



Research article

Nature's Notes: Analyzing the Environmental Advocacy in the Deuda Songs of Nepal

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Abstract

Deuda songs, originating from the mid-and far-western regions of Nepal, represent a rich musical folk genre deeply rooted in the culture and lifestyle of the performing communities. This paper explores the Deuda songs as potential environment-oriented texts, aiming to unravel the environmental concerns and nature-centric devotion encapsulated within these melodies. By employing the lenses of cultural ecology and ecocritical perspective, this analysis sheds light on the intricate relationship between these folk songs and the natural world. Examining the Deuda songs reveals a profound emphasis on the co-existence and interdependence of human society and nature. The study finds that the lyrical content critiques anthropocentric activities and demonstrates a heightened ecological consciousness among the performers. These findings underscore the critical role played by the Deuda songs in fostering environmental awareness and their potential as powerful tools for environmental advocacy. Furthermore, this paper advocates for additional research to uncover the broader significance of the Deuda songs as integral components of the region's cultural heritage. It also proposes their incorporation into educational and environmental policies to enhance ecological consciousness on a wider scale. Recognizing the educational potential of the Deuda songs, this study encourages their inclusion in curricula to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate connection between culture, nature, and sustainable living. Overall, the exploration of the Deuda songs serves as a gateway to a deeper understanding of environmental concerns within the cultural fabric of the mid-and far-western regions of Nepal.

Keywords: Deuda songs, ecology, folklore, environmental narratives, ecological advocacy



Climate Action, Life on Land

Introduction

The Deudas, popular folk songs rooted in the cultural fabric of the Far-western and Mid-western regions of Nepal, hold a unique position as both sung and performed expressions. A distinctive feature of the Deuda songs is the traditional question-and-answer format, often enacted between a Choretta (boy) and a Choretta (girl). These songs primarily utilize the Khas language, believed to

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have originated from Sinja in the Jumla district, with various districts in central and far-western Nepal claiming association with its genesis. The widespread popularity of the Deuda songs in the Central and Far Western Region can be attributed to the prevalence of the Deuda speakers in districts, such as Baitadi, Doti, Dailekh, Dullu, Jajarkot, Sija, Simikot, and others. While the Khas language is predominantly spoken in the far-western region of Nepal, its influence extends to individuals residing in Karnali, Bheri, and Rapti, and even reaches the Kumaon and Garhwal regions of India (Pant, 2007, p. 8).

Beyond their linguistic significance, the Deuda songs are a distinct form of language, providing a platform for personal expression within a rhythmic framework. These songs exhibit diverse rhythms and styles, encompassing vocal and dance elements, thereby creating a rich tapestry of folklore traditions. However, the Deuda songs transcend mere entertainment; they embody a complex interplay of cultural heritage and expressions. As Joshi (2011) notes, these folk songs represent a rich cultural folklore tradition that allows the inhabitants of the region to express their hearts. The linguistic variations within the songs themselves serve as evidence of the extensive influence of the Deuda songs on the people of the mid and far-western regions of Nepal.

Despite their rich cultural, linguistic, and social heritage, the Deuda folk songs have not gained sufficient and scholarly attention in academic discourse, particularly concerning their connection with the environment and nature-culture interplay. Existing research on the Deuda songs has largely focused on their cultural and linguistic characteristics, highlighting the unique features of this musical genre and the cultural linguistic ties within the communities where these songs prevail. Pant (2007) finds that the Deuda songs use the Khas language not only in Nepal's far-western region but also in neighbouring areas like Karnali, Bheri, Kumaon, and Garhwal, indicating strong cultural connections across these regions. Sharma (2019) explores the linguistic features and functions of the Deuda folk songs, concentrating on language, structure, and style. However, these researches underscore a gap in understanding how linguistic and communicative aspects relate to the environmental themes in the Deuda songs. Similarly, Joshi (2011) notes that the Deuda songs as a folkloric tradition allow performers to express deep sentiments and preserve cultural identity through reflections on traditions, customs, and personal emotions. On a different note, Stirr (2012) examines the significance of the Deuda songs in Nepal's far-western region and their connection to evolving notions of the nation. Despite commercial popularity, debates persist about the recognition and representation of Deuda music in the broader cultural landscape, raising questions about power dynamics and inequalities. Overall, the studies on the Deuda songs deliberate more on the historical, cultural, and environmental significance along with analysis of lyrics, themes, and symbolism. However, the role of the Deuda songs as a crucial part of cultural expression in advocating ecological consciousness has largely remained an untrodden domain in current scholarship.

