

Transformation of Deuda Song: Folk to Popular Culture

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Abstract

This research paper explicates the transformation of Deuda songs from folk culture to pop culture in terms of functions, patterns and purposes over the time. Along with rapid development of transportation, information technology, mass media and movements of people from rural to city specially after the restoration of democracy in Nepal, Deuda, a folk-dance song originated and played in all districts of the far western region and inclusively some areas of Mid-western Nepal, undertakes its journey from village to city. In towns, it enters into the domain of popular culture with recording, visualization and screening. Now, Deuda song has been changed in its patterns in order to draw the attention of larger audience with diverse back grounds. Deuda has not been changed in its physical form only, but it has gone through the changes of its purpose, function and role also. Originally, Deuda served primarily as a means of community bonding, cultural transmission, and local entertainment. But, in the realm of popular culture, Deuda has been sung for earing, entertainment and political propaganda. In this globalized time where the world has become a collective village, national boundaries have been blurred and people from the Deuda regions perform Deuda abroad to reconnect themselves with their origin and culture. In this light, Deuda plays the role of diasporic element also. The present research work exposes the ways folk performances has become popular with economic, social, political and cultural functions. It retraces changes in folk dances when performed in restaurants, bars, colleges along with festivals, locally and abroad.

Keywords: Deuda, Folk-culture, popular culture, diaspora, community, bonding, globalization.

Cite this paper

Shah, D. B. (2023). Transformation of Deuda Song: Folk to Popular Culture. *DEPAN*, 5(1), 27-32.

Introduction

Deuda refers to a traditional folk dance from Nepal's far west and some mid-west districts. It is a dynamic representation of local tradition and communal identity, deeply ingrained in the cultural customs of the Khas group. It's a community performance that takes place during festivals and social events. It features upbeat group dances to the beat of folk music performed on traditional instruments including drums and flutes.

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. As a living tradition, it not only serves as a means of cultural expression but also as a social event that strengthens communal ties and celebrates regional identity.

Barabara D. Millar writes that the indigenous community has the strong bond than the homogenous cultures. He writes "in relatively homogenous cultures, ethnicity is a more important distinction than race (217). Similarly, characterized by its circular dance formations, rhythmic movements, and communal singing, Deuda has historically served as a means of storytelling, social bonding, and cultural expression for the people of these remote hill districts. Chuda Mani Bandhu of the Nepal Academy attributes this to the distinct culture of the far west and implies that far-western residents preferred their own regional culture to the detriment of their integration into

the nation (127). Here, Bandhu characterizes the Deuda community as a distinct culture always getting scared on the loss of its originality. Its themes, ranging from love and daily life to historical events and social issues, have traditionally reflected the values, concerns, and experiences of these close-knit rural communities. However, in recent years, Deuda has undergone a significant transformation as it has gained recognition beyond its original geographical and cultural boundaries.



Figure:1 Deuda Battle Kailai (source: YouTube)

This picture shows Deuda, as a folk culture how it is danced and inherited by the people living in Deuda regions often reflecting the values, history and life style of Deuda Community.

The transformation of traditional folk music into popular culture forms has been a subject of significant scholarly interest, as evidenced by the work of ethnomusicologists like Bruno Nettl (1978). and Philip Bohlman (2002). These scholars have explored how folk music evolves over time, particularly in response to globalization and technological advancements. Nettl's work is especially relevant in understanding the historical context of such transformations, while Bohlman's research provides insights into how local musical traditions integrate into the global popular music landscape. This process of integration often involves a degree of cultural commodification, a theme thoroughly examined in his essays on popular music by Simon Frith (2007).

The role of technology in facilitating these transformations cannot be overstated, as argued by Mark Katz (2010). in his exploration of how recording technologies have reshaped musical traditions. This technological influence intersects with issues of cultural identity and place, topics central to Martin Stokes' (1994) work on the relationship between music, ethnicity, and identity. Moreover, Arjun Appadurai's (1996) theories on cultural globalization provide a broader framework for understanding how local musical traditions like deuda songs interact with global pop culture trends. These perspectives collectively suggest that the transformation of deuda songs from folk to pop culture is likely part of a larger global phenomenon, involving complex interplays between tradition, technology, identity, and market forces.

With the pace of time, Deuda transforms from a localized folk tradition to an element of popular culture in Nepal. Deuda is changed in terms its purpose, performance patterns, and cultural significance. I have explored how modernization, media exposure, and changing societal dynamics have reshaped this ancient art form. This study aims to shed light on the complex interplay between tradition and innovation, and the challenges and opportunities that arise when a deeply rooted folk practice enters the realm of popular culture.

In its traditional form, Deuda has been a cornerstone of folk culture in Nepal's far western regions for generations. Typically performed in a circular formation, participants join hands or link arms, moving in a rhythmic, swaying motion while singing. The songs are often performed without instrumental accompaniment, relying solely on the collective voices of the participants. This communal nature of Deuda underscores its primary purpose as a means of social bonding, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity among community members.



