

The Art of Peace?

**Dêudã Culture and Its Role in Community ‘Peacebuilding’ in
Nepal’s Far-western Communities**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the University for the
Creative Arts (UCA)**

University for the Creative Arts

April 2025

Abstract

Traditional peacebuilding in post-conflict settings often prioritises political settlements and institutional reforms, frequently overlooking the role of cultural expression in fostering trust, solidarity, and healing. This thesis examines Dêudã culture – a song, dance, and storytelling tradition from Nepal’s Far-western region – as a participatory practice that supports emotional connection and social cohesion after conflict. Rooted in local customs, Dêudã culture has historically enabled collective reflection and unity, particularly during and after Nepal’s Maoist conflict, through shared embodied experiences (Stirr, 2012; Air, 2023; Upadhyaya, 2024).

Drawing on Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), the research conceptualises Dêudã as a performative space that transforms audiences into active participants – “spect-actors” – engaged in dialogue, critique, and communal problem-solving. This framework is developed through the Dêudã Triangle Model, which explores the dynamic interplay between performance, positionality, and peace. The model illustrates how Dêudã culture nurtures empathy, reinforces cultural continuity, and enables inclusive participation in ‘peacebuilding’ practices.

This research draws on perspectives and experiences of purposely selected and the analysis of selected lyrics of Deuda cultural performances to provide a grounded analysis of how culturally embedded practices like Dêudã culture can complement institutional approaches by embedding equity, voice, and collective resilience. Future research should adopt mixed methods designs and broader comparative samples to assess the scalability and long-term impact of such practices. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that by centring culture and collective joy, Dêudã culture offers a sustainable, community-rooted alternative to dominant peacebuilding paradigms in Nepal and other post-conflict contexts.

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Acknowledgements

Pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from a university in the United Kingdom has always been a dream for many, and I am no exception. For someone like me, coming from a rural background in Nepal, this journey was not just about academic achievement but also about overcoming financial challenges and traversing the complexities of a fast-paced and materialistic world. This requires consistent hard work, unwavering support, and a lot of motivation. I feel incredibly fortunate to have received the Vice-Chancellor's PhD Studentship from the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), which covered my full tuition fees and provided a monthly stipend for three years. This support represented a pivotal moment in my life, for which I am perpetually grateful.

I owe a deep sense of gratitude to my main supervisor, Prof. Jonathan Harris, whose unconditional guidance and constant motivation were my pillars of strength. Without his continued encouragement and support, this journey would have felt almost impossible. It has been one of the greatest joys of my studentship to meet such a caring and inspiring professor as my supervisor. Similarly, my second supervisor, Prof. Sunil Gupta, played a critical role in reminding me of my South Asian roots, especially regarding analysis and writing. His insights were invaluable to this research.

I am also thankful to Dr. Jessica Kelly and Prof. Victoria Kelley for their guidance during my initial days at university. Their support helped me settle into a new academic environment. Dr. Yoriko Otomo, the esteemed leader, merits particular recognition for her encouragement and guidance, alongside the commendable administrative team, notably Mrs. Sian Benette, whose support has been invaluable.

Additionally, appreciation is extended to the UCA Inclusion team for their provision of note-taking assistance when required.

Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Professor Ananda Breed from the University of Lincoln, who not only connected me to this incredible opportunity but also continuously supported me through knowledge-sharing platforms and motivational conversations. Her involvement with the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project became a cornerstone of my field research, helping me understand the arts-based lens of my research. I am truly indebted to the MAP Project, Prof. Simon Dancey – for his guidance and collaboration through the research project, and its partners.

I cannot forget my dear friend and Assistant Professor at Tribhuvan University, Rajib Timilsina, who has been with me since the very beginning – from the germination of this idea to the data collection process to shaping the research ideas. His connection with the MAP in Nepal was instrumental in shaping my research design. My evergreen mentor, Dr. Prakash Bhattarai, has always been a guiding light, pushing me to move forward, even when things seem tough. I would like to thank Dila Dutt Pant, one of the kindest souls I met in Kathmandu, who genuinely cared about my progress and constantly motivated me to give my best not only on the research context but also on the Déudã contents along with the translations of the songs.

I am sincerely grateful to Bogdan Matuszynski (Bogey) from the United States, whose generous reading and thoughtful feedback on the complete initial draft provided invaluable clarity and direction. I also extend heartfelt thanks to Dr. Kuldeep Niraula for sharing his insightful ideas and literature notes on arts-based research and peacebuilding, which greatly enriched this research. I warmly acknowledge Binod

Adhikari and Dr. Keshab Giri, whose unwavering care, encouragement, and family-like support sustained me throughout the course of this research.

Most importantly, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my research community – the respondents, artists, politicians, and Dêudã enthusiasts – who helped me collect the necessary information and field data. Their contributions were vital to the success of the present research.

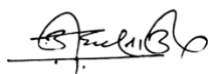
Last but certainly not least, I am eternally grateful to my supportive wife, Bhumi, inspiring son, Abhinav, family members and relatives, who have always wished to see me progress and succeed in life. Their unwavering belief in me has kept me going. I also want to acknowledge my friends, who have been my true admirers and shared my pain and happiness. Without their support, I know that this journey would have felt incomplete.

This PhD journey has been a collective effort, and I am deeply humbled by the love, support, and guidance I have received from many wonderful people. I would like to thank everyone for being a part of this incredible chapter of my life.

Declaration

I confirm that this PhD thesis is my own work. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, the research and content are original to this research. This thesis has not been submitted to this or any other university for any degree.

Signed:



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Submission Date:

09/04/2025 (Resubmission: 10/09/2025)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO DÉUDĀ CULTURE AND COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING IN FAR-WESTERN NEPAL

Contemporary societies are frequently affected by conflict – understood here as persistent disagreements rooted in unmet individual and collective interests, sometimes escalating to armed violence – and the pursuit of peace remains a critical human endeavour. In this thesis, peace denotes social conditions that enable non-violent expression, participation, and critique through cultural forms. Rather than treating peacebuilding as solely a matter of political negotiation and institutional design, this research examines how cultural practice can broaden the repertoire of sustainable peace.

Recent scholarship on post-conflict processes indicates that arts-based, context-specific interventions enhance trust, social cohesion, and psychosocial healing (Boal, 1979; Lederach, 1997, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Brauchle, 2022; Dirnstorfer and Saud, 2020). Building on these findings, the thesis argues that cultural arts such as Dêudā can bridge divides among heterogeneous – at times antagonistic – groups. It examines the arts–culture–peace nexus with a specific focus on Dêudā culture¹, while recognising that cultural expressions may also be mobilised for propaganda in Nepal.

¹ This thesis presents the ‘Dêudā culture’ as a complex and creative cultural phenomenon that integrates song, performance, and storytelling in Nepal’s Far-western region as a part of livelihood. It serves as a platform for expressing the community’s collective sentiments and emotions, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals within the area. While Dêudā culture primarily provides entertainment through singing and community participation, it also encompasses a variety of interrelated activities that strengthen social bonds and affirm cultural identity. This culture functions as a dynamic medium through which people convey shared experiences and aspirations, making preserving and evolving the region’s heritage crucial. By



Figure 1: Dêudā Performance in a Community, 2023

A group of community people participating in Dêudā Khel, Mellekh, Achham on 15 April 2023. The performance in a circle is central to Dêudā culture and traditional festivals, reflecting unity and cultural pride. At the heart of this event is the formation of a circle, where people join hands to sing and dance, sharing stories of God/Goddess and everyday community life. This circular formation symbolises unity, continuity, and equality, reflecting the architectural traditions of communal spaces that encourage interaction and participation. The rhythmic dances and harmonious chants of the Dêudā performance offer an immersive experience that captures the enduring spirit and cultural pride of the Achham people, serving as an exciting testimony to their history and social life composition. Photo: Dila Pant

Dêudā culture, a participatory art and culture from Nepal's Far-western region, functions as an inclusive social space rather than a discrete entertainment form. It enables people across backgrounds to share narratives, articulate emotion, and cultivate relationships. Historically, it has been present in ordinary life and in moments of crisis, including during and after the Maoist conflict.

examining traditional practices, such as local community-based activities, alongside contemporary adaptations, including audiovisual content and social media, this analysis offers new insights into the cultural and social dynamics of the region regarding local community 'peacebuilding'. Traditional practices, such as local community-based activities, and contemporary adaptations, including audiovisual and social media, this conceptualisation offers new insights into the cultural and social dynamics of the region concerning local community 'peacebuilding'.

Drawing on Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Lederach's (1997; 2005) moral imagination and reconciliation, and Galtung's (1969) conceptualisation of negative and positive peace, the research explores how practices like Dêudã performances support emotional repair and the rebuilding of intergroup trust. In interviews in Far-western Nepal, participants repeatedly emphasised the value of inter-group and inter-generational dialogue for peace. As one participant noted, "*Youth must listen to the stories of our elders or other opposing groups to understand the past and create a brighter future.*" This underscores the role of oral histories and shared performance in bridging generational divides. Accordingly, the research investigates how arts-mediated dialogue deepens understanding and underwrites more durable forms of peace in post-conflict settings. In this light, Dêudã culture emerges as a platform that fosters connection and mutual recognition, reflecting the resilience of Nepalese culture and demonstrating how tradition can contribute to social harmony.

This Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) project therefore examines the role of Dêudã culture in post-conflict community life. Combining song, dance, storytelling, and self-organised participation, Dêudã culture shapes locally rooted expressions and everyday sociability in the Far-western communities in Nepal. The analysis traces how such practices open pathways for community 'peacebuilding'² by crossing social boundaries, interrogating inherited assumptions, and fostering inclusive association.

² The term community 'peacebuilding' is enclosed in single quotation marks to denote a specific approach that integrates arts and cultural practices, distinguishing it from traditional methods. The architectural metaphor of "building" peace highlights this process's structured and deliberate nature, emphasising the integration of cultural foundations, much like the structural elements in a village house. The advantages include underscoring the importance of a strong foundation and interconnected elements. In contrast, the drawbacks involve potential rigidity and risk overlooking peace's dynamic and relational aspects. In Dêudã culture, the metaphor resonates with how cultural expressions such as participation, song and dance form the basis for community engagement and cohesion.

To structure this analysis, the thesis introduces the Dêudã Triangle Model (DTM), a culturally grounded framework for understanding how participatory performance contributes to post-conflict social cohesion. By examining the interaction between performance (embodied practice: song, dance and rituals), positionality (social location: gender, caste, age, status shaping access and voice), and peace (relational outcomes: inclusion/exclusion in cultural participation shaping trust and cohesion) of the Far-western communities, the DTM captures the relational processes embedded in Dêudã's practice.

In the regional context, allied practices span communal rites (birth, marriage, and funerary ceremonies); calendrical festivals (*Bishu*, *Sankranti*, *Dashain*, *Olke*); and religious observances (*Jatra*, *Pooja*), alongside acts of remembrance (*Shradha*, *Teej*) and mutual-aid customs (*Parm*; *Aichopaincho*). These practices operate as locally embedded 'peacebuilding' infrastructures – rooted in empathy, reciprocity, and cultural exchange – offering context-specific insights into how societal harmony and sustainable peace can be cultivated in Nepal and in similar contexts.

Background

Different social revolutions have shaped Nepal's history, advanced people's rights, and supported freedoms such as speech, the rule of law, and liberty. These revolutions have also ensured access to education and health services (Jha, 2014). They have also played a key role in establishing a secular, federal, and democratic republic. From 1996 to 2006, Nepal was subject to an armed conflict initiated by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Before this, Nepali people fought to overthrow the autocratic Rana regime (1846–1951), experienced a decade of constitutional monarchy (1951–1961), and the absolute monarchy reign or the Panchayat regime (1961–1990) to

establish democracy in the country. The conflict aimed to pressure the government to address existing social and economic discrimination based on caste, gender, religion, region, poverty, and unequal resource distribution (Thapa, 2012). Existing ethnic disparities, unequal land distribution, and exclusionary participation in the state mechanism were other factors that escalated the conflict.

When the Maoists started their armed conflict against the state on 13 February 1989, the Nepali governments and major political parties did not take its possible impact seriously (Vinayak, 2015). Instead, the Nepali Congress-led government began mobilising police in some regions to combat Maoist attacks. Despite police repression, the conflict expanded throughout the country, and its cost was undoubtedly severe for citizens and the country.

Initially, the Maoists targeted police stations in the Rolpa and Rukum districts. Although they did not achieve tangible gains, they gained valuable experience. In Sindhuli, they captured a police post but left the police personnel unharmed. With their firm commitment to the conflict, Maoists denounced the voice against the higher classes (feudal), such as rulers, landlords, and top-level bureaucrats in Nepal, and imperialist and expansionist³ powers such as India and the United States motivated. They gained the support of certain groups facing multiple forms of discrimination, fuelled by class resentment and inequality (Adhikari, 2014). Several *Janaajati* (indigenous) and Dalit (untouchable caste in Hinduism) groups had been discriminated against due to their cultural practices and language in the Maoist heartland (Karnali) and other areas during the armed conflict.

³ In their party documents, the Maoists frequently used the terms '*Samrajyabadi*' (imperialist) and '*Bistarbadi*' (expansionist) to describe capitalist foreigners.

The Maoist party and its military wing, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), were recruited extensively from marginalised groups to fight the conflict. This recruitment deepened ideological, caste, and ethnic divisions within communities, particularly among those disillusioned with the government, elite groups, capitalism, and foreign imperialism. The ideological nature of the conflict aligns with broader regional dynamics, such as China's Maoist influence and India's Naxalite movement, shedding light on the perceived roles of foreign powers like the USA and India as "imperialists." The armed conflict ultimately resulted in the death of over 17,000 people, the disappearance of 1,300 others, and the destruction of physical infrastructure worth billions of dollars (Adhikari, 2014; Robins, 2011).

Despite limited resources and various challenges, the Maoists gradually expanded their coverage of rural areas in Nepal. Along with gathering small, loosely organised fighting groups, they worked to convince people of the necessity of struggling for their liberation from centralised rule, elite rulers and corrupt bureaucracy. They used culture and arts.⁴ used to promote specific missions and raise awareness among the public. Activists printed and distributed several posters and pamphlets containing

⁴ The term 'art or arts' encompasses various human activities that result in creating visual, auditory, or performing artworks, expressing the artist's imagination, conceptualisation, or technical skills. Individuals can acquire these skills through self-practice or imitation. As Ellen Dissanayake (2015) claims in her work *What Is Art For*, artworks evolve to make socially important activities memorable and pleasurable. In this sense, Dêudã art becomes a creatively unforgettable and enjoyable form for many people in communities, serving as an appreciation of beauty and an expression of emotional power.

Art has been used globally for awareness, healing after wars, and propaganda and warmongering. Vandy Kanyako (2015) highlights the role of performing arts in the war healing process in the article *Arts and War Healing: Peacelinks Performing Arts in Sierra Leone*. Unlike Kanyako, Ross Chambers (1983) critically reviews the role of posters as propaganda tools during the World Wars in her article *Art and Propaganda in an Age of War: The Role of Posters*. Chambers examined how posters influence public opinion and garner support for war efforts. This examination highlights the dual role of art as both a unifying force and a method of manipulation

revolutionary messages and painted slogans on walls. With the help of songs, theatre performances, and rallies, they gathered the public and informed them of their ideologies (Chalaune, 2009). These activities were part of the conflict activated through the cultural units of Maoists.

In contrast, the government declared a state of emergency and deployed the national army to suppress the conflict in the late 1990s. International forces supported the state against the Maoists, including financial assistance. For example, the US government provided over 20 million in military aid in 2002⁵. Meanwhile, the monarchy overtook an elected government, which was later overthrown by public agitation. The conflict ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Nepali government and the Maoists in 2006. The post-conflict community ‘peacebuilding’ processes⁶ The government and Maoists initiated the process in Nepal in the presence of the United Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), a trusted and impartial third party: international communities, donors, global and national non-governmental agencies, civil society organisations, and private entities supported the peace process.

As a result, a new constitution was formulated through a participatory process involving the election of the constituent assembly and was promulgated in 2015. This

⁵ For more information: see <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2002/05/nepa-m02.html>
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2002/05/nepa-m02.html>

⁶ The concept of community ‘peacebuilding’ is not universally accepted in academic literature and is often criticised for failing to fulfil its promises (Öjendal et al., 2021). This ambiguity can create confusion within the field. In this research, I define community ‘peacebuilding’ as activities—particularly those focused on the arts - essential for sustaining stability in the post-conflict phase and driving long-term changes in relationships and structures (Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Lederach, 1997). This research focuses specifically on the relational dimensions of community ‘peacebuilding’ as they relate to the arts and culture of society. A subsequent chapter examines this concept in greater detail.

constitution shaped the ways to institutionalise structural changes, including a federal republic, a secular state, federal governance, legal assurance of inclusive participation, and freedom of speech. With this contextual background in mind, this research specifically examines the outcomes and processes of Nepal's Maoist conflict (1996–2006). The findings of this research are not intended to be directly applicable to other regional or global conflicts related to Maoist or Communist movements. Instead, this research focuses on Nepal's unique context and draws connections to broader peacebuilding processes that share relevant themes and dynamics. While insights may resonate with other post-conflict settings, the conclusions are framed within Nepal's specific sociopolitical and cultural environment.

Scholarly and development research on community 'peacebuilding' in Nepal highly prioritises the role of the United Nations (UN), international communities, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, and political parties (Nepali and Pyakurel, 2009; Regmi, 2016). They contributed to successful peace negotiations, signed peace deals, pledged to work towards peace and unity, held free elections, and supported state institutions capable of carrying out stable and effective government (Öjendal et al., 2021) as part of the broader framework of peace processes. However, these works do not precisely emphasise the role of local culture and artistic engagement in promoting peace in conflict and post-conflict situations. The findings of this research suggest that traditions such as the Dêudã culture possess transformative power in peacebuilding, and this model advocates the integration of practices into broader reconciliation frameworks.