In the context of integrating environmental protection with folkloristic practices, however, this study aims to investigate the Deuda folk songs, specifically focusing on their role in maintaining ecological balance and exploring the intricate relationship between nature and culture. The primary objective is to unveil the latent ecological consciousness embedded in these traditional art forms, highlighting their potential contribution to environmental advocacy and sustainability. More specifically, the study seeks to examine how the Deuda folk songs express environmental consciousness during their performances in local settings. The research aims to understand how

folk performers establish a connection between raising public awareness of environmental protection and expressing their innate artistic sensibility, thereby shedding light on the dynamic interplay between environmental concerns and traditional cultural expressions.

The reason behind analyzing these songs is to examine "aesthetics as a means of engaging with the world and the ethical impetus behind it" (Bartosch, 2013, p.10). Folk songs are part of literature and literature, according to Zapf (2016), "from its beginnings in storytelling and oral narratives, in legends and fairytales . . . has symbolically expressed the fundamental interconnectedness between culture and nature in tales of human genesis, of metamorphosis, of symbiotic co-evolution between different life forms" (p. 65). By the same token, the scope of the Deuda songs as part of oral literary traditions can be hypothesized to embrace ecological philosophy and promote ecological consciousness.

The paper employs primarily seminal theoretical concepts from cultural ecology and ecocritical discourse. This research is based on the idea that folklore, an integral genre of literature, can be characterized as a symbolic medium representing a potent form of cultural ecology, as proposed by (Zapf 2016). According to Zapf (2016), it is a central assumption of the cultural ecology, in their aesthetic transformation of experiences, literary texts "act like an ecological force within the larger system of cultural discourse and knowledge" (p. 65). Similarly, the paper also evokes Dundes's (1980) concept of folklore as a method of expressing folk ideas and values, and asserting an identity (p. 179-89), Bauman's (1977) conjecture that "performance as a dynamic process of cultural expression," and Glotfelty and Fromm (1996)'s idea that "ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (p. xviii). The analysis and interpretation of select Deuda songs are informed by an interpretive paradigm and qualitative research design to probe into the cultural ecology inherent in the folk songs (Cresswell, 2018).

Deuda Songs, Cultural Identity, and Indigenous Knowledge

The Deuda songs are sung and performed both as everyday activities and as a crucial aspect of special occasions in western regions of Nepal. As Nandwa and Bukeny (1983) believed oral literature, including folk songs, depends on the performers bringing them to life during a particular occasion, the Deuda songs, as they are performed, form the cultural identity of the people singing them. The groups, who sing and perform, "have a sense of group identity" through the songs (Dundes 2). This paper tries to read these folk songs as environmental discourses to explore what Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) define environmental discourse as "the study of the relation between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). In this connection, the Deuda songs, are a form of the cultural expression of people from mid- and far-western regions of Nepal to forge their cultural identity vis-à-vis their bond with nature and environment.

The folk songs, then, are recognized not as a phenomenon *sui generis* but as mentifacts and artefacts having "the social context, the time depth, and the medium of transmission on the one hand, and the conception of folklore as a body of knowledge, mode of thought, and kind of art on the other" (Ben-Amos, 1971, p.5). In that sense, these folk songs embody indigenous knowledge, which Jessen et. al (2021) defines as "place-based pieces of knowledge accumulated and transmitted across generations within specific cultural contexts" (p. 1). Similarly, the songs

also profess the cultural identity of the communities performing them. Finnegan (2012) emphasizes the performance aspect of oral literature, positing that it is contingent on the interpreter articulating it (p. 12). In that sense, the Deuda songs as part of oral tradition involve "a definite realistic, artistic, and communicative process" (Ben-Amos, 1971, p. 10).

Indigenous knowledge and perception undergo significant transformations influenced by urbanization, displacement, migration, technological advancements, and market economics. As emphasized in Principle 22 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), indigenous communities play a vital role in environmental stewardship and progress due to their expertise and ancestral customs. Governments must recognize and uphold their cultural identity, traditions, and concerns, facilitating their meaningful engagement in advancing sustainable development. The Deuda songs reflect an awareness of ongoing changes and channel this awareness to safeguard the people's connection with nature. These songs not only advocate for the restoration of this bond but also emphasize the importance of preventing the "weakening of traditional customary laws and norms to control inappropriate environmental behavior in other contexts" (Benjamin, 2009, p. 13). The examination of indigenous environmental values and practices is crucial because the call for indigenous participation in environmental governance is not only based on their rights to natural resources but also on societal perceptions regarding the sustainability of indigenous livelihoods (Benjamin, 2009, p. 11).

