

Folk Poetic Rhetoricity in *Deudā* Performance

Narendra Bahadur Air, PhD, Associate Professor
Durgalaxmi Multiple Campus, Godawari-2, Attariya, Kailali, Far Western University,
Nepal
Email: narendra.psair@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the folk poetic rhetoricity of *Deudā*, a popular oral performance tradition of the Sudurpaschim and Karnali regions of Nepal. The primary aim is to examine how *Deudā* functions as a rhetorical art that entertains, educates, and persuades audiences within communal contexts. The research applies rhetorical theories of Aristotle, Kenneth Burke, and other scholars to analyze *Deudā* songs collected from live performances and published sources. The analysis reveals that *Deudā* employs a wide range of rhetorical devices including metaphor, imagery, satire, irony, wit, repetition, defense, and artistic invocation. Performers make use of both artistic proofs, such as ethos, pathos, and logos, and inartistic proofs, such as anecdotes, folk images, and local examples, to influence attitudes and actions. The dialogic and competitive nature of duet and group performances further amplifies the rhetorical force, allowing singers to address sensitive issues of caste, gender, politics, morality, and love in symbolic and often satirical ways. Findings suggest that even though most *Deudā* poets are non-literate, they demonstrate rhetorical ingenuity, intellectual versatility, and mastery of vernacular languages. Their performances generate cathartic, aesthetic, and ethical effects by blending poetry, music, and dance. In conclusion, *Deudā* emerges as more than a folk literary form; it is a dynamic rhetorical practice that communicates vernacular knowledge, critiques social evils, and strengthens cultural identity. The study highlights its enduring significance as a medium of persuasion where folk poetics and performance converge to shape communal consciousness.

Keywords: *Deudā* performance, folk poetics, rhetoric and persuasion, oral tradition

Article's information : Manuscript received : 2025/05/10, Date of review : 2025/07/25, Date of manuscript acceptance 2025/08/25 Publisher : Mahandra Moranga Adrsh Multiple Campus, Biratnagar
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.3126/medha.v8i1.85082>
Homepage : <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/medha> Copy right (c) 2025 @ Medha Journal
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons CC BY-NC License.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Introduction

Deudā is one of the most vibrant folk song traditions of Nepal, widely performed in the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces and deeply rooted in the cultural practices of the Khas community. It is sung both privately, as an individual expression, and publicly, as a communal performance accompanied by dance. Whether performed at festivals, fairs, weddings, or religious and social gatherings, *Deudā* has long served as a medium for cultural preservation, recreation, and moral instruction. Beyond entertainment, it functions as a means of expressing emotions, experiences, vernacular knowledge, and social critique, thus reflecting the lived realities of everyday folk life.

Scholars have observed that *Deudā* possesses both simplicity and sophistication in its form. Typically composed in couplets with end rhyme and distinct folk rhythm, each line carries fourteen to sixteen syllables. While the first line often establishes rhythm and rhyme rather than meaning, the second usually conveys the substantive message (Upadhyay, 2016). Yet, skilled poets frequently align both lines to produce unified meaning. As Joshi (2011) notes, *Deudā* embodies the raw outpouring of human feelings in their most unrefined state, yet it is not devoid of artistic beauty. This balance of direct expression and subtle artistry is central to its enduring appeal.

Although earlier studies have described the form, rhythm, and cultural role of *Deudā*, less attention has been given to its rhetorical dimension. In practice, *Deudā* is not only a song but also a persuasive art. Through metaphors, imagery, satire, irony, wit, defense, and repetition, performers influence attitudes, critique social injustices, and foster communal values. Duet and group performances often take the form of dialogic exchanges, where symbolic language and verbal contestation address sensitive issues such as caste, gender, politics, morality, and love. These elements reveal that *Deudā* is a rhetorical act that mobilizes both artistic proofs (ethos, pathos, and logos) and inartistic proofs (examples, anecdotes, and folk knowledge) in performance.

