

Thado Bhaka: A Source of Social Intercourse

Yam Bahadur Dura^{1*} and Binod Neupane²

¹Madan Bhandari Memorial College, Kathmandu

²Marsyangdi Multiple Campus, Lamjung

(*corresponding: ybdura@gmail.com)

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Abstract

Thado bhaka is one of the popular genres of folk songs in the Gandaki region. The territory of the Gandaki region is extended from Budhigandaki in the east to Kaligandaki in the west. Thado bhaka is the diminishing musical genre. The habitual and experienced performers of thado bhaka are dying out. These days a handful of people from the old and new generations are capable of performing it. This article aims at introducing thado bhaka connecting it to its history, nature, and style. Observation, interview and secondary sources were used to collect information for this study. It is found that thado bhaka has a typical tune, language, style and meaning and become an identity of the Dura people of the Gandaki region. However, the study has pointed out some influences on its originality because of the growing wave of modernisation, especially after the development of electronic instruments.

Keywords: Thado bhaka, diminishing musical genre, folk culture, Gandaki region, oral tradition.

Introduction

Nepal is famous for ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. Different ethnic groups have their own cultural identity and tradition. People living in various geographical locations have developed their culture and arts which adds the beauty of Nepal and known in the globe. A particular culture can have the power to tie various ethnic groups belonging to different geographical locations and linguistic identities (Daskalaki, 2010). As Tylor (1887) states culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society", *thado bhaka* has been rising as an emerging musical art among the people of Gandaki region, more specifically in Dura community of Lamjung district. Despite its popularity, *thado bhaka* and its cultural background is

a less researched area. Thus, this article aims to illustrate how *thado bhaka*, a typical Nepali folk song, connects people socially and culturally within the community and between different communities. Moreover, it examines critically the impact of modernisation on *thado bhaka* based on my observation as a participant observer and some information conversation with the people of the Dura community.

There is no exact timeline about when *thado bhaka* came into existence. Thapa (2030 BS) claims that Bauddha Singh Gurung migrated from Dhaulagiri (no exact location of Dhualagiri has been found where did he come from) to Hansapur (Kaski) in 1914 BS. Thapa further said that he came up with *thado bhaka* along with him, and Motilal Gurung, a folk song lover of the same village, well-picked up this song. He sang it in *Jatras* (*Shivaratri* and *Fagupurnima*), which takes place at the bank of Madi River, popularly known as Karputar. Motilal Gurung transmitted this popular musical genre to Deu Bahadur Dura, a legendary figure of *thado bhaka* (Thapa, 2030, pp. 59-60). However, there is limited literature to verify this statement and this can be a one-sided description of the origin of *thado bhaka* until and unless it is verified from other independent sources. Even so, various literature ensured that Deu Bahadur Dura and his singing mate Pancha Subba Gurung, the famous singer of *thado bhaka* popularised it a lot. The name and fame of *thado bhaka* spread in such a way that it is largely performed in Lamjung, Tahanun, Kaski, and Gorkha. They sing it with their local variations in the tunes and singing patterns of the song. *Thado bhaka* can be performed anywhere and anytime, especially in *Jatras*, social gatherings, *parma* (a tradition of labor exchange), religious rituals, and so on.

Thado bhaka is known by other names as well such as *Karputare bhaka*, and *Lamjunge bhaka*. Because this *bhaka* is popular and well-performed mostly in the Dura community, it is also recognised as *Dura bhaka* (Thapa, 2030 BS, p.59). In reality, *Dura bhaka* is largely popular in Dura community even today. However, it doesn't mean that it is not popular in other communities, its popularity has been extended in most of the ethnic communities of the Gandaki region. It is not only performed for entertainment in these communities but also offers an opportunity of a source of social intercourse which has promoted social harmony and interrelationship.

Tune Family

The tune family of *thado bhaka* is yet to be determined. However, some experts (Thapa, 2030 BS; Khanal, 2077 BS) believe that it is one of the members of a large family of songs prevailing in the Gandaki and Dhaulagiri Regions. According to Chetan Karki (cited in Khanal, 2077 BS) *thado bhaka*, *aadhikhole bhaka*, and *salaijo bhaka* are from the same family. Similarly, *thado bhaka*, *salaijo bhaka*, *sunimaya bhaka* are from the same family (Thapa, 2030 BS, p. 63). *Thado bhaka* seems to have a brotherly connection with *Salaijo bhaka* (Krishna Gurung, personal communication, December 11, 2021). However, one shouldn't confuse *thado bhaka* with *thadi bhaka*. *Thadi bhaka* is one of the genres of *Deuda* (Lamichhane, 2067 BS, p. 113).