Results and Discussion

The primary purpose of this paper is to trace the connection between the Deuda songs as folklore and the ecological awareness that embeds the life of people from the far-western region of Nepal. The analysis of the select Deuda folk songs revealed three predominant ecological issues: nature as a source of life, nature as subject to anthropocentric and capitalist-centric activities, and nature as a conveyor of wisdom.

Nature as a Source of Life

The old Deuda songs, orally transmitted to successive generations, portray nature as a sole life resource. The songs praise the diverse ecology of Western Nepal, depicting the region's flora and fauna, rivers, mountains, and farmlands with reverence and affection. These lyrical depictions underscore nature as autopoiesis— self-creation or self-organization. According to Lovelock (2000), Gaia is a "self-regulating" living being that is characterized by the interconnectedness, interdependence, and cyclical pattern of life (p. 22). One of the repeatedly recited songs is:

Wind and water created, and shaped the sustenance,
Everything that is seen, emerging from the same origin!
Himalayas are crafted, mountains are formed, and the plains are shaped.
Creation by the divine, the grandeur of creation!
Branches, plants, and grass-consuming medicinal herbs,
Rivers, streams, brooks, emptiness— all flowing together!
Oceans, seas, water - this vast expanse,
Mountains, hills, plateaus— interconnected in multitude
With open eyes, behold this enchanting Earth,

Like moulded by hands— a creation like no other!
This Earth is a tapestry of patterns - diverse and intricate,
It is heaven - it is hell - a mix of virtue and sin!

These songs are sung and performed as part of daily life. In short, these songs are an expression of the lifestyle of the people from western Nepal. To borrow Bauman (1977), this performance is integral to legend as it illustrates the dynamic process of cultural expression beyond the mere product. The songs as folklore can be seen as "a mode of spoken verbal communication that requires assuming responsibility towards an audience for a display of communicative competence" (Bauman, p. 11). What they try to communicate is environmental concern.

The interdependence is also emphasized by demonstrating that nature is also a collaborator of human struggle. For example, "Seasonal Song", celebrates the beauty of the coexistence of nature and humans, and also recognizes challenges during Jestha and Ashad's (May/June) drought, with Kartik's (July/August) disappointment in unmet expectations. The reference to Mangsir (beginning of winter) and lingering heart stiffness metaphorically captures prolonged hardship, highlighting the villagers' resilience in adversity.

The cowshed is thatched with straw, the buffalo shed adorned with leaves,
Your words are a sweet melody; stay here and continue to sing, please!
In Jestha and Ashad (before rainy seasons), the fields lay barren, Kartik (beginning of winter) brought no gain,
In the cold of Mangsir (winter), the stiffness in hearts did remain.

The vivid imageries of cowsheds, buffalo sheds, straws, and leaves portray a serene existence in the highlands, where villagers live harmoniously with nature, embracing traditional practices. Nature as autopoiesis helps us to a deep understanding that signifies the microcosm of the macrocosm (Lovelock, 2000, p. 2-3), nature as the macrocosm, and human society as one of the microcosms. This song, which is an everyday expression of the people, sheds light on how the microcosm and the macrocosm are interconnected.

The lyrics convey the vulnerability of the villagers to changing seasons, emphasizing their reliance on nature for sustenance. The songs thus establish nature as an indispensable source and sustainer of life in their communication, emphasizing a profound bond between the listeners and their natural milieu. By alluding to the diverse and complex tapestry of natural patterns, the song as "an environmentally oriented work" is characterized by the notion that "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell, 1995, p. 7-8). The plea for "the sweet melody" signifies a desire to preserve this harmonious way of life (Bhandari, 2017). For instance, the grandeur of Himalayan ranges, fertile agricultural lands, and thriving biodiversity are consistently referred to as pivotal life-sustainers for the community. These lyrical depictions underscore the intimate relationship between the community and its environment, signifying the crucial role of nature in their daily lives.

The relationship between nature, culture, and humanity is a recurring theme in the Deuda folk songs. In other words, the songs highlight what the first law of ecology delineates— Everything is connected with everything else (Commoner, 1972, p. 11). By living in harmony with nature,

villagers connect deeply with their surroundings, cherishing the forest and allowing cattle to roam freely. Also, the songs acknowledge nature as a reservoir of life-affirming seminal principles, including motherhood, knowledge, protection, and sustenance, emphasizing the dependency of humans on nature. The lyrics stress the importance of humans adhering to the natural order and rhythms, safeguarding nature's balance and cultural traditions. There is a cautionary tone about the potential consequences of deviating from the path of nature, underscoring the interdependence between human actions, culture, and the environment. Overall, the song calls for reflection on the reciprocal relationship with nature and advocates for responsible actions to preserve the harmony between humans and the natural world.