The purpose of this article is to explore the folk poetic rhetoric in *Deudā* performance, focusing on how its linguistic and performative elements operate as persuasive tools. As Baral and Paudyal (2025) note, “*Folklore is a form of rhetorical communication and has a persuasive dimension to a larger extent*” (p. 69). Their observation highlights that folklore, beyond being a cultural expression, inherently functions as a medium of persuasion, shaping attitudes, beliefs, and social interactions. Drawing on the rhetorical frameworks of Aristotle, Kenneth Burke, and others, the discussion highlights how *Deudā* integrates folk poetics and rhetoric to convey meaning, inspire reflection, and strengthen cultural identity. The article first outlines the

cultural and structural features of *Deudā*, then analyzes the rhetorical devices and strategies employed in performance, and finally situates these within broader theories of rhetoric and oral tradition. By doing so, it underscores the significance of *Deudā* as a dynamic cultural practice where folk poetry and rhetorical artistry converge.

Methodology

The research adopted an ethnographic research design to investigate the folk poetic rhetoricity of *Deudā*. It employed qualitative research principles grounded in textual and performance analysis. The focus is on understanding the rhetorical strategies embedded in *Deudā* songs and performances within their cultural contexts. Since *Deudā* is primarily an oral and performative tradition, the research emphasizes interpretive analysis, drawing insights from performance studies, folklore, and rhetorical theory.

The data were derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data consisted of transcribed *Deudā* songs collected from live performances observed during cultural festivals, fairs, and community gatherings in the Sudurpaschim province. In addition, some performances were accessed through audio and video recordings provided by local performers and cultural organizations. Data collection methods included telephonic and in-person interviews, personal observations, and focus group discussions. Secondary sources included published anthologies of *Deudā* songs, folkloric studies, and critical works by scholars.

The analysis was informed by classical and modern rhetorical theories, particularly Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos, and Kenneth Burke's notion of rhetoric as symbolic action. The study also incorporated insights from performance studies to account for the role of gestures, voice, and audience interaction in shaping rhetorical effects. Each song or performance excerpt was examined for its use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, imagery, irony, satire, repetition, wit, and defense, as well as its application of artistic and inartistic proofs.

The research proceeded in three stages. First, a selection of representative *Deudā* songs and performances was compiled and transcribed. Second, these texts were coded thematically to identify recurring rhetorical devices and strategies. Third, the findings were interpreted in relation to rhetorical theory, highlighting how *Deudā* performances function as acts of persuasion within communal and cultural contexts. Throughout this process, emphasis was placed on the interplay between poetic form, performance dynamics, and rhetorical effect.

As the study deals with publicly performed cultural practices, ethical approval was not required. However, due acknowledgment was given to performers and cultural sources wherever their contributions were cited. Care was also taken to represent the songs respectfully, preserving their cultural meanings while interpreting them through rhetorical frameworks.

Results and Discussion

Deudā embodies folk poetic rhetoricity through its persuasive methods. Listening to and observing performances is not only entertaining but also didactic, demonstrating the rhetorical effects of sound, rhythm, and music. Singers use couplets to shape attitudes and inspire audiences to action. As Burke (1969) explains, rhetoric is “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (p. 41). In this sense, words motivate audiences toward dispositions that guide their behavior. For example, the following *Deudā* verse illustrates how persuasion functions:

*dhan eutā sādhan mātra, dhan sādya haina / pāisāle dhukuti bharne, purṇ
sukhi chhaina*

(Balayar, 1988, p. 158)

(Wealth serves as a means rather than an ultimate goal, and those who hoard it in vaults seldom appear truly content.)

Here, the speaker is not merely informing listeners but urging them to embrace contentment by recognizing that money is a means, not the ultimate source of happiness. The song persuades audiences to cultivate satisfaction, which is portrayed as the true path to joy. Burke (1969) further notes that rhetoric is “rooted in an essential function of language itself ... the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (p. 43). This definition underscores how *Deudā* exemplifies the inseparable link between rhetoric, language, symbols, and human experience.

Deudā songs metaphorically and symbolically reflect human nature, shaping audience attitudes and motivating action. Worthen (2010) explains that “metaphor is rhetorical, privileging certain elements of likeness ... and shape[s] attitudes about writing and performance” (p. 8). In *Deudā*, metaphoric expressions embody the perspectives of the performers. The following duet illustrates rhetorical defense through symbolic imagery:

Singer A: *uinyā hajāriki mālā, batuwā dhāgāmā / bhābinile ke lekheho, yai merā*

bhāgamā

(I weaved the garland of marigold flowers in a thread. What has my destiny written on my forehead?)