Civil society and non-governmental organisations also play essential roles in promoting and preserving culture and the arts in communities, but this role has yet to

be widely acknowledged. When discussing community ‘peacebuilding’ in post-conflict societies like Nepal, it is essential to consider the long tradition of coexistence among communities of different castes, classes, and ethnicities. In the following section of this thesis, I describe the key terms and concepts to clarify the thesis limitations.

Key Terms/Concepts

This research project introduces three major concepts: the arts, culture, and community ‘peacebuilding’. Defining key terms relevant to the discussion, particularly within community ‘peacebuilding’ and the arts, is essential to avoid ambiguity. These terms include conflict and peace, culture and arts, Dêudă and dialogue, and community ‘peacebuilding’. Understanding the patterns of conflict and upholding peace in society, especially in post-conflict societies such as Nepal, is crucial for grasping the meaning of each concept, its implications, and its interrelationships.

- **Conflict and Peace**

Conflict and peace are often considered two opposing concepts, defined in various ways by different scholars; however, they coexist within societies. Conflict can be understood as a state of disagreement or opposition between two or more parties, manifesting in various forms such as disputes, armed conflict, civil war, violence, and animosity (Galtung, 1969; Burton and Conflict, 1990; Wallenstein, 2015; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Conversely, scholars often define peace as harmony, tranquillity, and the absence of (armed) conflict or violence (Galtung, 1964; Lederach, 1997). They

also view peace as an ongoing process of resolving disputes, negotiating, and reconciling conflicting parties (Galtung, 1964).

Modern societies frequently navigate a spectrum between conflict and peace. For instance, in late July and early August 2024, the United Kingdom witnessed a wave of right-wing demonstrations and riots across several cities.⁷ Yet, these outbreaks did not constitute a full “state of conflict.” They occurred alongside counter-protests, ongoing democratic processes, and community peacebuilding initiatives. This example illustrates that societies can exist in a dynamic equilibrium in which conflict and peace are not mutually exclusive but interrelated processes that shape social dynamics. Recognising this complexity is essential for understanding the nuanced character of both conflict and peace and their impact on societal development.

Although many view conflict and peace as binary opposites, some scholars argue that they can coexist in different forms (Galtung, 1996; Ramsbotham et al., 2016). These scholars describe peace as a relative concept existing on a continuum, ranging from negative peace (the absence of violence) to positive peace (the presence of justice, equality, and human rights) (Galtung, 1996). Similarly, they portray conflict as a necessary condition for social change and progress, driving the emergence of new ideas, values and institutions (Coser, 1956).

Conflict and peace are complex, multi-faceted concepts defined in various ways, depending on the context and perspective of the observer. While conflict is often seen

⁷ These events included anti-immigration riots and right-wing demonstrations in Southport, London, Blackpool, and other UK cities. They were marked by attacks on mosques and hotels housing asylum seekers, the burning of a police van, injuries to police officers, and hundreds of arrests. See: *Vox* (2024), “How the UK’s far right used a local tragedy to spur chaos,” [link](#); *The Guardian* (2025), “Two in five arrested for last summer’s UK riots had been reported for domestic abuse,” [link](#).

as a harmful and destructive force, it can also catalyse positive change and transformation. Similarly, peace is the absence of conflict and the presence of justice, equality, and human rights. Additionally, peace theorists encourage human relations between two or more parties, which are essential for achieving peace in society. The parties may be within a person, state, nation, region, or civilisation. Galtung (1969) emphasises that one party alone cannot build relations; instead, parties need to express their interests to (re)establish relations to achieve peace. The foundational elements of peace include justice, equality, freedom of speech, physical well-being, security, and self-identity. The meaning of peace needs to be understood beyond the ‘absence of war’ or armed conflicts, which peace scholars consider to be ‘positive or negative.’ Realising peace is related to the level of structural violence in communities to overcome negative peace and move towards positive peace.

According to Galtung (1969), structural violence refers to a form of violence wherein social structures or institutions harm individuals or groups by preventing them from achieving their full potential. Such violence can occur due to systemic inequalities, such as discrimination, poverty, and lack of access to education or healthcare. In conflict or post-conflict societies, structural violence can exacerbate existing tensions and hinder recovery and development by perpetuating disparities and limiting opportunities for individuals and communities to thrive. Likewise, Farmer (2004) argues that structural violence results from social structures, institutions, and historical and political processes that create and maintain inequalities. Additionally, Sen (2000) highlights the importance of addressing income inequality as a key factor in promoting social justice and reducing the structural violence. Finally, UNDP (2006) emphasises the need for a human rights-based approach to address structural

violence, empower marginalised groups, and promote their participation in decision-making processes. These papers provide evidence of the importance of addressing structural violence in conflict-affected societies and the need for a comprehensive approach that involves all stakeholders.

This PhD research seeks to deconstruct the idea of structural violence by examining how individuals pursue peace in their minds and actions at the personal level through artistic and cultural engagements despite facing various challenges in sustaining peace. These challenges may include poverty, discrimination, and marginalisation issues. The research also explores the internal satisfaction experienced by participants after engaging in Dêudã events, considering this as a measure of ‘peace.’



Figure 2: A Dêudã performance by a group of women from Far-western living in Kathmandu, 2023.

A group of women in traditional attire, representing various districts of Far-western Nepal, perform Dêudã during a program in Kathmandu. Although residing in Kathmandu for professional and family reasons, these women remain actively engaged in promoting Dêudã culture, showcasing its significance as a social artefact through their participation and involvement collaboration. Photo: Nar Saud

- **Culture and Arts**

Culture encompasses an intricate and multi-faceted concept with diverse definitions and interpretations that vary across disciplines. Scholars perceive it as a framework shaping human and societal existence, a compilation of collective knowledge and behaviours and a way of life that includes language, religion, cuisine, and the arts. It also reflects collective attributes, representing shared knowledge and tools for

managing external environments and internal norms (Schein, 2015). However, people often need to pay more attention to its boundaries and substance, leading to misconceptions. Despite its varied and unstructured applications, culture plays a pivotal role in shaping organisational and national identities (Lee, 2018).

Culture encompasses human society's social behaviours and norms, knowledge, beliefs, laws, customs, abilities, and habits (Boulding, 2000). People acquire culture through acculturation and socialisation in various societies. Religious beliefs, group worship, rituals, and theological texts constitute the aspects of ordinary culture. Examples of culture include the appreciation of opera and hospitality norms across countries. Boulding (2000) observes that cultures rooted in ethnicity, religion, language, or class typically align with state boundaries, although they can extend beyond them. For instance, the culture of Nepal's Far-western region differs from other areas in terms of language, livelihood, and cultural celebrations. People originally from this region sustain these traditions even when they live elsewhere in Nepal or abroad.



Figure 3: Engaging People Through Traditional Music, 2023

A group of elderly locals plays traditional musical instruments in Mellekh, Achham, on 15 April. This practice is inspiring and transforming younger generations.

Photo: Gobind Khadka.

The arts also encompass various human activities that result in visual, auditory, or performing artworks, expressing the artist's imagination, conceptualisation, or

technical skills. These skills can be learned through self-practice and imitation. Ellen Dissanayake (2015) argues in her work, *What Is Art For*, that artworks evolve to make socially essential activities memorable and pleasant. For example, a painting such as the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci can be considered art because it captures and conveys beauty and emotion. In this sense, Dêudã is an art form because it is memorable and pleasurable to many people in communities, serving as an appreciation of beauty and an expression of emotional strength.



Figure 4: The Essence of Dêudã Dance, 2024

In this video, the performers showcase the Dêudã dance, beautifully reflecting the region's cultural richness. Set in a communal space, the scene highlights the close-knit nature of the community. The participants' expressions, energy, and movements radiate joy, reverence, and unity.

This clip serves as a valuable visual documentation of the Dêudã dance, underscoring its significant role in the cultural and social life of the people in the Darchula district. It reminds us of how traditional practices like Dêudã during the Gaura festival are vital in preserving cultural identity and fostering community cohesion in this part of Nepal.

Video by: Dinesh Dhami

In this research, art is a medium for expressing and sharing emotions, feelings, needs, harmonies and differences, happiness, and sorrow in human relations that exist or exist in the community. Art primarily refers to the Dêudã song, which has been celebrated in the region for a long time. A detailed discussion of Dêudã appears in the second section of this thesis's review section (Chapter 1).

Scholars believe that culture shapes and influences people's minds and hearts by embedding itself in their values, beliefs, and behaviours (Hofstede, 2011; Oxford, 2014). Culture is expressed collectively through multiple dimensions: historical,

societal, behavioural, normative, relational, cognitive, structural, symbolic, and artistic aspects of society (Oxford, 2014: 4). As a result, people develop an understanding of art, heritage, trauma, lifestyle, values, and rules of living, along with interaction and communication patterns, perceptions, ideas, emotions, and modes of representation. Thus, culture is integral to how individuals perceive and interact with the world.

In this research, the connection between art and culture is relational. Dêudã culture is a form of expressive art in which participants express their human emotions. Human feelings often result from the interplay between culture and the arts. People express what they feel as a spontaneous reaction to an actual, present situation because such expressions naturally arise without premeditation, reflecting immediate responses to events, the company we are in, things people say, or even the weather itself. These expressions reveal our physical and mental states and the emotions that stir within us (Langer, 1962:7). Furthermore, the creation of art is inspired by the region's cultural values. As a result, participants used the local language, customs, gestures, and traditions throughout the process.

- **Dêudã Culture and Dialogue**

As a performing art, the Dêudã culture consists of rhythmic lyrics or poetic verses, music, and some form of dancing. Traditionally, it is performed both personally in the form of lyrics that depict miseries and sorrows, love and romance, and social commentary, as well as in public to comfort audiences in Nepal's far- and mid-western regions. Although it does not require a specific time or moment to celebrate, people tend to gather during special occasions to make it memorable. The social

context, cultural gatherings, geographical setting, and local customs and habits play significant roles in creating songs. As mentioned earlier, in this research, Dêudã culture mainly refers to a form of performing art in Far-western Nepal, an integral aspect of livelihood culture in the region.

Similarly, dialogue is a means of communication between two or more parties. Parties exploring conflicting emotions, needs, feelings, and requirements can be individuals or groups of people, communities, states, nations, or countries. The parties can use different means, including dancing and singing. However, this process may lead to disputes, destruction, and even violence. Bohm et al. (1991) stated that a group of people can analyse their unconscious biases and beliefs that affect how they interact. Such methods help them have conversations that bring attention to practical and ineffective communication. It reveals the confusing contradictions that make the group avoid certain subjects or vigorously defend their opinions without valid reasoning.

In this research, I explore Dêudã culture as an artistic practice that fosters community dialogue through traditional and cultural participation. During its celebration, participants perform in both solo and duet forms. Each group or party designates a leader (Gitaru or गितारु) who guides the team by sharing songs or dances, gradually fostering a dialogic environment through lyrical questions and answers. When the leader poses a question, other participants follow, and the opposing leader and team respond with answers. In Dêudã culture, people refer to this exchange as ‘dialogue.’ Through this process, participants raise an issue (question) as a problem, while the reply (answer) seeks a resolution to the problem. This process continues until the

dialogue reaches completion, although the resolution may (or may not) be realised.

An example of a wife's call for her husband is as follows:

ल्याइआउलो बम्मैका गाउँमन, चोली चाईनन् बम्मैका गामन, आफ्नै गजी सार ।
मखमलका । झुरी रात कट्टनहै त, हुनु जिम्मेदार ।।
देशको धन घर ल्याइआउलो, अरल्ली
झजलका ।।

<i>From distant Bombay I'll return with, velvet blouses, fine and rare. With foreign wealth we'll deck our home, silver bangles, bright to wear for you.</i>	<i>No need blouses from the distant Bombay, Our own soil is fine and true. If bitter nights are ours to face, Then hold your ground, it's up to you.</i>
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This dialogic Dêudã song reflects community 'peacebuilding' themes by illustrating the importance of relationships and emotional bonds over material wealth, as follows: The husband, who works in India, promises his wife beautiful clothes and financial security upon returning to their village, symbolising the common pursuit of material comfort. However, the wife values their togetherness in the village over economic gain, highlighting her more profound desire for connection and unity. This narrative aligns with community 'peacebuilding' principles, emphasising that true peace and happiness come from mutual support and shared experiences rather than wealth, a reality for many former Maoist combatants. Thus, it underscores the idea that peace is not just the absence of conflict but the presence of meaningful relationships that sustain communities through challenges and adversity.

Similarly, public opinion raises concerns among authorities and parties involved.

Public opinion towards political parties is represented through the song: ठुलठुला भाषण

गद्दा, गाउँमा भोट माग्दा, जितेपछि सबै नेता, कुसी मात्र तगडा. This song highlights the

disconnect between political promises and actions, a significant barrier to community 'peacebuilding'. Politicians often deliver grand speeches in villages to secure votes,

promising change and prosperity. However, once elected, they frequently focus on maintaining their power and position, neglecting the needs of various community factions. This pattern of unfulfilled promises breeds distrust and disillusionment among people, illustrating the complexity of societies in which different groups may have conflicting interests.

For sustainable peace, leaders must move beyond rhetoric and take actions that benefit the community, acknowledging its diverse and sometimes antagonistic elements. Genuine leadership is required to prioritise community well-being and foster trust among these groups. Such leaders' activities involve recognising and addressing underlying social tensions and divisions, building solidarity, and facilitating dialogue and cooperation. community 'peacebuilding' efforts can be genuinely effective and meaningful only by understanding and engaging with society's multi-faceted nature.

- **Peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding generally describes post-conflict actions – a diplomatic course to improve people's social and economic conditions (Latifi, 2011). Johan Galtung, a pioneer in conflict and peace studies, introduced the term in the 1970s to propose methods for enhancing human security. He argued that sustainable peace requires systems that address the fundamental causes of conflict by focusing on building social capacity by tackling root issues.

Initially conceived as a top-down approach, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali further articulated the concept of community 'peacebuilding' in 1992 in *An Agenda for Peace*. This document introduced the language of building peace into the

UN system, emphasising peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy, and peace-making. It defined peacebuilding as “an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992: 11).

Since then, numerous development agencies have adopted the concept of peacebuilding to design programs for conflict and post-conflict countries. However, as its use has proliferated, peacebuilding has sometimes become a cliché, risking dilution of its meaning and effectiveness. This overuse highlights the need for critical engagement with the concept to ensure that it remains a practical and impactful tool for achieving sustainable peace. Such a community ‘peacebuilding’ trend is particularly relevant in the Middle East, where complex socio-political dynamics and external interventions have influenced peacebuilding efforts in the region. For instance, peace initiatives, such as those in the Israeli Palestinian context, often face challenges owing to asymmetric power relations and the need for local ownership of peace processes (Abu-Nimer, 2001). Moreover, the role of youth in community ‘peacebuilding’ in the Middle East and North Africa is increasingly recognised, yet it faces obstacles due to the region’s complex geopolitical environment (Williams, 2016). Effective community ‘peacebuilding’ in these regions requires an integrated approach that considers local cultural contexts and avoids imposing external models (Abu-Nimer, 2001).

Some scholars critically argue that peacebuilding is not just a post-conflict action but a continuous process that should occur before, during, and after conflicts (Lederach, 1997; Richmond, 2011). They contend that peacebuilding should be a long-term process that addresses the root causes of conflict, promotes social justice and builds

sustainable peace. They emphasise that peacebuilding should extend beyond post-conflict situations and be implemented in conflict-prone areas to prevent violence from occurring. For instance, Lederach (1997) views peacebuilding as a holistic process that addresses the conflict's structural, cultural, and relational dimensions. He suggested that peacebuilding should focus on building relationships, promoting dialogue, and addressing underlying causes. Several scholars contest the idea of peacebuilding as a post-conflict action, arguing that it should be viewed as an ongoing process that tackles the root causes of conflict.

In this research, community 'peacebuilding' refers to community gatherings where people come together to share emotions, build stronger relationships, and promote reconciliation through cultural and artistic activities. In contrast, personal peace refers to an individual's inner sense of well-being and harmony. However, personal peace is closely tied to larger peace efforts because when individuals heal and reconcile their past experiences, it helps society as a whole to recover and unite. This type of peace often emerges in cultural and artistic settings, connecting personal growth to community strength and post-conflict healing.

In Nepal and South Asia, personal peace is significantly influenced by cultural values and psychosocial factors. Self-reconciliation is essential for achieving inner peace, particularly among women living in patriarchal societies (Niaz and Hassan, 2006). Furthermore, South Asia's unique perspective on peace emphasises that it is an ongoing, internally driven process that aligns with the concept of personal peace as inner harmony sustained through cultural and artistic engagements (Jones et al., 2013).

Based on this evidence, participation in cultural activities can help individuals overcome their painful pasts and achieve inner peace by providing a platform for expression, reflection, and connection with others. These activities enable individuals to express emotions, share stories, and find solidarity, which can contribute to healing and reconciliation. Consequently, this research aims to analyse how artistic engagement can support these individuals by examining Dêudã culture in Nepal and exploring its potential to facilitate personal and collective healing within communities.

The following section discusses the connection between art, culture, and community ‘peacebuilding’ in global and local contexts.

Interweaving Culture, Arts and Peacebuilding

Culture is not a fixed and stable entity; it is a dynamic site of struggle in which different groups and individuals negotiate and contest meanings and values. It is reproduced by dominant and subaltern groups that resist and challenge prevailing ideologies. Antonio Gramsci⁸, an anti-fascist communist imprisoned by Mussolini in Italy in the 1930s, offers a compelling analysis of this dynamic. In his prison writings, smuggled out of his cell, Gramsci argues that culture is a terrain of hegemonic struggle, where dominant and subaltern groups compete to produce and disseminate meanings and values. He suggests that culture is not merely a tool of domination but also a site of resistance and counter-hegemony, where oppressed groups can assert their meanings and challenge the status quo.

⁸ For more: Ramos, V. Jr., 1982. *In its most inclusive meaning, the concept of “hegemony” refers to a condition in process*. Theoretical Review, No. 27, March-April. Transcription, editing and markup by Paul Saba. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-7/tr-gramsci.htm> [Accessed 17 Feb. 2025].