Figure:2 Meri Champa (Source: YouTube)

The figure:2 sheds lights on transition of Deuda from a localized folk practice to an element of popular culture has had significant impacts on its original communities in far western Nepal. On one hand, the increased visibility and recognition of Deuda have instilled a sense of pride among many community members, reinforcing their cultural identity on a national stage. This newfound appreciation has, in some cases, led to renewed interest in Deuda among younger generations who might otherwise have dismissed it as outdated. The economic opportunities arising from Deuda's popularity, such as performances at cultural events or for tourists, have provided new income sources for some practitioners, potentially helping to sustain the tradition.

The themes of traditional Deuda songs span a wide range of topics deeply rooted in the local context. Love songs, known as 'prem geet', are common, often narrating tales of romantic longing or describing the beauty of a beloved. Other songs recount historical events, myths, and legends specific to the region, serving as an oral history that preserves and transmits cultural knowledge across generations. Social commentary is another significant aspect of Deuda, with songs addressing issues relevant to the community, such as marriage customs, seasonal celebrations, or challenges faced in daily rural life. The language used in these songs is typically the local dialect, further emphasizing Deuda's role in maintaining linguistic and cultural distinctiveness.

Discussion

A major transition in Nepal's musical landscape can be seen in the way Deuda songs have evolved from folk to pop culture, mirroring larger socioeconomic and technological shifts.

As Regmi notes, "The evolution of traditional Nepali music forms often mirrors the country's socio-political developments" (45). This observation aligns with your research, which ties the transformation of Deuda to Nepal's post-democracy era. The journey of Deuda from rural origins to urban popularity echoes similar transitions observed in other cultures. For instance, Connell and Gibson argue that "the urbanization of folk music often leads to its commercialization and integration into popular culture" (78). A process clearly evident in the case of Deuda. The multifaceted transformation of Deuda songs encompasses changes in form, function, and cultural significance. This research shows how Deuda has adapted to new performance contexts and audience expectations, a phenomenon that Appadurai might attribute to the "social life of things" in a globalized world (15). The shift in Deuda's purpose from community bonding to entertainment and even political propaganda reflects what Frith describes as the "industrialization of music" (12). where traditional forms are repurposed for modern consumption. Moreover, the role of Deuda in diasporic communities adds another layer to its evolving significance, exemplifying what Bhabha terms "cultural hybridity" in transnational contexts (211).

The economic and technological factors driving Deuda's popularization are crucial to understanding its transformation. As your research suggests, recording and visualization technologies have played a significant role in this process. This aligns with Katz's assertion that "recording technology fundamentally alters the nature of musical performance and reception" (10). Furthermore, the commercialization of Deuda reflects broader

trends in the global music industry. As Taylor argues, "The commodification of folk music often leads to tensions between authenticity and marketability" (156). Your exploration of how Deuda navigates these tensions in various performance settings – from festivals to restaurants – provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of cultural transformation in the age of globalization.

The transition of Deuda from a localized folk tradition to an element of popular culture began to accelerate in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, driven by several interconnected factors. The expansion of mass media, particularly radio and television, played a crucial role in exposing Deuda to wider audiences across Nepal. National broadcasting of folk music programs and cultural showcases brought Deuda out of its regional confines, introducing its unique rhythms and melodies to urban populations. Simultaneously, increased mobility and urbanization led to the migration of people from the far western regions to cities, bringing their cultural traditions with them and creating new contexts for Deuda performances.

This exposure to broader audiences coincided with a growing national interest in preserving and promoting Nepal's diverse cultural heritage. Cultural festivals, both within Nepal and internationally, began featuring Deuda performances, further elevating its profile. The tourism industry also played a role, as Deuda became marketed as an authentic cultural experience, leading to more stylized and condensed versions of performances tailored for tourists. Additionally, fusion artists and popular musicians began incorporating elements of Deuda into their work, creating hybrid forms that appealed to younger, urban audiences while maintaining a connection to traditional roots. These factors collectively contributed to Deuda's gradual integration into Nepal's popular culture landscape, extending its reach far beyond its original geographical and social boundaries.

Deuda's goals changed dramatically as it matured from a regional folk tradition to a part of popular culture. At first, Deuda was mostly used for local entertainment, cultural exchange, and community building. It was an integral part of social gatherings, festivals, and daily life in far western Nepal, with performances often spontaneously occurring during agricultural work or community events. The purpose was deeply rooted in maintaining social cohesion, preserving local history and values, and providing a creative outlet for communal expression.