Singer B: *hausale jodyāki bāuli, kasā kurā addā / yai merā karmale hoki, budā phelā paddā*

(I have joined my arms in pleasure; why do you talk in a sorrowful mood? I must be content with old company; is this my bad fortune?)

When the singer B calls A “old,” he responds out of wounded pride:

Singer A: *gāban halleri khello, nado katthiniba? / ucchā ucchā thāra khoddi, nicchā bassiniba?*

(Your petticoat seems loosely worn; will you not tie it tighter? You wish to sit higher, yet must perch lower.)

The singer B replies metaphorically, exposing his limited caste privilege:

Singer B: *kyā hapkāunchhai dādi bāja, terā basaiki nai / tersoi tokhi tersoi makhi, thādo*

kasaikhi nai

(I cannot be under your control; rebuke is meaningless. The laces binding us are equal, though not upright.)

Here, the singer B highlights caste inequality: although neither belongs to an untouchable caste, the singer lacks the sacred thread (*Janeu*) reserved for higher castes. Her metaphor exposes social contradiction while defending her dignity. Defense, as Mille (1882) notes, often relies on conciliation and modesty, though in *Deudā* it is expressed with firmness and symbolic sharpness. Thus, defense in *Deudā* becomes a rhetorical technique of persuasion, employing symbolic and conciliatory language while simultaneously challenging social hierarchies.

In public *Deudā* performances, oral poets often employ defense as a rhetorical tool. Audiences are particularly persuaded when singers exchange metaphorical attacks and defensive responses, as in the following dialogue:

Man: *rātabhari ballasita, sāiāyo bāiāyo / rātbhari ballako pālo, byānnala gāi āyo*
(All night I plowed the field with the ox; its turn ended with dawn, and now the cow has come in the morning.)

Woman: *herihela bujhihela, nikkari rāihela / gāiko gāuta shuddha hunchha, ek sudki khāihela*

(Look closely, understand, and discern with care. The urine of the cow is held sacred; take a sip of it.)

This exchange reflects a woman singer's defense against a satirical attack from a man representing the so-called higher caste. The man metaphorically likens her husband to an ox and her to a cow, implying subjugation. In response, she turns the metaphor against him, asserting that if he considers her a cow, he should then drink her urine, which is regarded as sacred in Hindu practice. Her rhetorical defense not only subverts the insult but also exposes the contradictions within caste-based prejudice, demonstrating the power of metaphor as a persuasive strategy in *Deudā*.

In group *Deudā* performances, lead singers employ various rhetorical strategies that elicit appreciation and admiration from large audiences. Oral poets experiment with diverse techniques of persuasion while engaging in dance and song. As Joshi (2011) explains, drawing on Aristotle, rhetoric is “an art of finding available means of persuasion ... not about persuasion, but about finding ways of persuasion” (p. 14). Aristotle identified five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Invention helps rhetors identify arguments, which Aristotle associated with *kairos* (the context of an argument), *stasis* (the locus of an argument), and *pisties* (proofs, reasoning, or evidence). Arrangement refers to the effective organization of proofs, while style denotes sentence composition, language use, and rhetorical devices. Memory involves the retention of discourse, and delivery emphasizes voice, gesture, tempo, tone, and appearance. These rhetorical principles are clearly reflected in *Deudā* performances, where singers skillfully balance verbal artistry with embodied performance to maximize persuasive impact.

A rhetor's knowledge of context, venue, proofs, reasoning, and evidence enables effective persuasion. In *Deudā* performances, poets act as skilled rhetors by applying these tools to influence audiences. Their impact increases through the careful arrangement of proofs within the discourse. Verses composed in folk poetic language, enriched with rhetorical tropes, carry persuasive weight. The arguments emerge from the memory of lead singers who spontaneously create songs, while delivery through voice, gesture, tempo, tone, and appearance further enhances their effectiveness. Together, these elements captivate spectators and produce a cathartic experience.