Raymond Williams (1981) argued that culture should be democratised, allowing everyone an equal right to participate in its production and interpretation. Historically, the arts – as cultural artefacts – have played a dual role in promoting both peace and conflict within communities, being used to influence ideology, politics, and social issues in both positive and negative ways. At the outbreak of World War II, Germany, Russia, Italy and France had developed sophisticated propaganda machines. At the same time, the Allies lagged behind, relying on posters and wall paintings to mobilise public sentiment (Chambers, 1983).

After WWII, France and Britain fought to counter the communist influence in South Asia. The British government took significant steps to prevent the spread of communism through military actions, such as the Malayan Emergency, and diplomatic efforts (Williams, 1972). Although less influential in South Asia than in Southeast Asia, France sought to maintain its colonial influence while countering communist insurgencies (Thomas, 1997). These actions highlight the complex influence of the impact powers in the region.

Additionally, the 1920s saw the emergence of critical art movements in Russia and Germany, such as futurism and surrealism, which were used for social commentary and propaganda purposes. These movements have shaped the cultural landscape, influencing global perceptions, including in colonial regions such as South Asia (Barthel and Wongsurawat, 2021). The interplay between Western cultural developments and colonial influence underscores the need for discussions in the cultural debate.

Furthermore, various studies have emphasised the positive role of culture and the arts in community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. For example, playback Theatre⁹ has been instrumental in promoting community reconciliation in Nepal, offering inspiration and emotional release (Dirnstorfer and Saud, 2020; Saud, 2023). Similarly, in post-war Indonesia, the arts served as tools for resistance and reconciliation, rooted in cultural values (Bräuchler, 2022). The Maoists in Nepal also utilised various forms of art to propagate their political ideology¹⁰ Moreover, it mobilises marginalised groups, including Dalits and people with low incomes, in their fight for proletarian liberation.

In her research on the artistic and cultural engagements of Maoist cadres during and after the armed conflict, Mottin (2008) indicated that the ‘catchy melodies’ of the arts (songs) were intended to raise ‘clinchd fists,’ a symbol of victory for Maoists, persuading village people to participate in political and cultural programs throughout the country such melodies align with the peace principle. If the arts are used thoughtfully and constructively without hurting other people’s feelings or artistic values, they can provide a safe space for those in need. Artworks can escalate conflict in any community when this is not ensured.

Artists and communities can find (safe) spaces to deal with difficult situations/times as they create art, participate in these programs, and witness artistic and cultural

⁹ Playback Theater is an original form of interactive and improvisational theatre that builds on the tradition of psychodrama. It is usually organised in community settings where individuals volunteer to share their stories on specific topics or lives. A facilitator digs into the story’s details, and the individual selects from a group of trained performers who mirror the story back to the person and the audience. For more information, see Jonathan Fox and Heinrich Dauber (Eds.) (1999). *Gathering Voices. Essays on Playback Theatre*. New Palts, NY: Tusitala Publishing.

¹⁰ Inspired by the ideas and actions of communist figures such as Mao, Lenin, and Stalin, the Maoists of Nepal developed their ideology known as the Prachanda Path. This ideology reflects a unique adaptation of communist principles tailored to the Nepalese context. For further details, see the article accessed on 23 July 2023 at [Taylor and Francis Online](#).

engagements. The arts also create awareness among people about the possible effects of conflict and preventive measures of the impact of reverse disputes to manage peace in society. Premaratna (2018) noted that theatre has the potential to introduce common but underreported stories of institutional violence into the social discourse. In such spaces, people feel encouraged to share their stories that were not shared in the past, and the rest come to know the reality (Saud, 2022). Additionally, violence reduction can be aided by the arts. It is believed that artists can create connections between different cultures and inspire people to aim higher because of their self-expression (Boal, 1985; Fox, 2015). Artistic skills can also be used to investigate issues, process unresolved emotions, and forge new informal bonds. Therefore, different art forms can help reduce community violence and heal individuals.

Throughout history, culture and the arts have been used as propaganda and a means of resistance and subversion against oppressive regimes and dominant ideologies (Baxandall, 1985). From ancient civilisations to modern political movements, art and culture have shaped public opinion, rallied support, and inspired people to take action. One of the earliest examples of culture being used as propaganda is found in ancient Egypt. The pyramids, temples, and statues they built were impressive feats of engineering and robust symbols of legitimacy as rulers.

In ancient Greece, art and culture were used to promote democracy and civic virtues. Some scholars argue that ancient Greek art reinforced social hierarchies and promoted the interests of the ruling class. For example, the Greek philosopher Plato argued that art should be censored because it could corrupt citizens' minds and undermine the state's stability. Similarly, some scholars say that Renaissance art was used not only for propaganda but also to reinforce social hierarchies and promote the ruling class's

interests. For example, the art historian Michael Baxandall argued that Renaissance art displayed the ruling elites' wealth and power and reinforced their social status (Baxandall, 1985).

More recently, art and culture have been used as propaganda by political movements and social causes (Hooks, 1990; Rose, 1994). For example, during the apartheid era in South Africa, Black artists and activists used art as a means of resistance against the government's racist policies. Music, poetry, and visual art were used to express the experiences of black South Africans and challenge the dominant narrative of white supremacy. During the civil rights movement in the United States, Black artists and activists used music to express Black Americans' experiences and call for social justice and equality. This form of creative communication uses everyday experiences to challenge the dominant power structure and ideology of the period (Morant, 2010).

Throughout this research, I refer to 'culture and arts' as a wide range of artistic activities, including music, song, dance, acting, and performances, focusing on Dêudã culture in Nepal. This type of art has been practiced in Nepal's Karnali and Sudurpashchim (Far-western) provinces for ages and is inclusive, allowing anyone to participate regardless of their background (Pant, 2008). Owing to the interactive and social nature of the arts (Epskamp, 1999), I focus primarily on their performance aspects. These performances allow participants and audiences to experience and appreciate art forms without preconceived judgments or barriers. For example, in the research locations, many people participate in Dêudã during festivals and special occasions without hesitation and join freely if they wish.

In this regard, it is beneficial to have the arts available and accessible to a wide range of people, regardless of class and position. Therefore, culture and the arts can build

relationships and celebrations by raising awareness of specific community social issues. Through culture and the arts, people and communities are encouraged to work together, express themselves, and connect, despite their different formats and goals. Some examples of cultural and artistic expression in the form of Dêudã are as follows:

*चल जिया बलपति संपूर्ण रथी गर बाबु बलिभद्र धर्मको बाटो
इसा त पापीया देश तुलसी लाई नैथी कसो गरी होला जिया धर्मको बाटो
आँगन तिलसी लया होला धर्मको बाटो*

Religion: The religious verse of the Dêudã culture highlights the tension between despair and hope, drawing on the community ‘peacebuilding’ theme of finding strength in cultural roots and traditions. In despair, a son tells his mother of his intention to leave their homeland, seeking refuge where even the sacred Tulsi plant might be absent, symbolising the loss of cultural identity. Despite this, the mother encourages him to stay and plant Tulsi in their courtyard, reflecting her belief that honouring their traditions and maintaining their cultural and religious practices can bring hope and happiness, even in difficult times. This emphasis on nurturing cultural roots underscores the idea that peace is achieved through external change, internal resilience, and preservation of cultural identity, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity that transcends adversity.

History: This verse from a Dêudã song illustrates how historical conflicts are narrated, providing insights into past culturally significant events. The lyrics describe the journey from the song: *तल्लो बाटो ताछेदोकको, माझ बाटो हुम्लिको, तौलाखर लडाईं भयो, नाश पर्यो जुम्लिको*, culminating in a fierce battle at Taulakhar between the Sinja State regime and Khar State. The verse describes how the Sinja squad was fated to lose,

possibly reflecting the perceived inevitability of conflict outcomes owing to the power dynamics and circumstances of the time.

However, the notion of inevitability is only one interpretation of these events. Other perspectives emphasise the resilience and strategic choices of the Khas State, the role of chance, or even the moral lessons intended by the song's creators. My perspective, which initially focused on the futility of war and the importance of peaceful resolution, has evolved through this research. I now recognise that Dêudã songs can also be viewed as celebrations of cultural identity, resilience, and the complexity of historical narratives.

Such songs preserve cultural memory and encourage reflection on the past, fostering a deeper understanding of the consequences of conflict and the value of peace itself. By examining these multiple interpretations, I appreciate the richness of the Dêudã culture and its capacity to inspire dialogue on history and conflict.

Society: The song, *जाडिले मरिन हो कि ओरडकी कोडी, आइजा सुवा माया भया लुवा संग्ला तोडी*, reflects on a dark chapter in history when leprosy was a feared and misunderstood disease, leading to the isolation and inhumane treatment of those afflicted in the context of Far-western region in Nepal. The lyrics highlight the tragic fate of individuals who were abandoned or killed because of the stigma surrounding the disease. However, the song also underscores the transformation in societal consciousness, where compassion and understanding have replaced fear and ignorance. Today, leprosy is almost eradicated, and patients in Nepal receive free medication, symbolising a collective move towards healing and reconciliation. This shift reflects a broader community 'peacebuilding' theme, wherein empathy and care

for the vulnerable become central to societal values. By acknowledging past injustices and embracing compassionate actions, the song conveys a powerful message of peace, demonstrating how societies can evolve to prioritise the dignity and well-being of all individuals.



Figure 5: Women's Voices Through Dêudâ, 2023

In this video, women express their emotions through a Dêudâ performance in Dadeldhura district during the Teej Festival. In a patriarchal society, opportunities for women to publicly express themselves are rare. Festivals like Teej provide a valuable space for them to share their feelings through song.

This celebration allows women to enjoy time for themselves, momentarily free from the demands of household chores. The Dêudâ performance is not only a cultural expression but also an important outlet for women's voices and emotions.

Video by: Dan Bhandari (8 September 2023)



Furthermore, numerous organisations have integrated the arts into their global community 'peacebuilding' activities. The form of art used varies depending on the project, the interests of stakeholders, and the resources available. Since the late 1990s, the international development agency, Search for Common Ground, has supported peace initiatives employing artistic expression. In 1999¹¹, they established a separate division to further their efforts at the intersection of arts, culture, and peace. This division has implemented community-based peace activities in Nepal using sports and audio-visual arts. Other well-known groups leveraging the arts for community 'peacebuilding' include Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International, International Alert, Civil Peace Service, Transcend and War Child. These organisations use creative expression to raise awareness and support their community 'peacebuilding' efforts in the region.

¹¹ The organisation's website was www.sfcg.org.

Numerous individuals and small groups worldwide use art to promote peace. One example is the four-year global initiative Mobile Arts for Peace¹², which provides a comparative perspective on arts-based interdisciplinary practices for community ‘peacebuilding’ in Nepal, Rwanda, Indonesia, and Kyrgyzstan. This initiative brings together universities, cultural practitioners, civil society organisations, and young people worldwide.

While these initiatives have primarily been established in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, they are less prevalent in Western countries such as the UK and the US. This discrepancy can be attributed to several factors, including the different socio-political contexts and specific needs of conflict-affected regions, where such initiatives are often more urgently required.

Funding for these projects typically comes from various sources, including international development agencies, government aid programs, philanthropic organisations, and non-governmental organisations. The motives behind funding these projects can vary, including fostering reconciliation, reducing conflict, promoting social cohesion, and empowering communities to build sustainable peace in the long term. These initiatives testify to the transformative power of the arts in addressing complex social challenges and highlight the global commitment to community ‘peacebuilding’ through creative means.

Drawing on the arts-based literature (Levy, 2015) and my empirical experiences, this thesis categorises existing art forms used for community ‘peacebuilding’ purposes worldwide. These are 1) interactive arts, 2) therapeutic arts, and 3) campaign arts.

¹² For more information see the project’s website, map.lincoln.ac.uk.

Interactive arts deal with community-based joint projects in conflict-prone or post-conflict regions to address relational components of peace. Simultaneously, therapeutic arts include art or music as therapy for people who have suffered trauma. Schouten et al. (2014) found that art therapy in treating traumatised adults yielded promising results in clinical practice. Likewise, telling stories and expressing personal narratives through various art forms to a community of witnesses can be a powerful tool for individuals to work through difficult experiences (Speiser and Speiser, 2022). Furthermore, Gardener (2022) and Groot et al. (2021) asserted that the value of music for quality of life has already been emphasised, especially in older people and through songs close to the participants.

In arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’, artists create works in various forms, including literary (essays, short stories, poetry), performative (music, dance, theatre), visual (photography, paintings, sculpture), audio-visual (film, podcasts), and multi-method approaches that combine two or more art forms. These works are presented in schools and community platforms to engage participants on specific issues, such as the ‘Changing the Story.’¹³ The project supported building inclusive communities through arts-based activities with and for young people in 12 countries affected by past and present conflict. Brouwer and Hesselning (2019) note that while the arts can be a powerful tool for community ‘peacebuilding’, they are only sometimes effective and may only suit some contexts. The success of arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’ activities depends on the cultural context, the nature of the conflict, and the initiative’s goals.

¹³ ‘Changing the Story’ was a four-year international, multidisciplinary project conducted from October 2018 to September 2022. It focused on building inclusive communities through arts-based activities involving young people in countries affected by past and present conflicts. For more information, visit the project’s website: [Changing the Story](#).

This research is guided by Lisa Schirch's (2013) community 'peacebuilding' framework, which emphasises the multi-faceted approach required to build peace in communities. Schirch explains that community 'peacebuilding' at the personal level involves changing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours to resolve conflicts, including managing physical and emotional reactions to tense situations. Interpersonally, peace can be fostered by increasing understanding of differences and commonalities and by addressing injustices. Structurally, it involves changing institutions to promote human fulfilment, while culturally, it focuses on non-violent conflict resolution approaches through increased understanding and tolerance between groups.

A finding through the case of Dêudã song illustrates that the song *साल सालैको पर्दैशिनु कति माणै शोक; खाना दिनेई ईजा छैन जन लागेई भोक* represented the emotions of people in different levels. This case song examines how Dêudã folk songs from Far-western Nepal facilitate peacebuilding across personal, interpersonal, and structural dimensions. Focusing on the song *साल सालैको पर्दैशिनु* (Year after year living away - how much sorrow can one bear?), field observations from Kailali district (2022) reveal its transformative potential in post-conflict communities.

At the personal level, these songs provide a vital emotional outlet. During community gatherings, migrant workers frequently wept while singing verses about family separation, particularly the poignant line *कति माणै शोक* (how much sorrow). This cultural practice creates a socially sanctioned space for vulnerability, countering the stigma around expressing grief in a society that often demands emotional stoicism. The songs' therapeutic function aligns with contemporary understandings of music as

a tool for psychological healing, particularly for individuals coping with trauma from migration or conflict.

The interpersonal reconciliation effects emerged clearly during participatory observations. The call-and-response structure of Dêudã performances facilitated unexpected intergenerational bonding. Youth who had previously dismissed traditional practices joined elders in singing, bridging cultural divides. One striking example was a 22-year-old returnee migrant who reported gaining new understanding of his father's emotional silence after they performed the song together. These musical interactions created platforms for empathy across age groups and between genders, with women often taking lead roles in verses about the hardships of maintaining households during male migration.

Structurally, Dêudã songs have demonstrated capacity to mobilise communities for systemic change. Women's groups in the research area adapted traditional lyrics to advocate for migrant labour rights, leveraging the songs' cultural legitimacy to demand policy reforms. This strategic use of folk culture proved effective - the song's themes of displacement were directly referenced in a 2023 local municipality proposal for migrant support programs. The case thus shows how cultural practices can transition from personal catharsis to political advocacy, creating pathways for addressing root causes of conflict.

Such evidence supports the thesis's central argument for culturally grounded peacebuilding frameworks in three keyways. First, it demonstrates how traditional practices can address trauma at the individual level. Second, it reveals their role in repairing social fractures. Third, it shows their potential to inspire structural reforms. While limited to one geographic area, the findings align with Lederach's (1997)

concept of “moral imagination” in peacebuilding and Turner's theory of *communitas*, suggesting broader applicability.

Such a case of Déudã culture ultimately illustrates how cultural expressions can simultaneously function as tools for personal healing, social reconciliation, and structural transformation. By giving voice to collective suffering while preserving cultural identity, such traditions offer a holistic approach to sustainable peacebuilding that merits inclusion in both academic theory and practical interventions.

Although Schirch’s framework provides broad theoretical guidance, practical applications can be seen in various arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives in the Global South. For instance, community theatre projects, as Dirnstorfer and Saud (2020) showcased, build relationships between conflict victims in Nepal through Playback Theatre, which brings together people from opposing sides of a conflict to facilitate shared storytelling, build empathy, and transform cultural narratives. These projects illustrate how Schirch’s principles can be implemented by fostering personal growth, interpersonal understanding and cultural change.

Furthermore, this research challenges the notion that community ‘peacebuilding’ is primarily a top-down process driven by governments and international organisations, such as Nepal’s. Instead, it highlights the importance of local arts and culture in the long-term processes of community building and local community ‘peacebuilding’. By emphasising that community ‘peacebuilding’ is a grassroots effort involving the active participation of local communities, this research underscores the transformative role of arts and culture. These practices are essential for shaping people’s perspectives, fostering societal development, and building confidence among community members.

This synthesis highlights the multi-faceted role of the arts in fostering peace and perpetuating conflict. This reflects their power to shape society in diverse ways while being influenced by broader geopolitical dynamics.

In the following section, I discuss the fundamental reasons for researching the arts and community ‘peacebuilding’ and then assess the research questions that guide this research.

Motivation for Research

I have desired to write a thesis examining the nexus between artistic dialogue and community ‘peacebuilding’ in communities for several reasons. First, the arts can enhance dialogue between different groups in conflict, even after the conflict ends. Artistic dialogue refers to the use of creative expressions, such as visual arts, music, theatre, and dance, as a medium for communication and understanding between conflicting parties. Through these forms, individuals and groups can convey emotions, share narratives, and explore complex issues in ways that transcend verbal communication and foster empathy and mutual respect. Groups of people involved might follow different religions, languages, and castes, which often create barriers to traditional dialogue. Little attention has been paid to this area in the community ‘peacebuilding’ sector.