Along with the popularity Deuda gained beyond its original context, its purposes shifted and expanded. In the realm of popular culture, Deuda has taken on new roles as a symbol of cultural identity, a tourist attraction, and a commercial entertainment product. It now serves as a representation of Nepal's cultural diversity on national and international stages, often showcased in cultural programs and festivals as a unique art form. The commercialization of Deuda has led to its use in advertising and media, where it's employed to evoke a sense of tradition or "Nepaliness." Additionally, Deuda has become a tool for cultural preservation, with organized efforts to document and teach the art form to younger generations who might otherwise lose connection with this aspect of their heritage. This shift from spontaneous community practice to deliberate preservation and promotion marks a significant change in Deuda's cultural purpose. The popularization of Deuda has led to notable changes in its performance patterns.

Traditionally, Deuda was performed in a circular formation, with participants holding hands or linking arms, moving in a rhythmic sway while singing. These performances were often spontaneous, lengthy, and deeply participatory, with members of the community freely joining in. The songs were typically performed without instrumental accompaniment, relying solely on the collective voices of the participants. The setting was usually informal - village squares, fields, or homes - reflecting its integration into daily life.

As Deuda entered the realm of popular culture, its performance patterns adapted to new contexts and audiences. Now, Deuda is often presented on stages at cultural shows, festivals, and tourist events, shifting from a participatory activity to a more formal, presentational performance. The duration of performances has generally shortened to accommodate modern attention spans and event schedules. Instrumental accompaniment, sometimes including modern instruments, has been introduced in some adaptations. The circular formation, while still maintained in many cases, is sometimes modified for stage presentations. Additionally, costume elements have become more standardized and elaborate, designed to visually represent 'traditional' culture to outside audiences. These changes reflect a move from Deuda as a living, evolving community practice to a more formalized, stylized representation of cultural heritage.

The popularity of Deuda song in popular culture has also brought challenges to the original culture. The

standardization and commercialization of Deuda for wider audiences have led to concerns about the loss of authenticity and local variations. As Deuda is adapted for stage performances and media presentations, some of the spontaneity and community participation that were central to its traditional practice are diminished. There's a risk that the deeper cultural meanings and social functions of Deuda may be overshadowed by its entertainment value. Moreover, the emphasis on more polished, professional performances can create a divide between 'authentic' village practices and popularized versions, potentially marginalizing traditional practitioners who don't conform to new expectations. This tension between preservation and evolution has sparked debates within communities about how to maintain the essence of Deuda while allowing it to thrive in contemporary contexts.

The transition of Deuda from a localized folk tradition to an element of popular culture holds profound cultural significance for Nepal as a whole. This shift represents a broader trend of cultural exchange between rural and urban areas, highlighting the dynamic nature of national identity in a rapidly modernizing society. As Deuda gains recognition beyond its original context, it serves as a bridge between Nepal's diverse regional cultures, contributing to a more inclusive and multifaceted national cultural narrative. This process of incorporation into mainstream culture also reflects the country's efforts to preserve and celebrate its intangible cultural heritage in the face of globalization, demonstrating how traditional art forms can remain relevant and vibrant in contemporary settings.

However, the popularization of Deuda also raises important questions about cultural authenticity and representation. As it is adapted for wider audiences, there is an ongoing negotiation between maintaining the integrity of the tradition and making it accessible to those outside its original community. This balancing act is emblematic of the challenges faced by many traditional art forms in the modern world. The way Deuda navigates this transition could set a precedent for how other local traditions are treated in the national cultural landscape. Moreover, the commercialization of Deuda opens up discussions about the commodification of culture and the potential for cultural appropriation, prompting reflections on who benefits from and who controls the representation of traditional art forms in popular media and tourism contexts.

Finding

The development of Deuda in Nepal from a regional folk tradition to a component of popular culture illustrates the intricate and varied process of cultural change. Deuda's mission, performance style, and cultural relevance have all undergone major modifications as a result of this shift, which has been fueled by elements like media exposure, urbanization, and cultural preservation initiatives.

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While originally serving as a means of community bonding and local expression in far western Nepal, Deuda now functions as a symbol of national cultural identity, a tourist attraction, and a commercialized art form. These changes have brought both opportunities and challenges: increased recognition and potential economic benefits are balanced against concerns about authenticity and the loss of traditional practices. The impact on original communities has been mixed, with renewed interest and pride in some cases, but also fears of cultural dilution and marginalization of traditional practitioners. The popularization of Deuda reflects broader trends in Nepal's cultural landscape, highlighting the tension between preservation and evolution of traditional art forms in a modernizing society. As Deuda continues to navigate this transition, it serves as a compelling case study of how folk traditions can adapt and persist in the face of changing social, economic, and cultural contexts. The future of Deuda will likely depend on finding a balance between maintaining its cultural essence and embracing new forms of expression and appreciation, a challenge that resonates with many traditional art forms worldwide in the 21st century.

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"Meri Champa" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9vVVvH7c6Y&t=6s>