Effective orators should embody moral character and intellectual integrity to persuade audiences. When rhetors maintain ethical standards in personal and social life, they are more likely to be trusted. Aristotle (2008) emphasizes that persuasion relies on three capacities: “(1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions i. e. to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited” (p. 11). Rhetors who combine logical reasoning with insight into human character and emotions

gain influence over their audiences. In this sense, *Deudā* poets persuade effectively by reasoning logically, recognizing human character and virtue, and responding to audience emotions with precision. Joshi (2011) similarly affirms that *Deudā* is “rhetorically extremely persuasive as it involves arguments which are supported with inartistic proofs like examples, illustrations and forensic evidences, and artistic proofs that consist of ethos - ethical proofs, pathos - emotional proofs, and logos - logical proofs” (p. 14). Accordingly, *Deudā* as a folk poetic art persuades audiences by integrating both inartistic proofs - examples, illustrations, and evidence - and artistic proofs - ethical, logical, and emotional appeals - during live performance.

A rhetor must be a competent judge of virtue and moral character, possess knowledge of emotions, and demonstrate strong reasoning and logic. In *Deudā* performances, persuasive power arises from the careful ordering of proofs, with the credibility of the lead singer playing a central role. The following verse illustrates ethical and emotional proofs:

rāmāle chinekā dhārā, pāni khāijā Sitā / man bhanchha māitamai basū, karma bhanchha bidā

(O Sita, as you pass, drink from the tap built by Ram. My heart longs to stay in my parental home, yet destiny binds me to live with my husband after marriage.)

Here, the singer voices the plight of a daughter obliged to leave her parental home after marriage, despite her personal longing. By alluding to the legendary couple Ram and Sita from the *Ramayana*, the verse highlights the inevitability of marital duty. Just as Sita accompanied Ram in exile, the speaker acknowledges her own obligation to share life with her husband under patriarchal norms.

Rhetorically, this song demonstrates a fusion of *ethos* and *pathos*. The credible voice of the married daughter conveys ethical proof, while her emotional longing and resignation reflect pathos. Finnegan (1977) observes that “the emotional rapport built up by the performer with his audience can also play an important part” (p. 123). This suggests that singers are able to capture the hearts of their audiences by cultivating emotional connection during live public performances. Literary devices such as allusion, personification, and imagery reinforce these appeals: the heart and fate are personified, while symbols like the tap and water evoke everyday reality. Ram and Sita symbolize arranged marriage and wifely devotion in Hindu culture, underscoring the patriarchal expectations binding women. When a singer successfully blends ethical, emotional, and logical appeals in this way, she exemplifies the qualities of a skilled rhetorician.

The dialogic exchanges in *Deudā* often rely on logical questioning and spontaneous responses, which captivate both co-performers and audiences. The following verses illustrate the logical ingenuity of folk singers:

A: *kaikhāi ho jethādāi bhannu, kaikhāi ho bhāu bhannu? / kaikhāi ho kṅgāla bhannu, kaikhāi*

ho sāhu bhannu?

(Whom should we honor as the elder brother, and whom as the younger? Who deserves to be called a pauper, and who a pawnbroker?)

B: *gyandine jethā dāi huna, gyān sunnyā bhāu huna / āla ti kṅgāla huna, mehanati sāhu huna*

(He who shares knowledge is the elder brother, and he who learns is the younger. The idle are paupers, but the diligent are the true owners.)

The initial question perplexes the audience because it requires more than literal definitions; it calls for deeper, pragmatic interpretation. The rival singer's immediate reply persuades listeners by reframing kinship and social roles through knowledge and effort rather than status or wealth. In this logic, those who share wisdom assume seniority, while those who follow become juniors; similarly, laziness is equated with poverty, and diligence with ownership. Such dialogic reasoning demonstrates the logical power of *Deudā* singers and their ability to engage audiences with wit, spontaneity, and practical wisdom.