Bräuchler (2022) asserted that although creative community ‘peacebuilding’ approaches are used to mitigate conflict at different levels in Indonesia, there is a strong emphasis on rational solutions that exclude innovative ones. Although the arts are not the only creative method to facilitate community ‘peacebuilding’ activities in communities, they offer significant potential to facilitate communication between

groups and increase understanding. By incorporating artistic dialogue into community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, we can create a more inclusive and holistic approach that acknowledges the cultural and emotional dimensions of conflict, ultimately leading to more sustainable peace.

Additionally, the arts provide an avenue for meaningful and deep communication because of their extensive use of artistic techniques and non-linear expression methods. In my decade of experience practising community ‘peacebuilding’ activities in Nepal and beyond, I have participated in numerous community ‘peacebuilding’ activities and witnessed the transformative power of the arts. For instance, Playback Theatre in Nepal has been a common platform for sharing untold stories while maintaining the storytellers’ privacy and trust. This process ultimately leads to personal healing and community reconciliation by allowing individuals to share their truths (Dirnstorfer and Saud, 2020).

During my work in Nepal in the 2010s, I developed arts, dialogue, and community ‘peacebuilding’ programs that engaged thousands of community members, including conflict victims, through audiovisual performances, music, and playback theatre. I collaborated closely with theatre artists, individuals from combatant backgrounds, and conflict victims living in neighbouring communities, successfully reaching thousands across various remote villages.

Based on my empirical experience and feedback from community members, these community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives were effective in several ways: the arts provided a safe space for individuals to express their emotions and experiences, fostering understanding and empathy among participants. Many community members reported feeling a sense of healing and empowerment through their involvement in

the programs. The arts help bridge divides between groups with differing backgrounds by facilitating dialogue and reconciliation, contributing to a more cohesive and harmonious community. These positive outcomes inspired me to pursue further research in this area, aiming to explore and expand the role of the arts in community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts.

- **Schooling during the Conflict in the Village**

Some peace scholars have noted that experiencing conflict can lead individuals to prioritise education and develop an interest in researching the conflict, potentially to cope with its challenges (Denov, 2010). I was ten years old when the Maoists initiated the conflict in 1996. I lived with my lower-middle-class family in a remote village in the Dadeldhura District of far western Nepal. In our village, only a few families can consistently meet their daily needs, which is a relatively rare situation for the area.

Geographically, the Rolpa district in the Karnali region, a focal point of the conflict, was close to my community. Fortunately, I was not directly affected by the conflict before I started attending school in my village. My father’s old radio set was our only means of communication, providing updates on the conflict through Radio Nepal, the only state-owned channel. Much of the news coverage focused on the ongoing conflict between Maoist cadres and police forces. Headlines frequently reported deaths, injuries, and infrastructure destruction during these incidents.

Exposure to conflict through the media profoundly impacted my young mind, sparking my curiosity about the reasons behind the conflicting behaviours of the involved parties. This experience ignited my interest in researching conflict and community ‘peacebuilding’, ultimately leading me to pursue further education and

research in this field. Through my academic journey, I aim to understand the complexities of conflict and contribute to the development of strategies for sustainable peace.

- **Higher Education During the Pinnacle of the Conflict**

I passed my School Leaving Certificate (SLC) at a village school in 2001. With no options to continue my education in the village, I relocated to nearby cities to pursue an advanced education. However, the conflict escalated, and travelling became increasingly dangerous. The Maoists used landmines and explosives to attack and block roads, targeting the security forces and their vehicles. The government declared a state of emergency, mobilising and deploying the Royal Nepalese Army (now the Nepali Army) against Maoists. Civilian rights were suspended during this emergency, leading to significant challenges for individuals at home and those travelling.

Later that year, I moved to Dhangadhi, a city 120 km from my village. The journey took approximately five hours by bus, with multiple checkpoints set up by security forces to monitor Maoist activities. There were frequent rumours that Maoists disguised themselves as civilians while travelling in these vehicles. During my travels, I witnessed incidents where travellers were suspected of being Maoists, leading security forces to treat innocent civilians as spies and supporters of Maoists. Under these challenging circumstances, travellers lost confidence in arguing with security personnel. I was also mentally and physically harassed several times and questioned about my family history, any associations with Maoists, and people I might know connected to them.

I often walked with other travellers during that time to undergo security checks on roads, including in remote hill areas. The purpose and frequency of these exercises may have been more apparent to passengers who faced similar treatment by Maoist cadres. Many of us have found ourselves in this challenging situation.

On 17 February 2002 one of the most significant Maoist attacks occurred near a district headquarters in Mangalsen, Achham, while I was in my village. A total of 129 people, including security personnel and civilians, lost their lives in the attack.

Although the battleground was 100 km away, it felt as if the bullets were ravaging my surroundings. Five of the deceased police officers were from neighbouring villages, plunging the entire community into shock, pain, and chaos. This was the first time I experienced intense mental anguish and helplessness. The arrival of army helicopters carrying deceased bodies intensified these sentiments. While helicopters were a rare sight in our region due to its remoteness from the capital city, Kathmandu, their presence now signified tragedy as community members gathered to console the families of the fallen officers. The sense of communal solidarity was palpable as everyone came together to support each other in times of need.

This experience had an indelible impact on me. I was not a supporter of the Maoists, but these events compelled me to research the conflict more thoroughly. I continued to explore issues of conflict, peace, and development in Nepal and beyond, which are discussed in the following sections.

- **Working in Peacebuilding After the End of the (Armed) Conflict**

In 2010, I visited four sites where authorities temporarily demobilised Maoist combatants as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This research

project allowed me to closely observe the daily lives of Maoist combatants and experience the warm hospitality of communities in the Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts. Spending a week with the combatants helped me overcome my initial prejudices and made me more comfortable working with them.

After graduating from Tribhuvan University with a degree in Conflict Peace and Development Studies, I worked for the peace process in Nepal under the Secretariat of the Special Committee for Supervision, Reintegration, and Rehabilitation of the Maoist Army Combatants in 2011. During this time, I spent a month in a cantonment in the Kailali District in Far-western Nepal, providing another opportunity to understand the combatants more deeply. As part of a government survey group, we fostered a flexible and friendly environment that allowed us to share our feelings and experiences, despite adhering to strict terms and conditions. During this period, I heard many combatants' life stories, including those of female combatants, regarding their experiences during the conflict.

From 2015 to 2018, I led a project called 'EnActing Dialogue' in Kathmandu, Nepal. We implemented the project in six different communities in Nepal, where over 12,000 ex-combatants settled after reintegration from cantonments. In these communities, ex-combatants often feel alienated from locals due to a lack of trust and belonging.

As the project leader, I supported the reconciliation and healing process between community members and ex-combatants. My team and I used the Playback Theatre approach to create a 'safe space' for the storytellers to share their untold stories. I also updated national-level stakeholders on project planning and implementation, such as the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, District Development Committee, Social Welfare Council, and non-government organisations.

At the project level, I trained my team on project implementation and engaged with the project beneficiaries. One of my key tasks was managing the expectations of the beneficiaries, which involved extensive consultations with community members, particularly dialogue facilitators, who played a key role in organising dialogue events. I spent time understanding the community's real issues and grievances, which helped build trust and rapport. I also formed an advisory committee with representatives from the local government, local peace committees, mothers' groups, and youth clubs in each community to ensure their ownership of the project activities. These responsibilities required me to demonstrate leadership skills and strategic direction for my team in community engagement and project planning. These experiences motivated me to pursue further studies in this field, inspired by the insights and experiences I gained during my internship.

This journey provided me with insights into the internal and external factors of the conflict in Nepal. I learned that external powers, such as India, the United States, and other developed countries, had vested interests in the conflict. I have never supported armed activities, believing that disputes can be settled through dialogue, although this only sometimes happens. Thus, this research also accounts for my personal experiences in building collaborative efforts that support peaceful behaviours.

In this context, my personal experiences have deepened my understanding of the complexities of conflict and community 'peacebuilding', impacting my attitudes and research approaches. These experiences have given me empathy for those involved in the conflict and reinforced my commitment to non-violence and dialogue as practical tools for community 'peacebuilding'. These insights have informed my research, encouraging me to explore strategies that prioritise understanding each other.

I am committed to maintaining neutrality and objectivity in my research. I aim to critically analyse conflict and community ‘peacebuilding’ processes, drawing on diverse perspectives to ensure balanced understanding. I am aware of the importance of separating personal biases from academic enquiry and am dedicated to upholding the rigorous standards of research integrity.

To address concerns regarding objectivity, I highlight my methodological approach, which includes triangulating data sources and engaging with various perspectives. I am aware of my biases and actively work to mitigate them through reflective practices and peer review. My commitment to transparency and ethical research practices ensures that my findings are grounded in evidence and contribute meaningfully to community ‘peacebuilding’.

Incorporating personal experiences into my research on the role of Dêudã culture in community ‘peacebuilding’ can profoundly enrich my work. Sharing my encounters and interactions with Dêudã traditions highlights the importance of this cultural practice in promoting peace and authenticity in this research. My connection to the culture underscores its relevance in community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, illustrating how traditional practices and values foster dialogue and mutual understanding through conflict experience. By weaving my experiences into the research, I can explain how the Dêudã culture contributes to creating and sustaining peace, providing a compelling narrative that resonates with both academic and local communities. This approach supports methodological choices and demonstrates the decisive role that cultural heritage plays in addressing modern challenges.

Overview of Research: Key Questions, Aims, and Objectives

Johan Galtung (1996), Cynthia Cohen (2005), and John P. Lederach (1997, 2005) emphasise that there are meaningful gaps in peacebuilding research, particularly in understanding the role of local communities and their cultural practices. They highlight the need for more research on how local traditions, including the arts, can be effectively integrated into community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives. Michael Shank and Lisa Schirch (2008) specifically argue that the arts offer unique tools for community ‘peacebuilding’ that are underutilised in the field. Similarly, Strasheim and Bogati (2021) underscores the importance of understanding the local context in community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, suggesting that external actors must adapt their approaches to align with local cultural practices and beliefs.

These scholars collectively support the need for more research on the use of local cultural practices, particularly the arts, in community-level ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. There is a significant gap in the field regarding the use of the arts in Nepal’s community ‘peacebuilding’ activities, both in research and theoretical and empirical analysis. This thesis explores the relationship between culture, arts, and community ‘peacebuilding’ during and after the Maoist conflict in Nepal, focusing on the Dêudā culture of the country’s Far-western region.

- **Key Questions**

This PhD research addresses the issue of providing alternative options or methods of sustaining peace in post-conflict communities that can significantly contribute to knowledge production in the arts and community ‘peacebuilding’ and community engagement projects. For this, the thesis responds to three key research questions.

1. How has the (armed) conflict changed community-based cultural practices in Nepal's Far-western region?
2. In what ways, if at all, does Dêudã culture contribute to community peacebuilding and social cohesion?
3. What are the limitations of (local) artistic processes when integrating them creatively into a framework of community 'peacebuilding'?

The first research question aims to explore the socio-economic changes experienced by local communities due to the conflict. Understanding the perspectives and intentions of the people involved is crucial to comprehending the impact of the conflict on their livelihoods by investigating the fundamental aspects of social interactions and processes (Agee, 2009).

Similarly, the second research question examines the dual role of Dêudã culture in both fostering peace and perpetuating social divisions within communities. It is essential to consider if and how Dêudã culture plays a complicit role simultaneously in contributing to reproduce exclusionary relations and conflict drivers. This investigation acknowledges the complexity and nuances of the Dêudã culture and its potential impact on community 'peacebuilding' efforts. This question explores how Dêudã culture functions as a cultural element that can promote social harmony while recognising the possibility that it may have varying effects on community 'peacebuilding' within particular contexts.

The final (third) research question aimed to identify the limitations of local artistic activities regarding their capacity to contribute to community 'peacebuilding' in communities. It specifically examines the constraints faced in policy formulation and

implementation. By understanding these limitations, this research aims to inform future initiatives and policies to improve the effectiveness of artistic activities in promoting peace within communities.

This research aims to analyse Dêudã culture as a form of dialogue creation in Nepal and its potential as a tool for localising community ‘peacebuilding’ through art and research. The concept of Dêudã, a culture which also means ‘verbal and playful conversation’ in the Dotelee language, a locally spoken dialect in Nepal, has been utilised for centuries to promote communication, understanding, and social harmony in Nepal. This research examines how Dêudã culture can serve as a framework for community ‘peacebuilding’ by integrating local culture, tradition, and heritage elements, and explores its application in contemporary community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives. This research draws on primary and secondary data sources, including interviews, case studies, and literature reviews, to examine the effectiveness of Dêudã culture as a dialogue and its potential as a localised approach to community ‘peacebuilding’. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute knowledge to the discourse on community ‘peacebuilding’ in Nepal and provide insights for practitioners in the field.

Research Objectives

This research frames peacebuilding as a community-driven process rooted in local cultural practices (Lederach, 1997), focusing on how Dêudã functions as a relational and performative medium for trust-building and social cohesion in Far-western Nepal, rather than on broader state-level mechanisms such as political settlements, security sector reform, or constitutional restructuring. For this, the research has the following key objectives:

Objective 1: Document the changes in the cultural aspects of Nepal's Far-western region after the conflict, exploring opportunities in livelihood, festival celebrations, and political awareness. This region is significant for its distinct cultural activities, including annual festivals such as *Bishu*, *Tihar*. Celebrations of the Dêudã culture are unique to the region and reflect how local people commemorate special occasions. Family members often return from work to partake in communal gatherings, reunions, and spend time with loved ones and neighbours. This objective seeks to explore changing perceptions and their impact on community life.

Objective 2: To investigate the role of Dêudã culture concerning different arts and cultural tools in research development and its integration into the community 'peacebuilding' process in the communities of Nepal. Social gatherings serve as platforms for reunions, celebrations, and social and political discussions. The conflict disrupted these communal values and systems due to fear and insecurity among the people. The Maoist rebels used cultural songs for information and entertainment (Motin, 2008) and identity politics (Stirr, 2012). This research explores the preservation and redefinition of the potential of Dêudã culture to promote peace through collaborative learning and activities, addressing conflict issues in a post-conflict community 'peacebuilding' process. The visual and physical aspects of Dêudã culture are significant for entertaining participants and fostering emotional connections with the audience.

Objective 3: Support community arts projects by identifying problems and potential solutions through collaboration with artists, civil society organisations, and government agencies. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using the arts in

education and community ‘peacebuilding’ activities to enhance their impact and effectiveness.

Objective 4: Examine the role of Dêudã culture as an artistic activity in community ‘peacebuilding’ and recommend its incorporation into school curricula regionally/nationally for cultural preservation and promotion. This objective draws on scholarship in peace education, which acknowledges the importance of culture and the arts in shaping youth mindsets through creative engagement (Cohen, 2005; Lederach, 2005). This research assesses the effectiveness of Dêudã culture in influencing practices and behaviours from an arts-based research perspective.

This research assesses the feasibility of utilising local arts and culture for community ‘peacebuilding’, evaluating their effectiveness and significance through community perspectives. Insights gained from the research context will be incorporated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of Dêudã culture in promoting peace.

Methodology and Results

This research is guided by a constructivist paradigm, which assumes a relativistic ontology and recognises that multiple realities exist within communities. It employs a subjectivist epistemology, acknowledging that the researcher and respondents co-create understandings within the research context and use naturalistic methodological procedures to conduct research in the natural environment of contemporary phenomena (Densin and Lincoln, 2005). Information accepted as truth or valid knowledge derives from interactions with the ‘stake-holding community’ (Lincoln, 1995, as cited in Densin and Lincoln, 2005: 204). This knowledge emerges from

discussions and negotiations between the interviewees and me, and my understanding and beliefs influence how I interpret the findings. To ensure accuracy and authenticity, I validated the interviewees' statements, increasing the trustworthiness and validity of the research (Densin and Lincoln, 2005:196).

This research employed analytical methods to examine and articulate experiences, complemented by materially sensitive, discursive, and intuitive approaches (Baron and Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2020) as arts-based research components. This qualitative research combined multiple methodologies to draw conclusions and generate insights. Initially, a comprehensive literature review examined existing scholarly works, theories, and studies related to the arts and culture, providing a foundation for understanding current knowledge and identifying gaps or areas for further exploration.

Primary data collection focused on Dêudã culture through semi-structured interviews with 25 participants from the Far-western region. This diverse group includes artists, cultural enthusiasts, academics, conflict victims, and community members selected through purposive sampling based on their contributions to the field of art. These interviews gathered rich, in-depth perspectives, experiences, and insights, with the semi-structured format allowing flexibility for participants to share their narratives, opinions, and observations freely (A profile research participants are included in annex 4).

Personal reflections and observations also play integral roles in this investigation. By attending Dêudã event, I immersed myself in the cultural and artistic elements of the festival. This experience allowed me to examine the dynamics, nuances, and impact of Dêudã culture in the far western region in greater depth. My long-standing

involvement as a resident provides a deeper understanding of specific events and interactions, complementing the interviews and literature reviews to comprehensively analyse the role of Dêudã culture in conflict and community ‘peacebuilding’.

Triangulating these methods – literature review, qualitative research, and personal reflection/observation – ensured a holistic exploration of the research topic. This approach incorporated academic knowledge, diverse participant perspectives, and the researcher’s immersive experiences, enhancing the credibility and richness of the findings and facilitating meaningful conclusions.

This research aims to understand the history, development, and transformation of the Dêudã culture from the participants’ perspectives. Respondents shared their stories and experiences, and audiovisual recordings of Dêudã culture and research activities were made alongside reviews of relevant documents.

Furthermore, the PhD outcomes draw on references from arts-based projects, including Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) activities globally, which are considered to be examples of good practice. Breed et al. (2022) cited the MAP program in Rwanda as an example of how personal transformations experienced by participants in drama and theatre performances can scale up to the structural level. They explain how artists can channel the ‘effect’ of performances into relational networks involving civil society representatives, political actors, and others, as seen in MAP’s work in Rwanda. This approach motivates policymakers and civil society actors to develop effective strategies that sustain the changes expressed by the general public.