Nature is the grand teacher, the divine force of the natural realm,
 Guarded by nature, it flows from the highest peak!
 Nature does not forsake its own, it adheres to its natural law,
 It follows its rhythm and seasons, never forgetting its essence!
 Nature is impartial, creation knows no bias,
 Maintaining its order, an ageless tradition!
 At times, humans tread upon the path of nature,
 Guided by nature, humans find strength and resilience!
 When humans harm nature, they harm their own culture,
 When humans harm principles, they damage morality!

Nature is portrayed as a revered teacher and divine force, providing protection and sustenance. The songs underscore that "if nature is considered the holistic life-affirming principle that characterizes *Bhoomi/Mother Earth/Gaia* who brings together all the living creatures under her love and care, then there is certainly a greater possibility to envision the ubiquitous sacred connection between the heart, the hearth, and the Earth" (Porselvi, 2023, p. Xi).

In most songs, nature manifests as homeland. Hence, a song orally entitled "Matri Bhoomi Barnan Song" [Motherland Description Song] in its essence passionately appreciates and celebrates the majestic beauty of the northern landscape: " There is snow upon the snow in the north, and mountains upon mountains, /The cold wind and cool water, I am a resident of this land". The closing lines express a heartfelt yearning for exploration, symbolizing a deep appreciation for the natural wonders of the homeland:

Nandaghara has Nanda Devi, Kotghara has Kalika,
 Bajura is a paradise, blessed are the queens,
 Doti is beautiful, Dadelhura and Achham are safe,
 Fly me across the hills to see the pheasant in the Himalayas.

The above emphasizes the grandeur of snow-covered mountains, the soothing presence of cold winds, and cool water. With cultural and spiritual references to places like Nandaghara, Nanda Devi, Kotghara, and Kalika, the song embeds a sense of pride and connection to sacred elements. Bajura is portrayed as a paradisiacal haven, blessing its queens and symbolizing prosperity. The song also highlights Doti's beauty and safety assurance in Dadelhura, and Achham evokes a profound sense of security and regional pride. It emphasizes the grandeur of snow-covered mountains, the soothing presence of cold winds, and cool water. With cultural and spiritual references to places like Nandaghara, Nanda Devi, Kotghara, and Kalika, the song embeds a sense

of pride and connection to sacred elements. Bajura is portrayed as a paradisiacal haven, blessing its queens and symbolizing prosperity. The song also highlights Doti's beauty and safety assurance in Dadelhura, and Achham evokes a profound sense of security and regional pride. The song encapsulates the genre's spirit, resonating with a profound love for the land and its cultural richness.

The Deuda songs depict the earth/nature as Gaia, a self-regulating and organic entity, highlighting the interconnectedness of all life, with humans being an integral part of this system. These folk songs offer a potential means for humans to emulate these natural patterns, fostering love and concern for the planet's well-being. Folktales serve as environmental symbols, reshaping human imagination to contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and balanced society. Therefore, the Deuda folk songs mirror the environmental concerns and the intricate interdependence between nature and culture. The songs underscore the integral role of folklore in fostering ecological awareness and promoting environmental stewardship, enabling the necessity to preserve these cultural artefacts as invaluable components of the region's heritage.

A Critique of Anthropocentric and Capitalocentrism View

While many Deuda songs emphasize the idea of humanity in nature and nature in humanity, several songs harness a scathing criticism of modern human activities. Though the "domestication of a wide variety of species of plants and animals began worldwide in the early Holocene epoch", humans modifying ecosystems to create their space in nature (Smith and Zeder 2); the modification of ecosystem and encroachment culminated and is also claimed to be justified when the Anthropocene age began (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000). Many Deuda songs acknowledge the shifts induced by demographic and technological changes, including the effects of consumerism, trade liberalization, investment flows, and more: "The wealth of the rivers have not been safeguarded; / No place has been spared from contamination. / Even homes, that were once adorned are now covered in dirt, / The new age has brought pollutants to the rivers and streams."

Humans thus cultures evolve since they are adaptive mechanisms. Similarly, social and political systems, settlement patterns, and technology also evolve in their form as the environments change. People and their knowledge also as part of these adaptive cultural elements evolve (Sutton & Anderson, 2020, p. 131). As suggested by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000), the considerable impact of human activities on the Earth's environment justified the ending of the existing Holocene geological epoch and the beginning of a new epoch called 'The Anthropocene.' As evidence that the Deuda songs harness this cultural change, they have evolved and so is the message and emphasis of the songs.