Rhetoric, as a serious art, carries the responsibility of bringing knowledge into practice by linking imagination with reason. Bacon, as cited in Burke (1969), observes that “the duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will” (p. 80). For Bacon, rhetoric is to imagination what logic is to understanding: it applies reason in ways that stir desire and influence the will. This interplay of reason and imagination is evident in the following verse:

ki tele wadakhi āijāu, ki tele chissijāu / ekai jiu parāni hoijāu, ragata missijāu
(If only the mountain slope called Tele were nearer, or its winds were cool. If only our souls were united in one body and our blood intertwined.)

Here, the singer fuses reason with imagination to express the longing for both physical and spiritual unity with a loved one. Such verses illustrate how imaginative rhetoric can move audiences more powerfully than logic alone. When imagination intertwines with reality, audiences are deeply affected. Longinus, as cited in Burke (1969), similarly asserts: “The best use of imagination in rhetoric is to convince the audience of the reality and truth of the speaker's assertions ... imagination persuades by going beyond mere argument. When combined with argument, it not only convinces the audience, it

positively masters them” (p. 79). The experienced *Deudā* poets blend argument with lofty imagination to persuade audiences. By invoking past, present, and future simultaneously - imitating past events, portraying the present, and envisioning the future - their rhetoric captivates listeners and generates a transformative, persuasive effect.

Artistic invocation is a common rhetorical device in *Deudā*. In poetic terms, it functions as an apostrophe, where the poet addresses a personified object, an absent person, the dead, or even an abstract idea as if present. The following verse is one of the example containing the poetic invocation:

chinyākā chautāri māthi, sāiko nāu lekkihā / algā dādā niccho hoijā, sāiko mukh dhekkijā

(The name of my beloved is etched upon the travelers’ rest beneath the tree. Oh, may the towering hills sink low so I can behold the face of my dear husband!)

Here, the poet symbolically converses with both a lover and the mountain in his absence. Through such invocations, *Deudā* singers address absent persons, personified objects, or abstract ideas, employing indirect and symbolic expression. This device lends the songs philosophical depth while enhancing their aesthetic and emotional appeal.

The persuasiveness of an orator is enhanced by mastery of language, particularly its literariness, expressive vocabulary, and imagery. *Deudā* employs highly figurative and persuasive vernacular language that encourages audiences to participate and enjoy the performance. Bandhu (2001) claims, “The folks may be uneducated but they are seldom unwise” (p.320). The songs draw on linguistic varieties spoken across Sudurpaschim and Madhyapaschim provinces of Nepal. While poets often use the dialect of their own district, they frequently switch to other varieties to achieve rhyme or other artistic effects. Audiences feel more engaged and delighted when the performance reflects their local speech. As Burke (1969) explains, “You persuade a man only in so far as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his.” (p. 55). Cathcart (1991) states that “rhetoric is used...to refer to a communicator’s intentional use of language, and other symbols to influence or persuade selected receivers to act, believe, or feel” (p. 2). Effective persuasion, therefore, requires a shared vocabulary, language, gestures, images, and beliefs that foster identification between speaker and audience.

The persuasiveness of an orator depends greatly on their command of language, particularly its literariness, expressive vocabulary, and imagery. In this regard, *Deudā* demonstrates the power of vernacular speech, employing highly figurative and persuasive language that invites audiences to participate and enjoy the performance. As

Bandhu (2001) observes, “The folks may be uneducated but they are seldom unwise” (p. 320), emphasizing that even those without formal education possess wisdom that resonates with poetic and rhetorical expression. *Deudā* songs draw on the linguistic diversity of the Sudurpaschim and Madhyapaschim provinces of Nepal. While poets often rely on their own district’s dialect, they frequently switch to other varieties to achieve rhyme or stylistic beauty. This practice enables audiences to feel more connected and entertained when they hear their own local speech represented. Burke (1969) explains this dynamic by stating, “You persuade a man only in so far as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (p. 55). His point underscores the idea that persuasion is effective only when there is identification between the speaker and the audience. Similarly, Cathcart (1991) argues that “rhetoric is used...to refer to a communicator’s intentional use of language, and other symbols to influence or persuade selected receivers to act, believe, or feel” (p. 2). Together, these perspectives illustrate that effective persuasion requires a shared vocabulary, symbols, and beliefs through which the audience can see their own identities reflected.