MAP successfully mobilised policymakers in Rwanda to pursue policy changes advocated by young people, aiming to ‘create a more just and peaceful society’ (316).

Breed et al. further highlight that the safe space provided by artistic expressions like MAP enables participants to enact their agency and decide where to exercise it to pursue desired social transformations (316–317).

By researching local projects in Nepal and international examples, I have gained insights into the challenges, opportunities, and effective methodologies employed in arts-based initiatives. These references contribute to the body of knowledge and provide practical insights for developing and implementing future projects in Nepal and elsewhere.

This PhD research introduces Dêudã culture as a means of community ‘peacebuilding’. Sandra McKay and Cheryl de la Rey (2001) argue that community ‘peacebuilding’ is often viewed as post-conflict societal reconstruction without considering cultural context and gender, underscoring the importance of local cultural practices, such as the Dêudã, in promoting peace. Birgit Brauchler and Philipp Naucke (2017) emphasise the need for a cultural turn in peace research, focusing on the role of culture and local actors in community ‘peacebuilding’ processes. Paul Omach (2016) highlights the contribution of civil society, including religious groups, traditional institutions, non-government organisations, and community-based organisations, to local-level community ‘peacebuilding’ in Northern Uganda. These references support community ‘peacebuilding’ as a long-term community process involving local actors and cultural practices.

This research focuses on how the Dêudã culture engages communities. I aim to understand how this art form facilitates community communication and expression by identifying the elements that create an emotional connection with the audience.

Traditionally, peacebuilding is viewed as a developmental task implemented by

powerful countries and UN agencies. However, it is crucial to convey that peacebuilding is also a community-building process in which local arts and culture shape societal development by fostering confidence and shaping people's thoughts.



Figure 6: Hori – A Unique Form of Dêudā in Achham, 2023

A form of Dêudā (Hori) celebrated in Achham district, where community members actively participated and observed. Organized by the MAP Nepal team in collaboration with the local government, this event provided valuable insights for researchers, fostering deeper connections with local arts and culture while promoting empathy.

Photo: Dila Pant (15 April 2023).

In the short term, the PhD research project aims to establish partnerships with key stakeholders, including selected local government bodies, political parties, community organisations, artists, academics and Dêudā enthusiasts. This involved participation in community events to build relationships, gather insights, and conduct preliminary evaluations of arts-based projects in Nepal. Over the long term, this project seeks to develop a collaborative framework that integrates global best practices with local arts and cultural practices, advancing knowledge through academic publications and reports. Ultimately, this research intends to position itself as a significant artistic intervention that enhances the understanding of Dêudā culture and its societal role. However, academic limitations include the potential constraint of engaging only a limited number of stakeholders, the possibility that findings may not be widely generalisable, and resource limitations that could affect the depth of engagement and evaluation comprehensiveness.

In summary, in exploring the concept of Dêudã culture within various communities, this research faces a critical methodological challenge: the tension between anecdotal evidence obtained through interviews and the generalisability of these insights. While personal narratives offer rich, contextualised understandings, they also raise questions about their broader applicability. Thus, this research seeks to navigate this complexity by critically examining how individual claims can inform, yet not necessarily prove, wider theoretical assertions. By acknowledging this challenge at the outset, this research sets the stage for exploring and analysing Dêudã culture, which carefully balances specific experiences with broader claims.

Outline and Preview of Chapters

This section provides a detailed overview of each chapter of my PhD thesis, offering a comprehensive outline of my research journey. I summarise each chapter's main objectives, methodologies and findings, highlighting how they contribute to the narrative and research goals.

The thesis begins with the Chapter 1: *Introduction to Dêudã Culture and Community Peacebuilding in Far-western Nepal*, which presents an overview of the work and summarises the issues, processes, and outcomes. It provides a contextual background, defines key terms and concepts, examines the connection between the arts, culture, and community 'peacebuilding', and discusses the research motivation. Additionally, this section offers an overview of the research questions, aims, and objectives, and an outline of the thesis structure.

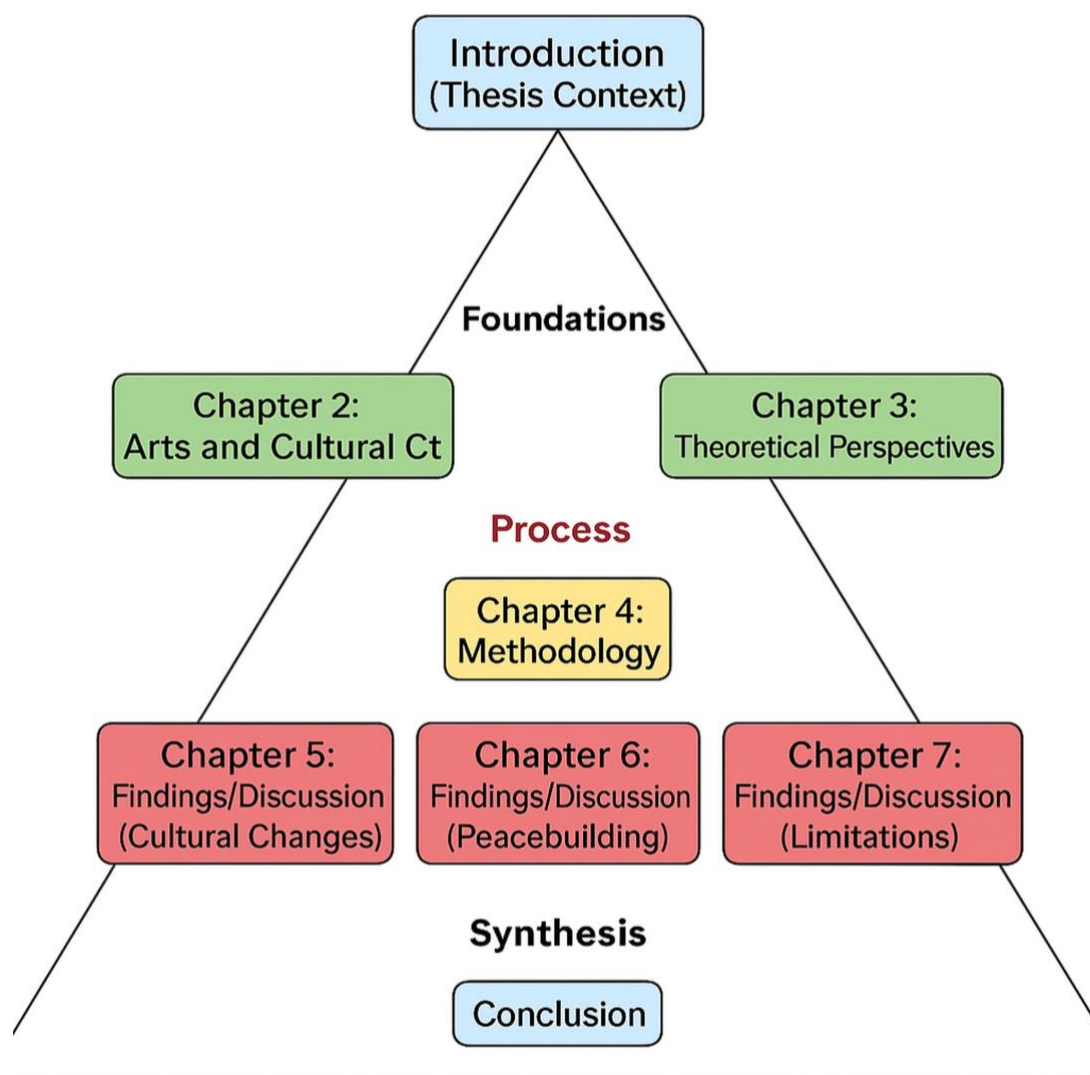


Figure 7 – Linear Structure of the Thesis: This diagram presents the linear progression of the thesis, highlighting the logical flow from contextual framing to theoretical grounding, methodological design, empirical findings, and synthesis. The Chapter 1 introduces the overall context, research aims, and structure. Chapter 2 establishes the historical and cultural foundations of Nepalese arts and the Déudā tradition, while Chapter 3 reviews theoretical and empirical perspectives on arts-based peacebuilding. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework and research pathways, setting the stage for empirical investigation. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the findings and analysis in three stages: cultural changes during conflict, the peacebuilding role of Déudā, and the limitations of integrating local cultural practices into broader peacebuilding frameworks. The chapter 8 concludes the research together these strands, presenting the Déudā Triangle Mode.

Chapter 2 – Tradition and Transformation in Nepalese Arts and Culture, 1700–2025

situates the study within the broader historical and cultural landscape of Nepal. It

begins by tracing major artistic and cultural developments from the eighteenth century

to the present, highlighting the interplay of religion, politics, and social change in shaping cultural expression. This overview provides the backdrop against which local practices can be understood. The chapter then narrows its focus to the Far-western hills, introducing the distinctive features of Dêudã culture. By placing Dêudã within this wider context, the chapter shows how it embodies both continuity with Nepal's artistic heritage and adaptation to shifting social realities, setting the stage for the thesis's deeper exploration of its role in community peacebuilding.

Chapter 3 – *Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives on the Arts and Peacebuilding*, provides a comprehensive and critical review of theoretical and empirical literature on peacebuilding, with particular attention to the role of cultural performance. The chapter begins with a broad discussion of key peacebuilding concepts, drawing on Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace and Lederach's framework of conflict transformation and moral imagination. It then identifies Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* as the primary theoretical lens guiding this research, highlighting its relevance to participatory and dialogical cultural practices.

The review critically analyses global empirical literature on arts-based peacebuilding, examining both the transformative potential and the limitations of music, theatre, storytelling, and visual arts in fostering dialogue, empathy, and reconciliation. It then turns to Nepal's post-war context, situating artistic and cultural initiatives – such as Playback Theatre, Nep-hop, Mithila paintings, and community festivals – within broader peacebuilding efforts.

Within this landscape, the chapter underscores the critical but underexplored significance of indigenous traditions, particularly Dêudã culture, as participatory practices that embody inclusivity, social cohesion, and critical reflection. By

identifying the limited scholarly attention to such traditions, the chapter formulates the rationale for this research: to examine Dêudã as a culturally grounded and sustainable form of community peacebuilding. In doing so, it lays the theoretical and contextual foundation for the research methodology presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 – *Research Pathways to Peace in Dêudã Practices in Nepal*, is a crucial entry point into the academic exploration, examining the research's fundamental principles and objectives. It begins by outlining the research paradigm, design, and methodologies, clarifying the direction of enquiry. Particular attention is given to the purposive selection of research participants, ensuring representation across gender, caste/ethnicity, age categories, and professional backgrounds. A combination of Dêudã performers, scholars, journalists, entrepreneurs, cultural activists, and former Maoist combatants from across the region (Sudurpaschim Province) provides the research with diverse and contextually rich perspectives.

The chapter then relates the Dêudã culture, positioning it as compelling case study in the broader research context. The initial section clarifies the theoretical foundations and conceptual framework underpinning the research, establishing a basis for a deeper understanding of the research domain. It addresses ethical considerations and emphasises the importance of maintaining integrity throughout the research process.

In addition to interviews and observations, the research was enriched through my active role as Co-Investigator in the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project. Through workshops, dialogues, field visits, and cultural events, the MAP initiative provided complementary collective spaces to contextualise and validate the findings of individual interviews. This dual approach allowed for methodological triangulation,

balancing personal testimonies with community-level perspectives and enhancing the reliability and depth of the research.

A detailed examination of the methodologies employed ensured the trustworthiness and validity of the research results. The inclusion of demographic profiles (Tables 1–2) and documentation of engagement activities (Table 3) further demonstrate the transparency of the research process and the breadth of participation. Rigorous scrutiny of research methods enhances the credibility of research outcomes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations and scope of the research, acknowledging both the strengths of methodological triangulation and the challenges of reaching less visible groups, such as disengaged youth and migrants.

Chapter 5 – *The Effects of Armed Conflict on Cultural Patterns in Nepal’s Far-western region*, presents the research findings on the effects of conflict on cultural patterns in Nepal’s Far-western region, interpreting their significance in light of existing literature. By integrating data with insights from the literature, this chapter aims to address the research questions further explored in Chapters 5 and 6. This transition from methodology to results and discussion marks a shift from describing the research process to presenting and analysing the findings, contributing to advancing knowledge in the field.

The research found that conflict caused significant disruptions to the region’s cultural patterns. As a result, the community has had to modify or abandon certain cultural activities and rituals because of security concerns and risks.

Chapter 6 – *The Dêudã Culture and Its Contribution to Peace in Communities*, explores the transformation of Dêudã culture in a post-conflict context, highlighting

its significance and contribution to community ‘peacebuilding’ and social integration in communities. It begins by tracing the historical roots and traditional importance of Dêudã, providing essential context for contemporary practice. During the conflict, Dêudã adopted new roles, evolving from a traditional cultural expression into a vehicle for peace and relationship building.

This chapter examines the economic benefits of Dêudã, including its support for artists’ livelihoods and its positive impact on gender relations and social cohesion in the region. It also assesses the challenges of modernisation and digitalisation, particularly generational shifts in cultural engagement and the influence of global trends. Strategies to maintain Dêudã’s relevance through contemporary themes are discussed, emphasising its role in fostering community cohesion and supporting community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. The chapter concludes by analysing the intergenerational transmission of Dêudã, underscoring the importance of preserving its vibrancy and adaptability through dialogue between age groups.

Chapter 7 – *Integrating Dêudã Culture into Community ‘Peacebuilding’: Challenges and Opportunities*, investigates the challenges and limitations of integrating local artistic processes, such as Dêudã culture, into broader community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks from a regional perspective. The central research question addresses the constraints of these cultural practices when creatively incorporated into peacebuilding efforts. This chapter uses theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence to identify and discuss structural, social, cultural, practical, political, and economic limitations. It offers policy recommendations for future research and advocates comparative and evaluative studies across diverse contexts to enhance understanding.

The chapter concludes with suggestions for fostering cooperation between peacebuilding professionals and community artists and broadening the scope of peacebuilding efforts to include creative approaches. Future research directions include examining the application of peace education principles, understanding the role of local culture in peace processes, and investigating the agencies involved in peacebuilding.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion *Reflections on Dêudã Culture's Role in Community*

Peacebuilding, summarises the thesis findings and highlights the contribution of Dêudã culture to community peacebuilding in post-conflict Nepal. It foregrounds the transformations in gender relations and caste-based social dynamics that emerged through Dêudã performances, underscoring their significance for advancing peace with justice. The chapter introduces the DÊUDÁ Triangle Model as a case-specific analytical tool to explain how performance, positionality, and peace interact in inclusive or exclusionary ways. Building on this, it advances the broader conceptual framework of Performative Relational Peacebuilding, which situates Dêudã within wider theoretical debates informed by Boal's participatory practice, Galtung's positive peace, and Lederach's moral imagination. The policy recommendations emphasise supporting inclusive participation—particularly of women and marginalised caste groups—and strengthening cooperation between peacebuilders and community artists. Finally, the chapter calls for comparative and evaluative research across diverse contexts, noting the need to investigate the complexities of integrating peace education, the role of local culture, and the agency of communities in shaping their own peace processes.

CHAPTER 2: TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION IN NEPALESE ARTS AND CULTURE, 1700–2025

Introduction

This overview contextualises the research by acquainting readers with the region's broader significance in the arts and culture. The first section outlines the key historical developments and influences that have shaped Nepal's artistic and cultural landscape, providing a foundation for understanding the unique characteristics of the Dêudã culture, which is covered in the second section.

Understanding this context is essential for exploring the specific contributions and transformations of Dêudã culture in community 'peacebuilding' efforts in Nepal's artistic and cultural domains. These outcomes include how Dêudã culture has influenced community cohesion, social integration, and cultural preservation, and how it has been adapted in post-conflict settings to support community 'peacebuilding'. The forthcoming sections address this exploration and provide a historical overview and detailed analysis of the role of Dêudã culture in Nepalese society.

Nepal is in the southern region of Asia, sharing its borders with India to the east, south, and west and Tibet to the north, an autonomous region of China. The country's origin stories date back to the fifth century AD, showcasing a rich cultural and socio-political history (Shaha, 1992). Understanding Nepal's ancient history is crucial for appreciating its diverse cultural and artistic heritage. The recorded history primarily centres around the Kathmandu Valley, highlighting the unification of fragmented kingdoms into a single nation under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1744

AD (Mulmi, 2017). While the unification process preserved the country's artistic and cultural heritage, there are contrasting views on the evaluation of Shah's rule. Situated at the crossroads of the Himalayas, Indian subcontinent, and Tibet, Nepal's history, culture, religion, art, and architecture underscore its importance as a region where commerce and culture intersect (Vaidya and Bajracharya, 1996; Wright, 1990; Whelpton, 2005). Different dynasties and ethnic groups have shaped the cultural landscape over the centuries (Whelpton, 2005; Dhungel, 2017). Contemporary discussions on the validity of historical accounts and the interpretation of cultural heritage highlight the challenges of preserving the country's artistic legacy. This chapter aims to unravel some relevant complexities of Nepal's creative endeavours, artistic and cultural changes, and socio-political impacts across various periods.

A historical analysis reveals that Nepal's political and sociocultural landscape is directly influenced by the mingling of multiple regional cultures, such as those of the Kathmandu Valley, Gorkha, and other regions. This landscape has woven Nepal's rich cultural tapestry, a singular synthesis of artistic, religious and cultural traditions (Dhungel, 2017). Different ethnic groups with distinct cultural essences have long inhabited and comprised the country's demography, such as the Kirats and Limbus in eastern Nepal and the Khas people in the western parts. However, despite being rooted in these contrasting locations, diverse ethnic groups have shared and exchanged various artistic ideas and cultural practices for ages, primarily through migration, trade routes, and conquests (Gurung, 2020). Furthermore, Nepal's native customs have mingled in numerous manifestations, encompassing dance, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture, exemplifying an opulent cultural heritage that spans many centuries (Chhetri, 2019, Gurung, 2020).