Many oral songs sung on different occasions critique the anthropocentric view of nature and environmental manipulation: "Everyone's beauty is tarnished, the water turns murky / Humans, in their ignorance, reap the fruits of impurity." While the dependency of humans on nature is acknowledged, the dependency can take the direction of conscious manipulation of environments: "Oh, Tele (Sesame oil seller)! Where has your scented aroma gone? / None treads along the banks of Seti searching for the yellow metal." The persona of this song expresses a

longing for the scented aroma in the highlands and the presence of the yellow metal on the bank of Seti.

The theme of nature being a victim of human exploitation, lamentation and nostalgia for the loss of natural heritages also appears in numerous songs. The personas in the songs mainly attribute the adverse impacts on the natural environment, including deforestation, pollution, water scarcity, and climate change, to human activities. These lyrics construct a compelling narrative of the destruction inflicted by human activities, vividly illustrating the deterioration of once plentiful natural resources. For example, the persona in the following song laments that:

Oh, the days of merriment during the day and roaming at night have disappeared without my companion.
Saipala is the origin of the Seti, just as Dhura is for Kali,
I thought you were mine, but now you are a distant stranger(foreign),
Memories linger of trekking in the highlands of Khaptad, and the days of my youth remain vivid.

The complaint registered by these songs evokes what Sutton & Anderson (2010) call "controls" (p. 17). According to them, the "controls" begin with domestication— taming the nature of the human's benefits, shift to manipulation— and end in exploitation (Sutton & Anderson 17-19). Such "alterations of the environment include those that affect both the abiotic and biotic components, that is, both living and nonliving aspects of the environment are altered and manipulated (Sutton & Anderson, 2010, p. 17-19). Expressing nostalgia and lamenting the loss of natural heritages and the disappearance of a bucolic life along the banks of the Seti River, the songs evoke a deep longing, reflecting the impact of global warming and environmental degradation on the Earth and its inhabitants. The diverse web of flora and fauna that once thrived is now threatened. These thoughtful expressions echo the sentiments of critics like Bell Hooks in "Touching the Earth," who yearn for the verdant landscapes of the Himalayan highlands (Hooks, 2009, p. 34).

However, the complaint in the song also suggests the community's increasing consciousness of the environmental crisis and serves as a potent critique of environmentally detrimental human activities. These songs can be interpreted as an elegy for the lost connection with nature caused by human activities, the inability of humans to understand the web of life and an emotional expression of deep longing for the once-cherished way of life. This also antithetically highlights the dependence of humans on nature as highlighted in the following song:

This world was crafted by divine hands, the very foundation of existence.
Yet, driven by their selfish desires, Humans have ravaged the wealth of the earth.
Forests, gardens, and grazing lands have been destroyed, along with many places of worship.
The rivers and streams have dried up, and settlements have been affected.
The wind now pollutes water that once flowed through gardens.
The wealth of the rivers has not been safeguarded;
No place has been spared from contamination.
Even homes, that were once adorned are now covered in dirt,

Rivers and streams have been polluted in the twenty-first century.

This Deuda song highlights the negative impact of human actions on nature and the environment, using metaphors to illustrate how communities exploit natural resources, leading to environmental degradation. The lyrics emphasize the consequences of human pride and careless behavior, symbolized by the loss of protection for elements like sandbars and stones in rivers and the cutting down of forests. The Deuda songs like this underscore a severe criticism that is "fundamental to capitalism's political economy, which rests upon an audacious accumulation strategy" (Moore, 2016, p. 2-3). According to Moore (2016), "[F]or capitalism, Nature is "cheap" in a double sense: to make Nature's elements "cheap" in price; and also, to cheapen, to degrade, or to render inferior in an ethico-political sense, the better to make Nature cheap (Moore, 2016, p. 2-3). The song portrays the Earth as a distressed mother suffering from pollution caused by human activities, underscoring the direct link between environmental pollution and health issues. The message underscored in the songs evokes the concept of "cheap nature" "understood as work/energy and biophysical utility produced with minimal labor, and power, and directly implicated in commodity production and exchange" (Moore, 2016, pp. 99). However, the persona also advocates for a clean environment as a source of happiness and peace and urges people to be more aware and responsible, highlighting that environmental pollution results from the actions of the uninformed or ignorant. Smoke and dust polluting the environment with reckless abandon directly result from human actions.