In live performances, *Deudā* poets must carefully compose their verses in response to contextual factors and the nature of participants. Performances vary across festivals, fairs, marriage ceremonies, and other social occasions. As Burke (1969) notes, “An act of persuasion is affected by the character of the scene in which it takes place and of the agents to whom it is addressed. The same rhetorical act could vary in its effectiveness, according to shifts in the situation or in the attitude of audiences” (p. 62). Thus, persuasion is shaped both by the immediate context and the disposition of the audience.

Burke also emphasizes rhetoric’s role in naming or defining situations, a concept echoed by Goffman (1956), who argues that individuals entering a social encounter must “define the situation” to establish appropriate roles: “Information about the individual helps to define the situation” (p. 1). In this sense, *Deudā* singers must be aware of the geographical, historical, and cultural backgrounds of their communities to ensure meaningful communication and avoid misinterpretation. The following performance illustrates how context and interpretation shape persuasion:

First Singer: *sāiki niuti yo parāni, sudisāra sukyo / korāla gādako māchho,*
Dadeldhurā

pugyo

(I endured deep suffering for the love of my lord. The fish from the Koral River was carried to Dadeldhura.)

Second Singer: *dhap chhaina pitalo chhaina, yai khela khellyāko / pet bhokai mukhaino*

makai, chauki kolu pellyāko

(These performers fail to keep proper rhythm and steps. The man who went to the oil-press at Chauki held a maize kernel in his mouth, yet his stomach remained empty.)

The first verse metaphorically targeted a man from Dadeldhura, accused of immorality after committing suicide in Doti, whose body was brought back for postmortem. The rival poet generalized this disgrace to all people of Dadeldhura, including the singer himself. Initially confused, the singer consulted relatives in the performance and learned that the rival verse referred to a notorious adultery case in Chauki, Doti. In this incident, a husband, upon discovering his wife's affair with a plowman while he was away in India, feigned blindness to collect evidence. Consumed by jealousy, he eventually killed both lovers, mutilating the paramour in the process. This exchange demonstrates how *Deudā* rhetoric is deeply embedded in local histories and cultural memory. Singers rely on contextual knowledge and shared experiences to persuade their audiences, with meaning negotiated collectively through performance.

Satire, irony, and mockery often function as powerful rhetorical devices in *Deudā* performances, engaging audiences by provoking thought and amusement. Singers frequently deliver messages indirectly and ironically, which stimulates the spectators' interpretive faculties. The following verses illustrate this satirical intent:

Man: *bijuli chhamkana lāgi, binna bādāl sarka / ek najar lāihelupana, dhāi wadi ta pharka*

(Lightning strikes in the cloudless sky. Let me behold your visage; please, turn and face me.)

Woman: *koi terā samjhāunyā chhanki, sadhaiko chhādā hai? / himmat chha mukhaikhi āijā,*

kyā herchhai tādāhai

(Are you truly an incorrigible rogue, or has no one ever corrected you? If you are brave, come and speak before me; why hide behind a distant stare?)

Here, the male singer mocks the woman, suggesting she lacks the caliber to defend herself in *Deudā*. Recognizing the satire, she counters forcefully, branding him a rogue and challenging him to confront her directly. Such ironic exchanges intensify the performance and sustain audience engagement.

Equally significant is the use of wit and humor, which combine intelligence, inventiveness, and comic expression. Folk wit, as seen in the verses below, reflects communal wisdom and rhetorical sharpness:

bhārimā ukālo thulo, dukkhaki rāt thuli / addāmā dhanpāisā thulo, sabhāmi bāt thuli

(When burdened, the uphill path seems harder, and for those in sorrow, nights feel prolonged. In the courtroom wealth dominates, but in assemblies, reasoned words prevail.)

These witty lines embody folk knowledge that historically guided non-literate audiences. The song teaches that burdens make progress arduous, much like responsibilities hinder advancement. It also reflects social realities: justice often favors wealth in court, while reasoned speech commands respect in assemblies. By weaving humor with wisdom, *Deudā* singers both entertain and educate their audiences.