Likewise, its architectural heritage, exhibited in the temples and palaces of the Kathmandu Valley, seamlessly merges diverse styles and influences, symbolising the country's heterogeneous cultural ethos. The fusion of Buddhist and Hindu customs illustrates religious syncretism, significantly impacting Nepalese artistic expression over time (Shastri, 1968). For example, Paubha Art, which refers to traditional Nepalese scroll paintings created primarily by Newar communities, is described as a visual diagram guided by sacred texts depicting Hindu or Buddhist deities (Sharma, 2021). The historic temples, gardens, palace squares, and courtyards (bahals) of the ancient towns of the Kathmandu Valley are examples of the successful integration of religious and cultural amalgamation into urban design, highly encouraging a city's culture, traditions, and social fabric (Chitrakar, 2006). Nevertheless, amid swift modernisation and rapid urbanisation trends, led by the demands of the growing population, conventional artistic practices have encountered an array of obstacles, posing a threat to safeguarding cultural heritage and creative assets (Sapkota and Tharu, 2016).

In Nepal, the development of arts and culture is influenced by many factors, including the advancement of modernism in painting and literature (Subedi, 2021), and the adaptation of cultural practices to environmental conditions (Rai, 2023). For instance, the Thakali people demonstrate adaptive continuity amid social, religious, economic, and political changes (Washington, 1982). The Maoist conflict has shaped Nepal's political transformation, state formation, identity politics and ecological consciousness (Schneiderman, 2016).

Amidst these changes, modern Nepali literature addresses issues of inclusivity and exclusion based on language, caste/ethnicity, religion, and geography (Subedi, 2021).

When ‘modern Nepal’ begins is critical, as it marks a cultural, political, and social landscape shift in the region. Many scholars point to the unification of Nepal under King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18th century as the beginning of modern Nepal. In contrast, others argue that the contemporary era began with the 1951 democratic revolution, which ended the Rana autocracy and initiated significant political and social reforms. The Maoist conflict and subsequent political changes in the early 21st century further defined contemporary Nepalese society and its cultural evolution.

In this context, current studies underscore the intricate and dynamic nature of Nepalese arts and culture, which are shaped by historical, sociopolitical, and environmental factors. To understand these complexities, I examine specific and relevant topics related to Nepalese arts and culture in the ensuing sections, tracing their historical evolution and connecting them to Dêudâ culture.

Unification of Nepal and Cultural Synthesis

Previous studies indicate that Nepal’s unification process and cultural synthesis are influenced by the complex interplay of historical, political, and social factors (Dhungel, 2017; Gurung, 2020). The country’s history has been characterised by periods of autocracy, democratic experimentation, and conflict, with the predominance of hill-based, Nepali-speaking upper-caste Hindus affecting the state’s approach to cultural diversity (Gellner, 2008; Pradhan, 2007). The constructed narrative of a Hindu identity has contributed to the social and political alienation of marginalised groups (Rai, 2007).

Despite these challenges, Nepal has made significant strides in developing a cohesive national political culture, with crucial contributions from the media, civil society, and local governments. Additionally, Nepal's unique geographical position between powerful neighbouring countries has notably influenced its approach to nationalism and national unity.

The promulgation of a new constitution in 2015 and the establishment of a federal republican governance system represent significant reforms to address long-standing issues such as inequalities in justice, representation, and access. However, it is essential to recognise that Nepal's diversity in terms of region, language, caste, and gender presents both opportunities and challenges for national unity (Shrestha, 2020), mainly when reflecting on the unification of Nepal under King Prithvi Narayan Shah.¹⁴ It involved merging lands and advancing the identification of Nepal as a common homeland for all people. The unification under King Prithvi Narayan Shah was pivotal in fostering a national identity, which was crucial for preserving and promoting Nepalese art and culture. Despite resistance from regional powers and ethnic groups seeking to maintain their autonomy, the Shah dynasty's efforts to consolidate power and promote a unified national culture were significant.

This process laid the foundation for a centralised authority and the promotion of the Nepali language, helping to establish a cohesive national identity (Vaidya, 1993;

¹⁴ The Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah (1723-1775), the pioneer of a unified Nepal, authored the *Divya Upadesh* (Divine Counsels), which is regarded as the most important testament explaining his conquest of Gorkha and his contributions to the nation's development. In these counsels, he outlined his vision for a united Nepal, emphasising the importance of national unity and the integration of diverse ethnic and cultural groups. Additionally, he described Nepal as *Charjat Chhatris Barnko Fulbari*, meaning 'a communal residence for all Nepalese people.' This metaphor reflects his belief in Nepal as a garden of four castes and thirty-six ethnic groups, highlighting the diversity and inclusivity he envisioned for the nation. For more information, visit <https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2015/03/06/the-divya-upadesh-of-prithvi-narayan-shah/>, accessed on 23 July 2023.

Neupane, 2022). Evidence for this can be seen in the policies implemented during and after the unification period, such as establishing a standardised administrative system and using Nepali as the official language in government and education, encouraging cultural integration and communication among diverse ethnic groups. Additionally, historical records and cultural artefacts from this period reflect a shift towards a more unified representation of Nepalese identity, as seen in art, literature, and architecture, which began to emphasise national themes and shared heritage.

However, these efforts of the Shah dynasty faced resistance from regional powers and ethnic groups who sought to maintain their autonomy and cultural distinctiveness, posing questions to a centralised system of governance. As Pradhan (2007) puts it, the political process that gave birth to Nepal as a state ‘created a unified kingdom, but not a unified society’ (26). He concludes that the unification of Nepal resulted in the high-order Hindu migrants from the Indian plains oppressing the ancient people, who were primarily Tibeto-Burman-speaking Mongoloids. For instance, due to the conquests, a privileged landholding gentry or feudal class of Jagir and Birta owners descended from the same ‘two superior classes of Hindus’ were created in the economic sector. Majorly holding the position of authority, they had access to civil and military power and subsisted against poor peasantry. Over time, this latent civic dissatisfaction became one of the significant factors that led to a decade-long conflict between 1996 and 2006 (Thurber and Bogati, 2021). However, despite these weaknesses, the initiatives undertaken by the ruling Shah dynasty played a significant role in shaping Nepal’s political and cultural identity.

Furthermore, looking at the other prominent sects of rulers in Nepal, the evolution of arts and culture during the Rana era was shaped by many factors. During this epoch,

Toffin (1990) delineated a discernible shift in the representation of power dynamics, wherein the king and Rana Prime Ministers assumed a more secular, militaristic portrayal, departing from the preceding devout and holy depiction of the monarchy. In addition, Guy's (1992) historical analysis underscores a consequential rivalry among the three principal kingdoms in the Kathmandu Valley – Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan – during the 17th century, fostering an era marked by munificent royal patronage extended towards the clergy, religious festivities, and artistic endeavours. It can be derived that this epoch witnessed a renaissance in Nepalese courtly life, significantly influenced by the cultural milieu of the Mithila region. After the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, the Mithila region was divided between India and Nepal; however, its cultural heritage continues to thrive in the Terai parts of modern Nepal (Bhetwal, 2021). Alongside the architecture, design, and art and culture derived from the Malla dynasty, Mithila art is integral to Nepal's art, literature, and cultural practices. Popular for its striking geometric patterns, vibrant colours, and intricate imagery, female artists predominantly use Mithila art as powerful storytelling tools, depicting their lives, societal norms, and traditional stories of Hindu deities (Dulal and Singh, 2023).

Recognising that cultural and artistic reforms were ongoing in other parts of Nepal outside the Kathmandu Valley, Shrestha and Singh (1972) contend that the pace of cultural advancement still decelerated with the advent of the Shah dynasty, epitomised by the displacement of traditional edifices by incongruously towering structures. However, Bist's (2022) scholarship accentuates the enduring practice of life cycle rituals among the Rana Tharus as an example that has evolved into a foundational framework fostering traditional values, social cohesion, and collaborative efforts within their community.

Given this background, it is crucial to recognise that celebrating Dêudã culture is not recent; it has been a powerful tool for centuries. For instance, when the Gorkhalis attacked Jumla during the unification process, many Jumli kings fled and hid. After Jumla was annexed into the unified Nepal, the Gorkhalis imposed severe oppression and injustices upon the Jumli people, as captured in the Dêudã:

पहिलेका शोभान शाही, अहिलेका नेपाल	<i>Once they were Shobhan Shahi, now they call themselves Nepal,</i>
सस्तो बन्दै मानो चिन्दै, ठूलो र	<i>Growing cheap in worth yet grand in beard and hair's proud fall.</i>
कपाल/बबाल	<i>The swaggering platoon has come, so guard</i>
भकुल्या पल्टन आयो, मानोमिर राख	<i>your precious grain,</i>
सारी बोक्न्या गाउँल्या हो, पालो सान	<i>Villagers who carry the sari, keep your dignity in the lane.</i>
राख	

The Dêudã culture and literature emphasise the profound importance of human values and ethics, drawing attention to social injustices and the need for empathy and unity. By preserving these narratives, Dêudã enriches Nepali folklore and serves as a timeless cultural practice that promotes social justice and harmony in the community.

In the historical context of Gorkha's unification and the subsequent suffering imposed on the people of Jumla, Dêudã played a significant role in documenting these events. Its capacity to raise awareness and foster a sense of collective identity and resilience is vital in community 'peacebuilding' efforts in the region.

By recounting these past injustices and advocating for unity through shared cultural expressions, Dêudã becomes more than just a preservation of history—it becomes a force for community 'peacebuilding'. It connects people through shared experiences and emotions, encouraging empathy, cooperation, and the pursuit of justice. In this

way, Dêudã actively contributes to the ongoing dialogue about human rights and the essential values of community ‘peacebuilding’ in creating a just and harmonious society.

Architecture and Urban Development

Nepal’s architectural achievements and urban development, particularly in the Kathmandu Valley, have evolved to reflect the region’s rich cultural heritage and historical significance. The construction of palaces, temples, and public buildings in the Kathmandu Valley exemplifies exquisite craftsmanship and a distinct Newar architectural style. This style is characterised by intricately carved woodwork, pagoda-style roofs, and ornate details that effectively incorporate public spaces for events, festivities, religious values, and everyday interactions (Chitrakar, 2006). This architectural style not only highlights the artistic skills of Newar artisans but also reflects the socio-cultural importance of public spaces in fostering community interactions. The traditional settlement patterns and architectural designs during the Malla period, which included unique palaces, temples, and forts, are significant cultural heritage sites (Shrestha and Singh, 1972). However, modern challenges such as rapid urbanisation and unplanned construction threaten the preservation of these historic sites (Pradhan, 2007).

Following the unification of Nepal under the Shah dynasty, major urban development initiatives were implemented, including the establishment of planned cities such as Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan. This urban strategy was mainly aimed at centralising the nation’s administrative functions and fostering a consolidated approach to economic growth, which brought a significant shift in the architecture and urban design of the region. Suppose one looks back at the antiquity of the Kathmandu

Valley. In this case, one can see that the traditional settlement patterns and architecture during the Malla Period reflected a high level of artistic skill and economic affluence. The period of Malla's reign witnessed the development of unique Nepalese architecture, including palaces, temples, and forts that are important cultural heritage sites even today.

However, rapid urbanisation and modernisation have posed challenges to the preservation of heritage sites and traditional urban landscapes, leading to unplanned construction, infrastructure development, and environmental degradation (Chitrakar, Baker and Guaralda, 2016). The city's primitive aesthetics are now replaced by incongruous tall buildings, leading to disorientation in residential architecture and multiple infrastructure and environmental challenges, necessitating sustainable and inclusive urban growth (Pradhan, 2016; Sengupta, 2016).

In this regard, the neoliberal economic policy adopted in the 1990s significantly accelerated urbanisation in Nepal. Although the policy envisioned economic progress through urban growth, the rapid transition from a predominantly rural to an emerging urban economy has led to population densification, uncontrolled urban sprawl, and increased social and environmental problems (Timalisina, 2022; Adhikari, 2014). The historic city core of Kathmandu, with its unique arts and architecture, faces threats to its spirit due to the deteriorating spatial quality (Rai, 2008).

This discussion is crucial to this thesis because it explores how urban development and architectural heritage shape cultural identity and community bonds, focusing on the role of the arts and culture in fostering peace and social integration in Nepal. As Nepal rapidly urbanises, traditional practices like Dêudã are moving into cities, carried by people seeking better opportunities. This migration shows how Dêudã,

once rooted in rural life, is now adapting to urban settings while continuing to strengthen community ties and cultural identity in these new environments. By bringing Dêudã into metropolitan areas, it not only preserves a vital piece of heritage but also enhances the social composition of cities, helping to build peace and unity in society.

Patronage of the Arts

Around the globe, patrons in the realm of art have included kings, rulers, or affluent individuals, whose patronage in the form of assistance, privilege, or financial aid has supported the artworks of painters, sculptors, and other artists, nurtured artistic traditions, and preserved heritage (Bendix, 2015; Hale, 2014). In Nepal, the previous rulers, particularly during the Malla reign, were effective in patronising the arts, focusing on religious festivals, palaces, and temples (Guy, 1992). The Nepali Army has also significantly preserved and promoted these art forms, cultures, and traditions in Nepal (Gautam, 2022). However, the once-thriving artistic and cultural development significantly slowed during the Shah dynasty (Shrestha and Singh, 1972). During this period, the symbolism of power and the power of images in Nepal shifted from pious and even mythical figure to secular postures of warriors, horse riders, and rulers. (Toffin, 2009). Simultaneously, the Rana era (1846-1951), one of the most contentious periods of Nepalese history, also marks a break from traditional Newar aesthetics and shows a growing preference for Western neoclassical architecture and designs (Bangdel, 2013).

Nevertheless, the origins of art patronage in Nepal can be traced back to the ancient Licchavi period, approximately between the 5th and 8th centuries CE, when a succession of Licchavi kings ruled the Kathmandu Valley. During this Era, the ruling

elite extended their patronage to artists and artisans, commissioning intricate sculptures, temples, and monuments that embellished the valley's surroundings. Soon after, the Malla period, which succeeded the Licchavi era, marked the pinnacle of Nepal's artistic prosperity. The Malla kings, who governed separate smaller kingdoms within the Kathmandu Valley, were enthusiastic patrons of the arts, financing the construction of grand palaces, temples, and public structures. Under their patronage, Nepali architecture attained unprecedented sophistication, with elaborate woodcarvings, pagoda-style roofs, and ornate brickwork adorning the urban centres of the valley (Gmińska-Nowak, 2014).

Licchavi Period (300 – 1200): During this period, art patronage was moderate as the ruling elite supported the construction of temples, sculptures, and other artistic endeavours in the Kathmandu Valley.

Malla Period (1200 – 1742): This period was marked by the highest level of patronage. The Malla kings enthusiastically supported the arts, commissioning grand palaces, temples, and public structures, leading to a peak in artistic prosperity.

Shah Period (1743 – 1846): Patronage declined during the Shah dynasty as the focus shifted towards centralising power and military achievements rather than arts and culture.

Rana Period (1847 – 1950): Patronage increased again during the Rana era, although it was marked by a preference for Western neo-classical architecture, reflecting the changing tastes of the ruling class.

Modern Era (1951 – 2024): In the contemporary Era, art patronage has been somewhat revitalised, with increased diversity and democratisation in support for the arts through government agencies, non-profits, and international institutions.

The emergence of the Newar Malla dynasty in Nepal during the 13th century can be attributed to the initial composition of a community comprising prosperous artisans and traders from the Kathmandu Valley. This community eventually established its state, with Bhaktapur serving as the capital, and oversaw a period of significant cultural and artistic advancement (Toffin, 2009). The Mallas gained renown for their

active support of the fine arts, which included the construction of temples and palaces, notably the iconic Durbar Square in Kathmandu, Nepal. Jayasthiti Malla, a prominent ruler, ascended to power following the successful repulsion of an invasion from Bengal in 1349, subsequently initiating notable social and economic reforms (Shrestha and Singh, 1972). The Malla kings actively patronised intellectuals and authors, contributing to a noteworthy cultural shift in the annals of Nepalese history. The growth of the Newari language and culture during this era continues to significantly influence contemporary Nepali society.

Nepal's artistic landscape has undergone further transformation in the contemporary era, influenced by political, social, and economic changes (Chitrakar, 2006). The advent of democracy and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in the 20th century ushered in increased diversity and democratisation of arts patronage.

Government agencies, non-profit organisations, and international institutions have emerged as pivotal actors in supporting artistic endeavours, providing financial backing for cultural festivals, exhibitions, and educational programmes that foster artistic excellence and celebrate cultural diversity in the arts.

Despite these advancements, challenges persist in Nepal's artistic patronage. Limited resources, political instability, looting and repatriation, and the pressures of globalisation threaten traditional artistic practices and cultural identity (Chapagain and Tiwari, 2018). Nevertheless, the resilience of Nepal's creative community and the enduring legacy of patronage inspire optimism for the future, ensuring that the country's rich cultural heritage thrives for future generations.

This context similarly applies to the Dêudã culture, where sustaining and transforming practices is essential for managing its continued existence. By relating

Dêudã to these dynamics, I aim to highlight how this traditional cultural expression, like others, must adapt and evolve to remain relevant and impactful in today's changing social landscape. Through this connection, I emphasise the importance of preserving Dêudã while allowing it to transform in ways that maintain its cultural significance and contribute to the broader goals of community 'peacebuilding' for social cohesion.

Literature and Language

Considering oral and written traditions as one of the foundations of culture (Saransa, 2016), the growth of the Nepali language and literature has been marked by significant developments. Hutt (1991) highlighted the emergence of contemporary Nepali literature, which has played a crucial role in envisioning a more inclusive society. This literature has been influenced by socio-political changes in Nepal, particularly the shift from a unitary Hindu monarchy to a federal secular republic. Additionally, the development of modernism in Nepali art and literature has been a key factor, with the influence of Western techniques and education being significant. The emergence of Nepalese English literature, characterised by distinctive features such as code-mixing and the reflection of Nepalese societies, has further enriched the literary landscape (Bhattarai, 2022). A closer examination shows that the ongoing political transformation in Nepal, particularly the Maoist insurgency and its aftermath, has been a significant theme in post-2006 literature (Schneiderman, 2016). These developments underscore the dynamic and diverse nature of the Nepali language and literature.