Naess (1989) notes that human beings for the last nine thousand years have been "a pioneer invading species" and "are individualistic, aggressive, and hustling" (p. 182-83)). Their individualistic acts swerved toward the experimentation and exploitation of nature. As a result, such capital-centered human behaviours have wreaked devastation on Mother Earth. According to Carson (2000), "Only within the moment represented by the present century has one species – man – acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world (p. 5) Some Deuda songs echo that human beings have been the exterminating species. The following songs criticize the human actions detrimental to the environment:

Someone plants a forest, someone smuggles it away,
Consumers are powerless, while the thieves hold sway!
Polluters have arrived, aiming to destroy the woods,
Mother Earth is angered, and the world is in a sorrowful mood.
The destroyers persist, always wreaking devastation,
Nature bears the brunt, with no one to advocate,
Pastures and water grow scarce, and the impoverished hesitate.
Earth and nature are fatigued, while greed consumes the human race,
Earth's wealth, once communal, now sought for private embrace!

By emphasizing nature's suffering, these songs provoke empathy and contemplation, encouraging listeners to consider the repercussions of their actions: "The wealth of all is shared of it belongs to you, /Whoever has departed, what's theirs is now yours too." The song resonates with Milton's (1996) emphasis on the interrelationship between nature, culture, and human beings; he posits that anthropologists' understanding of the diversity of human civilization is vital in

addressing environmental problems (Milton, 1996, pp. 22-23). The changing Anthropocene activities are realized in the following song:

Community arrows in hand, taking advantage,
When the ego takes precedence, the people suffer!
Sandbars and stones of the river, no longer have protection,
The forest has been cut down, leaving behind a bare disguise!
The Earth, the mother, is distressed, the situation is dire,
Pollution caused by humans, destroying the forest!
When air and water are polluted, diseases arise,
With a clean environment, there is happiness and peace!
Smoke and dust, with reckless abandon,
The environment is polluted, by the actions of the ignorant!

Because the thinking of modern humans is shaped by the capitalocentric worldview— the amassing of capital, they have forgotten the expression that the "history of life on Earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings . . . the physical form and the habits of the earth's vegetation and its animal life have been moulded by the environment" (Carson, 2000, p. 5). But, modern humans exploit their environment, and modern technology and science make it look as if humans are superior and have conquered nature (Commoner, 1972, p 15). However, a deeper interpretation of the song reveals that though humans might have found new ways to live under unfavourable external conditions, they are ultimately self-destructive. The following song echoes this ecological wisdom:

By polluting the same water, they endure the consequences,
Their deeds, like a cycle, come back to haunt them.
No clean water to drink, no pure air to breathe,
No pristine land beneath, no clear sky above.
Once a beautiful and delightful earth, now overwhelmed by filth,
This earth has transformed into a hell due to human actions.

The songs emphatically show the harrowing effects of environmental degradation and upsetting conditions of human existence. Hence, the urge in these songs is loud and clear: "If mankind is to avoid being replaced then the struggle against nature must cease . . . some kind of 'back to nature' attitude must be nurtured (Naess, 1989, p. 182-83). The songs at their kernel urge humans to come with a wisdom that the intricate interconnections within a mature ecosystem surpass the complexity of any relationships that humanity has fully grasped. As our comprehension grows, and our awareness of internal connections deepens, humans can sustain a fulfilling existence with modest material resources, achieving a remarkable abundance of goals.

Nature as Conveyer of Wisdom

Apart from critiquing anthropocentric activities and emphasizing the reciprocal impacts of shared experiences, these songs also demonstrate the "community's substantial environmental knowledge, actively and passively managed as a cultural resource" (Sutton and Anderson, 2010, p.125). This understanding of nature, beyond mere information processing, aligns with Ingold's

perspective (2008) and is actualized within "nested communities of practice within larger social groupings," through personified engagements, as Marchand (2010) describes (p. 3). In essence, the connections among minds, bodies, social contexts, and environments are more complex than commonly assumed in everyday or public discussions. The Deuda songs as embodied engagements and performances showcase ways of retaining and disseminating the wisdom of nature. The songs draw attention to the impartiality of nature, contrasting it with the partiality and selfishness of humans. The following song, for example, criticizes human actions that exploit and harm the environment, symbolized by the destruction of rivers and jungles and the scattering of the Earth's wealth.