In both its lyrical and duet forms, *Deudā* has emerged as a rhetorical genre of folklore and a vital medium of communication for non-literate communities to express their emotions and lived experiences. As Mille (1882) observes, “An orator may be truly great by force of language, reason, and feeling” (p. 510). Similarly, oral poets in *Deudā* persuade through the combined force of words, logic, and emotion. The feelings conveyed in these performances often resonate deeply with audiences, as illustrated in the following verse:

balla bhayā jotānāhū, gāi bhayā dunāhū / manlāgdo gharbāri bhayā, yati kyāi runā hū

(If it were an ox, I would plow the field; if it were a cow, I would milk it. If only my family life were happy, I would not feel so wretched.)

Here, the singer laments an unhappy family life, using metaphorical comparisons to cattle to highlight human suffering. The verse stirs empathy among audiences, especially those facing similar domestic struggles. It also implies that family miscreants not only disrupt harmony but diminish their own worth, living lives valued less than cattle in both household and society. Through such emotional appeals, *Deudā* poignantly integrates rhetoric with human experience.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Deudā* performance reveals that it functions as a rich rhetorical genre of folklore, intricately blending poetic expression, cultural tradition, and persuasive artistry. Through satire, irony, wit, humor, metaphor, imagination, and defense, *Deudā* singers engage their audiences both emotionally and intellectually, ensuring the continuity of communal wisdom and cultural identity. The lyrical and dialogic structures of *Deudā* allow for spontaneous interaction, where persuasion arises

not only from artistic form but also from contextual knowledge, shared histories, and local dialects.

Applying classical rhetorical frameworks - ethos, pathos, and logos - alongside folk wisdom, *Deudā* demonstrates how non-literate communities utilize oral artistry as a powerful communicative tool. The ethos of the performers is rooted in their credibility and moral standing, the pathos in their capacity to evoke emotions of joy, sorrow, and humor, and the logos in their logical reasoning expressed through dialogic exchanges and proverbial wit. The songs also highlight how persuasion is shaped by context, performance settings, and cultural memory, reflecting Burke's notion that rhetoric is inseparable from the scene and audience.

Ultimately, *Deudā* as a folk poetic performance embodies a vibrant mode of social discourse that preserves cultural values, critiques social injustices, and entertains with rhetorical elegance. Its enduring rhetorical power lies in its ability to merge language, music, and performance into a dynamic art form that educates, persuades, and unites communities.

Future research should explore the comparative rhetorical strategies of *Deudā* with other South Asian folk traditions to broaden understanding of oral rhetoric across cultures. Efforts should also be made to document, archive, and digitally preserve *Deudā* performances, as modernization and migration threaten the survival of oral traditions. Educational institutions and cultural organizations may integrate *Deudā* into curricula and community programs to highlight its literary, rhetorical, and cultural significance. Finally, interdisciplinary research combining folklore, communication studies, and rhetoric can further illuminate how *Deudā* contributes to shaping social values and sustaining collective identity in contemporary Nepal.

References

- Aristotle (2008). *The art of rhetoric* (W. Rhys Roberts, Trans.). Megaphone eBooks.
http://www.wendelberger.com/downloads/Aristotle_Rhetoric.pdf
- Balayer, B. B. (1988). *Belu: A lyric verse*. Bishnu Pustak Bhandar.
- Bandhu, C.M. (2001). *Nepali Lok Sahitya*. Ekta Books.
- Baral, R. K., & Paudyal, M. (2025). Rhetoric of some Nepali folklores and their changing modes of expressions. *The Batuk: A Peer-Reviewed Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 11(1), 68–85. <https://doi.org/10.3126/batuk.v1i1.74444>
- Burke, K. (1969). *A rhetoric of motives*. University of California Press.
- Cathcart, R.S. (1991). *Post-communication: Rhetorical analysis and evaluation*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Finnegan, R. (1977). *Oral poetry: Its nature, significance and social context*. Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. University of Edinburgh.
- Joshi, A. R. (2011). *Deuda songs: Poetry and performance*. Molung Foundation.
- Mille, J. D. (1882). *The elements of rhetoric*. Harper and Brothers.
- Upadhyay, D. R. (2016). *Deudā: A carnivalesque poetry of performance* (Doctoral dissertation, Kumaun University).
- Worthen, W. B. (2010). *Drama: Between poetry and performance*. Wiley-Blackwell.