Style

It is found that *thado bhaka* is purely an oral tradition because folk songs are a part of oral tradition. Britannica (2020) states that typically, folk music, like folk literature, lives in oral tradition, and it is learned through hearing rather than reading. No written text is used while performing *thado bhaka*. It is an anti-phonical (conversational) kind of song, in which a male singer and a female singer exchange their emotions, feelings, experiences and ways of life in the form of question and answer through a long melodious singing. Mostly, the singers use images and metaphors instead of stating something directly. These images and metaphors reflect their simplicity, originality and organic creation. Thus, *thado bhaka* has preserved a cultural identity of typical Nepali folk songs.

By nature, it is not a solo performance. It needs at least two singers—one male and one female. They are supported by a sizable team of side singers and musical instrument players. *Madal*, *mujura* and handclapping are used as musical instruments. Once a male or female singer recites the song, then a team of side singers (male and female) starts singing with him or her, which creates a melodious musical environment, and it attracts a huge number of audiences to support the singers and side singers by dancing and singing together. They also crack jokes during the transitional periods of the performance. The audiences use exclamatory words like *sakyo*, *maryo*, along with hooting in enjoyment (Dura, 2075 BS).

If one transcribes the lines of oral texts of *thado bhaka*, then it appears to be couplets, and quadruplets in some situations. Most of the expressions are rhythmic. The beginning line is called *phed* (a root) and the ending line is called *tuppa* (a tip). Let see an instance:

माइत जाँदा कुरौनी पाहुर (a root)

गयो ब्यारे देउबहादुर लाहुर (a tip)

Meaning:

(*A daughter*) brings the cream of milk when she goes to the maternal home as a parcel
(root)

Maybe Deu Bahadur Dura went to abroad (a tip)

Generally, the first line (a root) of the song is used only for making it rhythmic. So, it may not contain a meaningful message in the majority of the cases. The second line (a tip) does have the central message. Singers can add some rhythmic lines in between the root and tip. However, only capable singers can do it.

Content

Thado bhaka covers everything under the sun. It includes all dimensions of human life - including but not limited to love, reunion, tragedy, war, hell, heaven, spirituality, famine, sorrow, joy, and whatnot. In the past, knowledgeable and skillful singers used to include various contexts of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The majority of the words used in *thado bhaka* performance represent rural life equipped with agricultural activities.

Literary Devices

Thado bhaka is famous for euphemism, and its basic characteristics are the use of decent language and politeness. No vulgar expression is used in it. A higher level of soberness can be found in the wording of oral texts (Dura, 2075 BS). This is an unwritten code of *thado bhaka*. Metaphors, similes, and other literary devices are heavily used in the course of singing. Idiomatic expressions also can be seen in *thado bhaka*. In a way, the function of *thado bhaka* performance can give a literary flavor to the audiences. For example:

आँप काटी कोया

अबदेखि दिनदिनै बुढो भयो मयाँ ।

(The singer expressed his old age feelings)

.....
लौरी टेकौं पैयें

लमजुडको भेडीखर्के मै हुँ

(The singer introduced himself with images)

(दीर्घराज अधिकारी “भेडीखर्के साहिलो”, साउन १८, २०७३)

सुन्दैमा आको भन्थे बुढापाका आगो ताप्लु मुढाको

(I have heard that elder people said take the heat of wooden log)

धर्तीजीलाई खनी नभन्दिनु होला मायाँले यस्तो भनी

(Digging earth, do not say that beloved said this)

मकैलाई कनी यस्तै यस्तै कुरामा अति विश्वास गर्छु मनि, मायाँ लाउँछ बुढाको ।

(I also have complete trust in it and love the elder one)

(मञ्जु वि.क., साउन १८, २०७३)

Language

Thado bhaka is performed in the Nepali language and it is overwhelmed by local dialects. The colloquial form of dialect of Nepali language is heavily used. The audience can find a lot of dialectual terms used in the socio-cultural contexts of Gandaki region in general and Lamjung district in particular. In some situations, old-fashioned words can also be found in it, which are related to socio-cultural and historical events like wars, landslides, hunting, fishing, farming, shopping, marriage, etc.

Legacy

After Deu Bahadur Dura, Pancha Subba Gurung, Bakhat Bahadur Gurung, many singers like late Maniram Dura, late Rupa Miya, late, late Pechere Dura, Sahili Sarkini, late Bhedikharke Sahila, late Mairani Dura, late Sakudhara Dura, late Kaili Dura, late Dasharat Dura, late Riter Dura, late Gyani Maya Thapa, late Bhakti Maya Dura, late Chija Maya Dura, late Gau Maya Dura, late Soon Bahadur Dura, late Dhasiri Dura, late PadamKumari Dura, etc. continued the tradition of *thado bhaka* performance (Dura, 2022, pp.38-44 & 58).