Nature is impartial - beholds everything equally,
Humans, however, are biased - acting as lords over birds!
Unable to see beyond themselves - fixated on varied colours,
Like the vibrant hues of a rising sun - the essence of Earth's life!
Cutting through rivers and streams - tearing through jungles,
All the wealth of the Earth - now lies scattered [. . .]
Gleaming thieves - this is no longer a country but a naked land!
No protection for the open fields and valleys - against the rivers' fury,
The reckless never retreat - the innocent are trampled without justice!"

The lyrics highlight the consequences of human greed and irresponsibility, portraying a stark contrast between the harmony of nature and the damage caused by human actions. The song employs powerful metaphors, such as arrows piercing trees and the Earth being left naked, to convey a strong message about the need for environmental conservation and the adverse effects of human activities on the natural world. Ultimately, the song encourages reflection on the importance of living in harmony with nature and the consequences of neglecting the environment.

One way the Deuda songs impart ecological wisdom is through the evocation of spiritual dimensions. In many songs, the aesthetic mode of textuality— the words and concepts are used both to refer human world and nature— attempts to erase the existing dualism between mind and body, bringing together conceptual and perceptual dimensions. The folk songs encompass rich narratives that evoke spirituality as a collective yearning for the preservation of nature: "Cutting poplar trees is sinful, and people are going mad after cutting banyan trees / People grow thin after cutting silk cotton-tree and prosper after cutting thatch". The song tries to illustrate the consequences of uncontrolled deforestation by portraying the cutting of poplar as a sinful act, the madness that ensues after cutting the banyan tree, the physical decline experienced after cutting the cotton tree, and the restoration following the cutting of thatch. This vivid imagery resonates with ecocritics who perceive these songs as appeals to the collective consciousness for preserving nature. By drawing attention to the significance of trees in the ecological balance, folk songs aim to reconnect individuals with the natural world.

The songs assert that consciousness regarding the promotion and conservation of nature could be best understood with socio-historical awareness. It also adds another dimension to spirituality, where time, space, and materiality vanish. The "National Song" sings: the land where ascetics penanced, and the earth was united / The Buddha preached non-violence, leaving peach and fraternity! / This land is Sita's land, the pride of Bhrikuti / This land is Budhda's land, the land of

heroic ancestors." The song appeals to love and respect for the land because this is a land of great ascetics and spiritual personas.

Many ethnicities, many languages, diverse cultures,
Our beloved Nepal, embraced by nature!
Together, all flowers bloom, from Mechi (East) to Mahakali (West),
Changing colors, this kingdom lies in the lap of the Himalayas!
Be it from the mountains or the plains, be it a hill dweller or a Terai resident,
We, the sons of Nepali soil, embrace the Dharma!

The eco-cognition expressed in the songs challenges and counters a materialistic outlook if nature is not there, there is no value for human beings: "I am a precious jewel, but I am ripped apart / Forest and jungles, rivers and stream/ the creation is magnificent" But "Humans have become like Kalidasa, destroying the Earth". As a result of humans' Kalidas-like activities, "Every beauty is polluted, water becomes murky / Humans are ignorant, and their actions bear fruits of impurity. By polluting the same water, they suffer: they reap what they sow".

Another way of promoting wisdom about nature is through love and care imagery. Some Deuda songs express the concept of love that connects the people's hearts to the home, in the larger Home, the Earth. Love and care, in other words, can be seen as an underlying principle of proposing an eco-spiritual attitude of life in the songs. First, as an expression of love, each poem, directly or indirectly, celebrates the joy and delight of the created universe, nature. Second, the imageries of love and care are used to reinforce the overall love toward nature or the earth. In the following "The Mirage of Love", the persona almost completely depends on the natural imagery to express his/her love for the beloved.

Let there be buffaloes by the river, let there be a lake on the hill,
In you and me, two days blend into one!
Seal our words in written letters, with the Chief's name inscribed,
Will our love be shared, or will we be confined to the same village?
In the main event, let's get intoxicated, should I sacrifice myself, or should Bali Rai,
In the intoxication of love, what else can I say, should I become Sai or Arka?
Hold the upper part firmly, release the lower part,
This laughter is like a spring, it's Sai's melody!
The river Bhaisali murmurs, the branches make noise,

In the love act of the person in the poem, nature accompanies it with its natural song: the river murmurs, branches sing, the wind blows gently and rain drops delicately. In essence, the love present in the hearts of both humans and nonhumans extends to encompass love for the environment and the broader world, nature. Love is perceived as a unifying principle that harmonizes various elements in nature, connecting humans and the environment. Here, when nature suffers, humans are seen as affected. The songs reveal "the interstitial spaces and the temporal aspects of the sacred that allow humans to respect and revere life on this planet" (Porselvi, 2023, p. 12), exhibiting the intrinsic connection between and among nature, culture and the sacred.

