an opportunity to diversify its practice and increase its visibility. Event organizers and festival planners might consider featuring Maruni more prominently, not only during traditional occasions but also in a variety of cultural showcases, helping to expand its audience and appreciation. The evolving nature of Maruni's performances also opens up avenues for further research on how the dance can adapt to contemporary settings while maintaining its cultural and spiritual essence.

Limitations

The study is geographically limited to Indrasarowar Rural Municipality, which may not fully represent the diverse variations in Maruni dance practices observed across other Magar communities. The seasonal nature of Maruni dance performances presents a significant limitation, as the dance is closely associated with specific festivals—such as *Bhadra Purnima* and *Dhanya Purnima* celebrations—restricting opportunities for direct observation and data collection to these time periods. This dependency on seasonal events limits the scope of real-time observations, making it difficult to capture variations that might occur outside festival settings.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest. This study is conducted solely for academic and cultural investigation, free from any affiliations or influences that might affect its impartiality.

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