Likewise, Ratan Bahadur Dura, Buddhiman Dura, Amardhwoj Gurung, Dalrani B.K., Suk Maya B.K., Srijung Dura, Sita Dura, Radha Bhandari, Shanker Pariyar, Uttam Gurung, Hari

Maya Gurung, Sita Gurung, Indra Kumari Dura (Pakhere Mahili), Yam Bahadur Dura (not this author) have contributed to promote and protect *thado bhaka* through their performances (Dura, 2022, pp.38-44 & 58). However, the performance of *thado bhaka* is getting weaker and slimmer day by day due to the influence of modernisation. It looks like it is heading towards its final days. Some social organisations like *Dura Sewasamaj*, *Thado bhaka Lokkalaya Pratisthan*, etc. are making some efforts to protect and promote *thado bhaka*.

Impacts of Modernisation

In the face of globalisation, Nepali culture has undergone a massive change. Nepali folk culture cannot be an exception. As part of Nepali folk culture, Nepali folk song has witnessed unprecedented changes in its landscape. My observation reflected that modernisation has influenced Nepali folk songs including *thado bhaka* in two ways; first people use modern musical instruments instead of the traditional ones and the second is the decline of the younger generation towards folk music and the adoption of pop music. This is in line with Subedi (2010) who reported that the spectrum of modernity has penetrated folk songs through multiple aspects (p. 28). Before the advent of electrical musical instruments, *madal*, *sarangi*, *binayo*, and other local musical instruments were heavily used by the local people. After the arrival of recording industries in Nepal, electrical musical instruments are in fashion replacing traditional and local musical instruments.

The live performance was one of the main characteristics of Nepali folk songs. People used to gather in one place and they used to sing and play local musical instruments on their own to entertain themselves. Now, there is a sea change musical scenario. People don't sing and play musical instruments. They simply play imported recorded music and dance. The dark side of this kind of new trend is that it stopped the germination process of new talents in terms of singing and playing musical instruments. The process of germination and pollination of localised original songs is at a complete halt.

In the past, a folk song as a means of pure entertainment. These days it has turned into a saleable commodity. Music companies, *dohori restaurants*, festivals/*mahotsabs* are making folk songs a commercial product. Its positive side is that folk song performers are making their livelihoods through folk song performances and YouTube channels. It has a negative side too. Its result is that originality and localness-which are the defining characteristics of folk songs-are dying out and created, and composing songs is gaining popularity. These are the impacts of modernisation on folk songs in general. For example, Bel Bahadur Dura (pseudo name) said:

During our time there were no other means of entertainment. We used to sing *thado bhaka* while performing *Satya Narayan Puja*, at marriage ceremonies and some social gatherings. We used to have a large group of young men and women to work in *parma* such as plantation of millet in Shraavan (July–August) and they used to sing the whole day while continuing their work. The older generation used to transfer the songs to the younger generation. But now, most of young people engaged in social media and sing

foreign songs. They gradually forget *thado bhaka* and other many typical Nepali folk songs.

The above remarks indicated that the wave of modernisation influenced the way of life of the villagers which has an impact in cultural activities including *thado bhaka* and other many folk music. When the modernisation, urbanisation and marketisation influence the daily activities of many Nepali villagers, they adopted new culture and songs. As the population decreased in the village, so are the socio-cultural gathering. Thus, the influence of neoliberalism has created a threat to traditional folk songs including *thado bhaka*.

Thado bhaka cannot remain unaffected by the massive waves of modernisation. Being a special genre, it is not as easy as other popular genres to perform. For this reason, it is far behind in the race of gaining popularity in modern-day society. Some young performers are highly motivated by other genres of folk songs. Some young performers have performed *thado bhaka* as a commercial product using some new electrical musical instruments. On the one hand, it can help continue the tradition of *thado bhaka*. On the other hand, it can deviate from its original form. This is a painful irony.

Thado bhaka was born at a point in time in a special situation. The time and context have changed making it outdated. It seems as if it has not been able to be modified itself according to the time and context. For example, the similes, symbols, and metaphors used in the song are old enough and prove themselves to be old. It has not been able to develop new literary devices to fit with new context. Other folk song heritages are changed and transformed a lot. But, *thado bhaka* has been able to adjust itself to the new context. This situation has created a big challenge for its protection and promotion of *thado bhaka*.

Conclusion

Thado bhaka is one of the beautiful identities of people living in the Gandaki region, which was a part and parcel of the rural people (Dura, 2022, p. 57). It was the medium that connected the people of different castes and creeds. It was a source of societal communication and social intercourse. It is one of the centripetal forces that bring people of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds together.

The basic characteristics of folk songs are easiness, simplicity, poignancy, lyrical, musicality, heart-touching, and naturalness (Thapa, 2030, p. 32). *Thado bhaka* cannot be an exception. For this reason, *thado bhaka* performers are surrounded by a huge number of rural masses. They sing and dance together with the performers. It breeds a large volume of social intercourse and develops a sense of oneness or unity in diversity. However, the neoliberal ideology, which promoted modernisation, privatisation and marketization, influenced *thado bhaka* by promoting pop songs even in villages. Similarly, the changing way of life not only changes the socio-economic activities of people but also their singing cultures. There is a large scope of research related to Nepali folk cultures which can promote and protect this cultural wealth as their cultural identity.

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