In retrospect, the historical promotion of the Nepali language and culture commenced with the conquest of Gorkha, which was once a distinct kingdom. With a heavy

emphasis on the promotion of Khas-Arya traditions and culture, the Nepali language was then elevated to the status of the national official language, advocating the linguistic and dress code of Hill Brahmins, Chhetris, and Thakuris as the epitome of the national code. However, this endeavour to promote an assimilatory national policy resulted in the suppression of linguistic and cultural diversity. Under the Rana regime, deliberate plans were implemented to eradicate languages other than Nepali, which declared in 1921 that documents written in non-Khas languages were inadmissible in court (Tumbahang, 2010).

Even after the establishment of democracy in 1950, the Nepali language continued to maintain its prominence in governance and education, reflecting the ideologies of monolingism, which was further reinforced by the Panchayat regime, which made Nepali the sole language of administration, education, and media. This endeavour solidified assimilatory policies. However, with the restoration of democracy in 1990 and subsequent constitutions, language policies shifted. Today, all languages spoken as mother tongues are acknowledged as the languages of the nation (Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

Despite these efforts, challenges arise in implementing policies that embrace this diversity. For instance, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) recognises Devanagari, a part of the Brahmic family of scripts from Southeast Asia (Jain and Cardona, 2004), as the official script to be used in all government and legal procedures but allows the provinces to determine one or more languages spoken by many people within the specific province as their official language. As observed, the effectiveness of these policies relies on translating provisions into practice by communities and agencies; hence, their fruition takes time.

Understanding how political and social transformations shape the evolution of the Nepali language and literature is crucial, particularly in the context of traditional cultural practices such as Dêudã. The role of Dêudã culture in preserving and transmitting cultural values, social norms, and collective memories within communities is deeply intertwined with these broader changes, making its examination integral to this research.

Performing Arts

The performing arts have played a significant role in Nepal's development, particularly in the context of political and social changes. Community art, including urban murals and public dance performances, promotes health, social cohesion, and community resilience, especially in post-disaster contexts (Murphy, 2014). For instance, following the 2015 earthquake that claimed over 8,700 lives, art therapy emerged as a powerful tool for healing and communication among survivors (Baumann et al., 2021).

The performing arts are recognised as drivers of meaningful development, contributing to social progress and economic growth (Kabanda, 2014). For example, the Tharu ethnic group employs performance practices and musical experiences to resist social exploitation and assert their identity (Dalzell, 2015). However, the role of the performing arts in promoting gender inclusion in music education and the meanings of musical performance in specific cultural contexts (Westerlund, 2018; Widdess, 2006) underscore the need for a critical examination and transformation of these practices.

Scholars have explored the role of performing arts in Nepal from different perspectives. Gautam (2022) highlighted the Nepali Army's role in preserving and promoting Nepalese art, culture, and tradition, while Dirnstorfer and Saud (2020) discussed the potential of theatre in reconciliation and healing, especially in post-war communities, where emotions such as anger, frustration, and hopelessness are prevalent.

Treacy (2020) and Subedi (2022) focused on the role of music education in shaping imagined communities and introducing abstract art in Nepal, respectively. They emphasise the role of music educators in addressing societal issues such as discrimination through actionable measures, contributing to a socially just music education and society. Gautam (2022) also explored cultural performances in Kirtipur, notably the Lakhe Dance, from a mythical perspective, highlighting the convergence of tangible and intangible heritage that forms the bedrock of Nepal's cultural values.

In the context of the Dêudã culture, participants engage in dance and lyrical exchanges that vividly express their social realities, struggles and aspirations. This communal activity strengthens a sense of unity and shared identity among those involved and is a vital cultural practice that aids in community 'peacebuilding' and social integration. Recognising Dêudã in this discussion highlights the dynamic, living nature of traditional performance arts in Nepal, which continue to shape contemporary society. Dêudã's ability to promote social harmony and address community concerns through collective performance underscores its significance in Nepal's cultural and social development.

Media

The evolution of media (print, television, audiovisual, and social media) in Nepal is closely linked to the process of democratic consolidation that began during the period of Prithvi Narayan Shah. In those early days, the media, even in the form of oral traditions and local news, played a unifying role rather than dividing the nation. Shah's 'Dibya Upadesh' laid the groundwork for good governance and national integration, advocating the consolidation of a nation-state along with a diplomatic balance between neighbouring powers (Jayshwal and Shah, 2022). This simple form of media was essential in forming a shared national identity and laying the foundation for how later discourses would be shaped by media use (Posterlund, 2007).

As Nepal transitioned through different political regimes, the media's role changed drastically. The Rana regime, which held power from 1846 until 1951, marked the gloomiest period for the media, with the press heavily controlled and used as a tool for propaganda. Independent news rapidly disappeared, and alternative voices other than those in power or controlled by the regime were silenced. However, this period of repression could not quell the growing appetite for democracy, which found an outlet through underground magazines and coffeehouse conversations, keeping the fragile flames of a more liberal society alive.

The fall of the Rana regime opened a new chapter in which the media became an essential tool for aiding democratic movements. It became a significant medium for political reform, evolving into an active dialogue with the public, which was previously impossible (Tiwari, 2013). Even during the Panchayat era, when the state sought to control or co-opt the media to reinforce its authoritarian, party-less political system, the underground press played a crucial role in sustaining those aspirations.

This resilience demonstrates the media's inherent ability to force political evolution, even under oppression.

With the return to democracy in the 1990s, the media environment transformed into a lively forum for political debate and for public accountability. It played a significant role in political developments leading to the 1990 Constitution and, ultimately, the abolition of the monarchy (Dahal, 2013). The media also played a critical role in 2006, mobilising public opinion against the monarchy and favouring the establishment of a democratic republic despite enormous risks (Miklian and Tveite, 2007).

In the post-conflict period, the media was crucial in consolidating Nepal's democratic system and promoting transparency and accountability within the new federal structure. However, this period also brought new challenges, including media bias and the influence of political parties, which threatened press freedom (Dahal, 2019).

Social media has added another dimension to Nepal's media landscape. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter shape public opinion, especially during elections. The use of social media has also contributed to the democratisation of information dissemination (Edingo, 2014), enabling marginalised groups to share their experiences and to contest dominant narratives. In addition to empowering many, this has also introduced the challenge of misinformation, which may disrupt the democratic processes that the media are supposed to facilitate (Dahal, 2023).

Throughout Nepal, the media has been a communication tool and a powerful force for art, culture, and democracy. What began as mere oral traditions has blossomed into a complex and multi-faceted system that shapes the country's identity and political

landscape. As Nepal continues its democratic journey, the role of the media as an art form and cultural institution remains predominant.

In this context, this research also aims to assess and relate the role of the media in the development and transformation of Dêudã culture.

Influencing Social and Political Factors for Arts and Culture

During the Era spanning from the unification of Nepal to the ascendancy of the Rana regime, the intricate relationship between art and power, the influence of sociopolitical factors, and the preservation of cultural heritage presented challenges and opportunities. For instance, the Kirat dynasty, which spanned from 800 BC to 300 AD, as well as the Licchavi and Thakuri periods from 300 AD to 1200 AD, the Malla period from 1201 AD to 1769 AD, and the establishment of the Shah dynasty, all contributed to the reconstruction of Nepal's historical narrative. Similarly, the Licchavi are recognised for their meticulous urban planning and patronage of the arts, particularly sculpture and architecture. Many renowned temples and palaces in the Kathmandu Valley, such as the famous Swayambhunath and Bouddhanath stupas, were constructed during their reign. Furthermore, Nepal flourished as a centre for Buddhist learning and practice during this period, hosting notable Buddhist thinkers, including Nagarjuna. Due to their shared Buddhist beliefs, the Licchavi rulers enjoyed close relations with Tibet, another prominent centre of Buddhist scholarship.

The development of arts and culture in Nepal has been significantly influenced by socio-political factors, exemplifying the impact of the country's journey towards modernisation, characterised by political upheaval and economic challenges (Devkota, 2007). Additionally, the 2015 political crisis, which led to a blockade of

supplies from India, further exacerbated the situation by negatively impacting the daily lives of Nepalese citizens and the overall economy (Shimisu, 2018). Moreover, the emergence of Maoists in 1996 and the subsequent Maoist revolution played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural landscape, particularly in the garment manufacturing industry. Furthermore, the influence of language politics, globalisation, and neoliberalism has contributed to shaping linguistic diversity and the cultural panorama of the nation (Gautam, 2021). Furthermore, economic inequality, especially during the post-mid-1990s era, has significantly influenced the arts and culture sector. The intricate interplay between social and power dynamics, cultural beliefs, and ecological processes has further impacted the trajectory of social and environmental transformation in Nepal.

In this context, Dêudã has navigated sociopolitical changes while maintaining its cultural relevance. The resilience of Dêudã culture amidst these challenges highlights the adaptability of Nepalese cultural practices in the face of political and economic upheaval. By examining Dêudã within the broader historical and socio-political context, your thesis can explore how Nepal's changing social and political landscape has shaped this cultural tradition.

This analysis demonstrates how Dêudã, like other cultural practices in Nepal, has reflected and responded to the sociopolitical dynamics of the time. It also emphasises the importance of understanding these historical and political influences to fully appreciate the role of Dêudã in Nepal's cultural heritage and its relevance in contemporary society.

Conclusion

The discussion above aims to connect Nepal's various artistic and cultural developments. This creative and cultural heritage has been shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social and political factors over centuries. This heritage reflects the resilience and adaptability of Nepalese society in preserving its cultural identity amid various challenges. Nepal's cultural identity has evolved dynamically from unification under King Prithvi Narayan Shah to the patronage of the arts during the Malla period and subsequent shifts in patronage systems. Despite the challenges posed by modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation, Nepal's artistic community perseveres, ensuring the preservation and celebration of its diverse cultural legacy. Future research could explore the direct links between socio-economic inequalities and creative expression in Nepal, providing a deeper understanding of how contemporary challenges continue to shape the nation's cultural landscape.

As the literature states, much of Nepal's history is linked to its kings' history. As Nepal's monarchy is one of the most ancient monarchies in the world, the evolution of its art and culture is observed through inspirations gained across various periods of political stability and instability. Medieval Nepal experienced a renaissance during the Malla reign, adding multiple new dimensions to Nepalese arts and culture while fully preserving its traditional essence. Nonetheless, a genuinely streamlined national culture evolved only during the Shah dynasty's rule. Hence, navigating through the contemporary amalgam of diversity and representation while preserving the originality of Nepal's art and cultural history can bear innovative opportunities and pose multi-faceted challenges.

Nepali artists continue to explore modern forms, techniques, and narratives of art that connect tradition with modernity, shaping and redefining the cultural identity of Nepal. However, more effort is needed to preserve ancient art forms and cultural heritage. Art history, which intersects with various disciplines such as anthropology, economics, political science, art, and literature, can support policymaking in heritage conservation, education curricula, and tourism strategies. Amid Nepal's newly adopted federal governance structure, it is crucial to empower local authorities and strengthen institutional capacities to prioritise cultural heritage conservation within their agendas. Additionally, these efforts must include the voices, cultural practices, and aspirations of local and Indigenous communities, youth, women, and other historically marginalised groups.

The following section provides an overview of Dêudā culture, describing its fascinating and diverse heritage. It begins with ancient origins and explores the many aspects that make this tradition so unique. By examining the historical roots of Dêudā culture and its people, we can better understand the lineage and various influences that have shaped their cultural identity over the centuries. This exploration offers a deeper appreciation of what makes Dêudā culture unique and enduring.

Understanding Dêudā Culture: A Cultural and Historical Retrospective

In Mānsakhaṇḍ¹⁵, various classes and communities coexist, creating a multi-cultural environment alongside the region's geographical diversity (Kalauni, 2023). Each

¹⁵ Mānsakhaṇḍ refers to a region mentioned in ancient Hindu mythology and texts, often associated with Nepal's Far-western districts of Nepal, such as Baitadi, Darchula, Bajhang, and Bajura. This region is known for its unique cultural and religious practices, including the traditional Dêudā culture. In Hindu cosmology, 'Mānsakhaṇḍ' is sometimes depicted as a sacred land inhabited by divine beings or sages. For further details, see Sharma, *Purāṇic Geography: A Detailed*

community celebrates distinct festivals, following unique customs and traditions.

Déudā culture is considered a shared tradition across all castes and classes in Rajasthan. It conveys a message of social and cultural unity, fostering tolerance and harmony among people and seemingly erasing distinctions based on class, ethnicity, region, religion, and gender. These festivals, passed down through generations, have become markers of identity for the community. Beyond entertainment, Déudā culture heralds a new era, bringing joy to the masses. Déudā has become a key means of passing down social norms, traditions and ancestral heritage.

Déudā is believed to have originated with the establishment of the Khas state in regions such as Baitadi, Darchula, Dadeldhura, Doti, Achham, Bajhang, Bajura, Kalikot, Mugu, Jumla, and Dailekh. As human society evolved, singing one's feelings and experiences through déudā became common and was considered a variant of folk songs. Déudā is believed to have been born when local Khas leaders began rhythmically expressing their sorrows and pains. As people migrated, the practice of Déudā spread to other regions. Singing Déudā is relatively easy, and its themes of love, affection, and satire have made it increasingly attractive to young men and women.

However, there are significant variations in the pronunciation, writing, meaning, and definition of Déudā culture depending on the individual and the location in the research location. The Comprehensive Nepali Dictionary includes an entry for 'Déudā,' defining it as a rhythm used in folk songs in western Nepal, Deura (देउरा), and a type of musical rhythm, a variation of musical rhythm (Tripathi et al.

Study (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1999), and Thapa, *Cultural and Religious Practices in Far-western Nepal* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 2015).

1983:664). Similarly, the Nepali Shabdasagar mentions that ‘Dêudā’ is derived from the Sanskrit root word ‘dwi’ with the suffix ‘ūdha’ and defines it as: joined by bending at both ends, twisted, bent; crooked, twisted, bent. It also refers to a rhythm in Western Nepali folk songs, Dêudā, a variation of musical rhythm, a piece in a game of intellect or strategy that moves diagonally, a horse, and a type of trousers flared at the bottom (Nepal, 2001:676).

In the local languages of Far-western Nepal, ‘Déudā’ means ‘circular’ or ‘curved.’ Some argue that the name ‘Déudā’ originated because players move in a circular motion while matching steps and twisting their feet during the game. In Bajura, playing Déudā is also called ‘starting the game.’ Déudā is a type of musical game where boys and girls engage in a lyrical exchange, and there can be winners and losers (Padhyaya, 2000:22).

Giri (2011: 92-93) defines Déudā as a form of dance and song in which men and women of various age groups, from children to older people, participate. He states that Déudā encompasses multiple themes: joy, sorrow, love, social inequality and exploitation, unemployment, political thought, women’s issues, local nature, and nationalism.

According to Bandhu (2001), participants in the Déudā dance join shoulders, clasp hands, and dance in unison by moving their feet forward and backward in a slow, rhythmic manner. This dance is not accompanied by musical instruments. He also mentions that ‘men, women, and children can dance separately or mix’ and that ‘the participants gather in a large courtyard, divide into two groups facing each other, and engage in a collective lyrical exchange or question-and-answer style singing (134).’

Yatri (1977:64) describes Déudā as a game that involves singing and dancing with competitive emotions, in which rhythm, melody, feelings, and expressions harmonise. Nath (1964:18) defines Déudā as a folk song in which boys and girls hold hands, sing on one side, and move their feet on the other. Ojha and Giri (2003) define Déudā as the organised lyrical performances and songs sung during the game. They note that Déudā is often played or sung during festivals, fairs, or celebrations, and sometimes organised games of Déudā are held as well. They describe the process of performing Déudā as follows: ‘In this game, one player holds the hands of another, and they match steps by taking one step inside and another step outside. The players divide into two groups in a circular formation and play Déudā in a question-and-answer style (48).’

According to Bam (2007), Déudā songs, composed by natural-born poets, are not created in solitude or with a focused concentration. Instead, they are formed spontaneously during the game in response to questions and statements. Bam notes that Déudā songs are typically created during grand festivals, fairs, and events where boys and girls play Déudā, and the songs often reflect the competition in economic and moral terms (106-109).

The appeal of Déudā is greatly influenced by the skill, proficiency, interest, knowledge, and conduct of the Déudā performers, known as ‘Déudiyā.’ Déudā is deeply connected to the social environment, the country’s time and circumstances, and various geographical, social, cultural and political contexts. The rhythm and tone of Déudā vary in pace, ranging from slow to moderate to fast, depending on the song and the dance. The use of ornaments, wordplay, and gestures is also daily in Déudā performances.

Déudā is also an essential part of the original folk culture of the Khas-speaking community. According to Pandey (2003:124), the themes of Déudā songs, sung during the worship of deities or grand festivals, fairs, and Ratyoulis (festivals), often revolve around love, romance, and other subjects. He further notes that these songs frequently depict the joys and sorrows of social life, as well as love-related themes, and reflect local customs, caste, and attire. In addition to songs, Déudā emphasises rhythm and group singing. Pandey adds that Déudā can take on as many forms as there are people and their emotions, which is why the rhythm of Déudā varies depending on the location of the performance.

While different scholars have defined Déudā in various ways, its essence remains the same: a song composed of meaningful lines with a rhythmic pattern of fourteen syllables, sung and played in either a short or long rhythm. Based on this, it can be said that although the style of singing or performing may differ, the fundamental nature of Déudā remains consistent.

The cultural practice of Déudā involves diverse processes and forms, with participants often celebrating in a circle during festivals and at fairs. Traditionally, men have predominantly participated in Déudā, although women known as Pherkali—women who roam the village playing Déudā—also participate in the performance. When women join as Gitaru, they often use extreme obscenity, creating excitement and increasing participation. Female Gitaru, or Pherkali, are particularly adept at leading and arguing, frequently using objectionable terms towards male Gitaru, challenging even the most established singers. This trend can be perceived as an open medium for challenging contemporary social structures.