Bar (banyan) and Pipal (poplar) are the two botanical couples exemplifying the love of nature in Nepali culture. People commemorate the continual and eternal love of senior couples by arranging marriage between these two trees. The person in the poem scolds the brother for spending a coin that he would otherwise use to persuade his beloved. He dreams of becoming a known figure like Bar and Pipal.

The personal coin of my sister-in-law, why did you spend, dear brother?
Whether the birth would be in the place of Sai, and the end in Kaasi!
To become a known figure, to be like the Bar-Pipal Bridge,
To be as dear as You (Sai), to travel on the spinning rail!

This song the persona's eternal love for his beloved. He metaphorically exclaims that their love is like that of Bar and Pipal, the symbol of eternal love. In these lyrics, the "coin" and "rail" are signs of natural love and rebirth. Correspondingly, abundance and unconditional love form the core of eco-spirituality. However, the lover complains, "due to the materialistic greed of the humans/ the Bar-Pipal has been taken away by the landslide" and the lover worries about harvesting his love: "where to stay for shelter, / Guarding my love, in the weaving moments!" As the last hope, the lover wants to secure love by having a ring of the beloved:

Give me wearing the ring on the finger, for sweet remembrance of you!
The flowers bloomed in the Patan, with the rain pouring,
The deer was frightened, as the tiger killed the goat!

The love, due to human greed, is in danger, as suggested by "the deer was frightened" and "the tiger". The love for the landscape in the lyrics reenergizes the mindscape, subsequently motivating individuals to envision and actively work towards creating a better Earth for future generations. In the following "Ecological Song", the persona urges to preserve nature and abide by the ethics of nature.

The branch of Simala is elegant, the grass of Saj so fine,
Don't cut the grass, my friend by the lake, in its design!
The branch of Bar-Pipal is charming, a thousand flowers shine,
The known four paths are lovely, the water source is divine!
Worshipping the plough, the field is now set,
Will these days ever return, my dear plow, we bet!
Magh has arrived, the tree leaves gently fall,
What do you desire, my sister on the hill, as the lake freezes like a wall!
The lake in Telya has frozen, the blood in our veins is cold,
The same sun shines bright, yet its warmth we withhold!
Why come so close, or why move away,
The brother grows thin, the crow turns black, oh, pray!

The richness of the nature-conscious words in the songs challenges the materialistic worldview and promotes a biocentric worldview. The words, such as "Do not cut", "its design", "branch", "divine", and "gently fall" reinforce the idea of a symbiotic relationship between nature and culture. These folk songs initiate a process of raising awareness to comprehend environmental needs and regulate the utilization of flora and fauna as material resources. Recognizing the

interconnections and interrelationships within folk songs, viewed as a microcosm, assists in the restoration of an earth-centric lifeworld.

Conclusion

The study reveals the songs' multi-dimensional meanings, highlighting their crucial role in cultural preservation and ecological advocacy. It demonstrated how these songs bear witness to the community's environmental consciousness and profound connection with nature, serving as compelling advocates for environmental stewardship and embodying the community's commitment to harmonious coexistence with the natural world. Similarly, the findings underline the importance of integrating cultural and artistic expressions into initiatives to promote environmental conservation and sustainability. By harnessing the power of music and storytelling, we can effectively engage communities in dialogue about environmental issues and inspire them to act. The Deuda songs, with their rich lyrical narratives and deep ecological wisdom, offer a potent model for this type of engagement. They remind us that nature and culture are not separate entities but interwoven threads in the fabric of life, underscoring the necessity for an integrated approach to environmental stewardship.

The study has substantial implications, especially regarding the increasing global environmental crises. The paper promotes folk culture as an eco-pedagogical tool providing a unique perspective on how folk songs, as cultural expressions, can serve as a way to redefine and restate the human responsibility toward nature and connect again with nature, the home. The Deuda folk songs have egocentrism as a fundamental premise. In addition, the study suggests that harnessing traditional knowledge with contemporary environmental practices can result in a revolutionary model of environmental management that balances human actions with nature. The study suggests that integrating these songs into educational curricula can foster a deeper understanding of environmental consciousness among future generations. However, the study also acknowledges its limitations and opens up potential avenues for further exploration of traditional music genres in addressing environmental issues. Further studies in this direction may explore integrating indigenous knowledge into modern environmental management, thus contributing to a more sustainable future. The insights garnered from this study can pave the way for interdisciplinary research, bringing together fields such as ethnomusicology, environmental studies, folklore studies, and education.

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