An Overview of Historical Development of the Dêudã Culture

The development of traditional folk song performances in the far and mid-western regions demonstrates their cultural depth and enduring nature. Despite various difficulties, the area has safeguarded many folk songs from extinction. These musical pieces, cultivated within an oral tradition, have been handed down through generations, offering insights into societal structures and cultural values. The progression of folk songs in this area can be categorised into four specific periods based on historical epochs, each defined by unique socio-cultural influences:

The tradition of folk song singing originated in the 10th and 11th centuries and persisted until 1744 AD. During this time, ritualistic Vedic ceremonies, such as birth rituals and weddings, provided a backdrop for songs such as Sagun, Phag, and Mangal. These ritual songs played a crucial role in social and religious ceremonies, facilitating their growth and integration into the region's folk singing traditions. Notable compositions include Deuda songs recounting historical events and preserving the region's rich history and cultural legacies. Folk singing customs were reinforced by practices such as Bhailo and Bhuo, which were linked to logistics gathering and military instruction.

Similarly, the medieval period (1745 AD to 1957) is significant in Nepal because of socio-political transformations, particularly the unification campaign initiated by King Prithvi Narayan Shah. This period facilitated the spread of the Khas language, leading to the formation of Nepali. Traditional folk singing thrived in the early 18th century, with Hudkes and Bhats playing crucial roles in spreading narratives and tales of valour. The practice of Dêudã, which encompasses various genres such as the Devcharitra and Devastuti, flourished. The traditions of Sawai and Chaliya emerged,

offering detailed narrations of contemporary events and serving tactical purposes in warfare.

Furthermore, significant shifts occurred in the development of Nepali folk songs during the Modern Period (1958–1992). Following the restoration of democracy in 1951, modernisation progressed slowly, with folk artists persisting in traditional styles. The emergence of Janakavi Keshari Dharmaraj Thapa and artists like Parimal Snehhi marked a transition towards modern folk songs. Recording technologies and studios have facilitated the circulation of folk music, while media platforms like Radio Nepal and Nepal Television have promoted folk singing. Cultural institutions and festivals nurtured folk singing traditions, with artists gaining national acclaim and enhancing the reputation of Dêudã singing.

Table – 1: Dêudã culture’s historical timeline

Period	Timeframe	Key Activities
Ancient Period	10 th – 11 th Centuries to 1744 (AD)	The emergence of ritualistic songs, the development of the Nepali language, the rise of Deuda songs, and practices like Bhailo Bhao enriching folk music
Medieval Period	1801 – 2006 (AD)	Expansion of the Khas language, the rise of Deuda songs, performers like Maniram Khanal, the flourishing of Deuda genres, the emergence of Sawai singing, Chaliya
Modern Period	1958 – 1992 (AD)	Janakavi Keshari Dharmaraj Thapa’s influence, modern recording techniques, role of media, cultural organisations, and festivals nurturing folk music
Post-modern Period	1993 (AD) onwards	Expansion of central and private media, proliferation of festivals, digital platforms for dissemination, folk songs in political campaigns

(Upadhyaya, 2023:600)

Lastly, the post-modern period, which spans the democratic era under Nepal's constitutional monarchy from 1993 to 2015 and extends to the present, marks a significant phase in the evolution of folk songs in Nepal. New styles and techniques have been embraced, with modern technology enhancing production and promotional efforts. Government communication policies and regional media expansion have provided platforms for recording and promoting folk singing. Festivals and cultural events have facilitated cultural exchange, and digital platforms such as YouTube and TikTok have broadened the reach of folk songs. Despite modern influences, the essence of traditional folk songs remains deeply rooted, with folk music gaining global appreciation and playing a role in political campaigns in recent years.

Building on this overview of Dêudã culture, the next chapter turns to the theoretical and empirical foundations of the research. It examines how global and local scholarship on arts, culture, and peacebuilding informs this research, offering both updated perspectives and insights from contexts that remain underrepresented in existing literature.

CHAPTER 3: THEORATICAL AND EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS AND PEACEBUILDING

In the previous chapter, I critically examined Nepal's rich artistic and cultural history, uncovering its profound influence on the country's identity and sociopolitical context, along with an outline of the nature of the Dêudã culture. Throughout history, Nepalese art forms such as painting, sculpture, and architecture have reflected the country's diverse heritage and spiritual depth, playing a crucial role in shaping its societal fabric. In this chapter, I review key theoretical concepts in peacebuilding, critically examine empirical evidence on the use of arts and cultural performance in community peacebuilding, and contextualise these insights within post-war Nepal. By doing so, it identifies the gap that this research addresses: the limited scholarly attention to indigenous cultural performances, particularly the Dêudã tradition, as tools for peacebuilding. The chapter begins with a discussion of peacebuilding theory and the selected theoretical lens guiding this research, followed by a critical review of empirical literature on arts-based peacebuilding, before focusing on Nepal's post-war context and the rationale for this research.

Background

Having grown up during the conflict and frequently visited my communities in post-conflict Nepal, I have witnessed firsthand the power of cultural and artistic practices in bridging divides and fostering peace. My encounters with both parties to the conflict and the everyday challenges of poverty, discrimination, and injustice provided unique insights into the relationship-building and healing processes facilitated by cultural activities. At a Dêudã festival, I observed how music, dance, and traditional storytelling brought together people from all walks of life, creating a

shared space for relationship building. An illustrative example of the cultural significance of Dêudã performances can be drawn from my experience in Dadeldhura in 2015, shortly after the promulgation of Nepal's new constitution. During the Haritalika Teej festival in August, a group of women from various villages converged in the centre of Dadeldhura town to participate in religious rituals at the Shiv Mandir (Lord Shiva temple). This gathering was an act of worship and fasting, attending festivals (melas), reconnecting with relatives, meeting new people and celebrating through Dêudã performances.



Figure 8: Women Performing Dêudã in Dadeldhura, 2023

In this video, a group of female participants, led by a young Gitaru, come together to celebrate the Teej festival. These celebrations are organised with the support of the local government and provide a platform for communal gathering and cultural expression. It is important to note that such events could not occur during the conflict period due to security concerns. These programs are now seen throughout the region, marking a return to peace and revitalising cultural traditions.

Video by: Bandana Bhandari

This event was particularly noteworthy because such gatherings for women from rural areas are rare, and they typically have limited opportunities for communal celebration. The atmosphere was charged with joy and a sense of newfound freedom and emancipation – feelings suppressed mainly during the conflict. This example highlights how cultural practices like Dêudã serve as essential outlets for expression and solidarity, especially in post-conflict contexts where opportunities for social cohesion and collective celebration were previously constrained. This experience also echoes the findings of peace scholars such as Johan Galtung (1996) and John Paul

Lederach (1997), who have long emphasised the vital role of the arts and culture in conflict resolution and community ‘peacebuilding’. Galtung’s concept of ‘positive peace’ and Lederach’s emphasis on ‘moral imagination’ highlight how deeply embedded cultural expressions can mend relationships and rebuild trust in communities fractured by conflict and violence.

These endeavours can be broadly classified into two main approaches: those focusing on the structural causes of disputes, such as governmental and economic systems, and those dedicated to enhancing relationships among diverse groups, often through community-based initiatives (Broome, 1993; Burton, 1987; Kelman, 1997). My observations in Nepal resonate with this dual approach, as the Dêudã culture helps build communal relations and promotes social cohesion by celebrating shared cultural heritage and ‘belonging’, which I refer to as local community ‘peacebuilding’ in this context.

The intersection of the arts and religion in community ‘peacebuilding’ is significant, as both domains often share common values and symbols that can be harnessed to foster peace. For instance, the arts can mediate conflicts by integrating religious symbols and practices into community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, as seen in various grassroots and elite-level initiatives (Carter and Guerra, 2022). Religious motifs in art, such as murals and rituals, resonate deeply with communities and provide a powerful means of communicating messages of peace and reconciliation. This synergy between the arts and religion enhances the effectiveness of community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts by creating culturally and spiritually meaningful interventions that address the root causes of conflict and promote lasting peace.

Scholars are increasingly acknowledging the transformative potential of artistic methods, such as music, theatre, and storytelling, in community ‘peacebuilding’ processes at the community level (Epskamp, 1999; Galtung, 1995; Lederach, 1997, 2003). These creative forms of expression have proven highly influential in societies affected by conflict, serving as vehicles for personal and collective healing and for reconciliation. For instance, in post-conflict Nepal, Playback Theatre has emerged as a pivotal tool for fostering collective imagination and advocating for peace within local communities (Dirstorfer and Saud, 2020). They stated that ‘participants share personal stories and experiences, which are then enacted by actors, fostering empathy and understanding among participants and audiences alike’ (122-123).

Furthermore, scholars argue that the arts can inspire personal growth among participants and audiences and serve as catalysts for broader social change. By utilising established networks within local communities, the arts can drive structural and cultural transformations over time (Cohen, 2006; Lederach, 2005; Shank and Schirch, 2008). For example, Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) highlighted the work of Sarwanam, a theatre group from Nepal, and Jana Karaliya, a mobile theatre group from Sri Lanka. These groups actively engaged in transformative efforts during various stages of conflict in their respective countries (86–89). This evidence underscores the pivotal role of theatre in facilitating societal dialogues, mainly through forum theatre, which allows for exploring real-life scenarios and challenging oppressive system narratives.

In her article¹⁶, Amy Fallon (31 March 2024) examines the artistic endeavours of Ugandan cartoonist Jim Spire Ssentongo, who uses humour to critically assess Uganda's oppressive regime. Cartoonists use satire and caricature to highlight political misconduct, censorship, and human rights violations. Despite facing various forms of coercion and harassment from the governing bodies, he continues to produce satirical illustrations, firmly believing in the power of humour to confront injustice and spark discussions among the populace. This research scrutinises the significance of satire in advocacy efforts and elucidates the obstacles that dissenting individuals encounter within authoritarian systems in Uganda.

On a global scale, community 'peacebuilding' initiatives increasingly incorporate diverse art forms into their strategies, particularly in societies recovering from conflict. Scholars such as Whiteman (2003) and Chattoo (2020) have examined the impact of these initiatives on fostering social change. Despite this increased acknowledgement, there remains a noticeable gap in research focusing on the use of local arts for community 'peacebuilding'. Consequently, this research aims to elucidate how performative arts, exemplified by Dêudã culture, contribute to community 'peacebuilding' at the personal, interpersonal, and structural levels within Nepali society. To achieve this aim, the current chapter initially analyses the development of frameworks and theories related to community 'peacebuilding', progressing from a global scale to more localised contexts in the following section. Subsequent sections explore the conceptual progression of community 'peacebuilding' through the arts, highlighting its integration with societal changes in

¹⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/3/31/humour-is-powerful-a-ugandan-cartoonist-takes-on-a-repressive-government>

regions affected by conflict, from the UN to local contexts. Following this analysis, the chapter evaluates community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives through the arts established in Nepal after the Maoist conflict that concluded in 2006, presenting case studies and examples to provide a contextual foundation for the discussion. Finally, an examination will be conducted of the correlation between propositions and theories relating to Dêudã culture within the academic community.

Theoretical Framework: Peacebuilding, Theatre of the Oppressed and the Dêudã Culture

The concept of peacebuilding has evolved considerably since Johan Galtung first distinguished between negative peace (the absence of direct violence) and positive peace (the presence of justice and social harmony). Galtung (1975; 1996) argued that true peace requires addressing the root causes of conflict, including structural violence. Building on this, Lederach (1997; 2005) described peacebuilding as a dynamic social construct, emphasising long-term transformation of relationships alongside structural reforms. His notion of the “moral imagination” captures the creative capacity to envision reconciliation and new social realities.

Galtung emphasised that true peace involves the cessation of armed conflict and proactive collaboration among diverse societal groups to address and resolve the underlying causes of conflict (Chetail, 2009; Galtung, 1975). Since then, the concept of community ‘peacebuilding’ has expanded, evolving into a comprehensive framework endorsed by governments and international communities to restore peace and establish sustainable structures for long-term conflict resolution and societal harmony (David 2003). This evolution mirrors the growing recognition that peace is a dynamic process requiring ongoing effort and commitment from all levels of society.

Building on Galtung's seminal contributions, Lederach (2005) offered an extensive description of community 'peacebuilding':

“[A] comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict towards more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is not merely a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct” (Lederach, 2005:20).

Upon clarification, Lederach aimed to provide a more inclusive interpretation of the community 'peacebuilding' concept, as previously outlined in the United Nations' Agenda for Peace, which states that this concept involves differentiating community 'peacebuilding' from peacemaking (the resolution of conflicts by addressing their underlying causes) and peacekeeping (the maintenance of a balance of power and separation of conflicting parties) (Chetail and Jutersonke, 2015). Furthermore, community-based art processes have demonstrated promise in uniting identity groups through shared cultural experiences, heightening awareness of historical suffering, and engaging communities in creative projects (Cohen, 2006).

However, the intricate relationship between art, culture, conflict, and community 'peacebuilding' in contemporary contexts presents a challenging knowledge gap. This gap is significant because it complicates efforts to precisely define the impact and effectiveness of arts-based community 'peacebuilding' interventions. Understanding how artistic expression fosters reconciliation and peace remains elusive due to the diverse contexts in which these interventions take place, the varied interpretations of art's role in conflict transformation, and the challenges in measuring their long-term outcomes.

While the arts and culture can significantly contribute to community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, studies highlight the necessity of integrating artistic initiatives within broader frameworks that address the root causes of conflicts. For instance, sustainable peace outcomes often require simultaneous efforts in governance reform, economic development, social justice and cultural initiatives. This integrated approach enhances the impact of arts-based interventions and ensures that they are part of a comprehensive strategy for building lasting peace.

Schwarz (2005, cited in Supančič et al., 2021:630-634) advanced the discourse by identifying three essential components of post-conflict peacebuilding: security, welfare (which encompasses political and social well-being), and representation (which concerns the state’s interaction with its citizens). This comprehensive approach reflects the contemporary interpretation of security, which is intertwined with the quality of our interactions, mutual care, and consideration of each other’s needs (Schwarz, 2005, cited in Supančič et al., 2021: 634). Socio-economic aspects of post-conflict societies require recognition from governments, international entities, and other stakeholders, emphasising the need to address all three facets to achieve prosperity and emotional well-being.

Likewise, scholars such as Burton (1987), Kelman (1997), and Broome (1993) emphasised two interrelated strands of peacebuilding. Structural interventions focus on transforming the root causes of conflict by addressing institutional and systemic inequalities – for instance, reforms in governance, equitable economic opportunities, or access to justice. These measures aim to dismantle the structural violence that sustains divisions within society. Relational initiatives, by contrast, concentrate on rebuilding trust and repairing relationships through dialogue, reconciliation, and

shared cultural practices. It is within this relational strand that Dêudã culture is particularly significant. As a participatory performance tradition, Dêudã enables dialogue across caste, class, and gender boundaries, offering a culturally embedded platform where grievances can be voiced, emotions shared, and solidarity restored. In this sense, Dêudã exemplifies how arts-based practices complement structural reforms by strengthening the interpersonal and communal foundations of peace.

These two strands – structural reforms addressing systemic inequalities and relational initiatives fostering dialogue and reconciliation – frame the global discourse on peacebuilding. Within this framework, Dêudã culture resonates most strongly with the relational dimension, as its participatory performances provide a culturally grounded platform for dialogue, critique, and social healing in post-conflict Nepal.

Dêudã Culture as Culturally Embedded Performance Practice

While Dêudã culture offers entertainment, its significance extends far deeper: Dêudã is embedded in the social, cultural, and ritual life of the community. It serves as a culturally sanctioned platform for dialogue, critique, and healing, crossing boundaries of caste, class, gender, and political affiliation.

Women – often marginalised in rural public life – take an active role in Dêudã, using song to voice both grievances and aspirations. The improvised verses frequently address pressing local concerns, from gender inequality to economic hardship, weaving these issues into a shared community narrative. Through this process, participants symbolically negotiate tensions, affirm solidarity, and engage in collective problem-solving.

Beyond its lyrical content, Dêudã's embodied performance practices are central to its ability to foster social cohesion and reconciliation. Field observations in the Sudurpashchim region revealed that Dêudã is not only an artistic expression but also a lived social process that reshapes relationships. In regions historically labelled "remote" and marginalised in national narratives, these performances create temporary spaces where entrenched hierarchies can be set aside, allowing participants to relate to one another in new ways.

The structure of the performance—holding hands in a circle, moving in synchronised steps, and exchanging verses in a call-and-response format—creates a shared physical rhythm that cultivates trust, attentiveness, and mutual reliance. In communities where caste divisions and the legacy of bonded labour remain present, this embodied solidarity carries particular weight. Handholding symbolises vulnerability and interdependence, while the collective rhythm generates an emotional energy that bridges individual differences.

These dynamics align with Boal's (1979) concept of the *spect-actor*, where participants are not passive observers but active co-creators of meaning. They also reflect Lederach's (2005) idea of moral imagination, as the embodied and relational aspects of Dêudã invite participants to envision alternative possibilities for coexistence.

Even as Dêudã culture adapts to contemporary contexts – through digital media, stylistic innovation, and integration into urban cultural events – these embodied elements remain integral. This continuity sustains its role as a culturally resonant and locally grounded form of peacebuilding, embedding values of cooperation, empathy, and mutual recognition within its artistic form.

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Community Peace Practice

Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979) explains how cultural performance influences community peacebuilding through participatory mechanisms of dialogue, critical reflection, and collective rehearsal. This directly relates to my research questions because it illuminates how Dêudã transforms participants from passive spectators into active “spect-actors,” enabling marginalised groups to voice grievances, challenge social hierarchies, and co-create visions of reconciliation. By framing Dêudã within Boal’s theory, my research analyses how this indigenous practice fosters empowerment, emotional healing, and social cohesion in post-conflict Nepal.

To analyse how a cultural performance such as Dêudã can contribute to peacebuilding, this research adopts Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)* as its primary theoretical lens. Inspired by Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of critical consciousness, Boal’s approach is dialogical, inclusive, and action oriented. It operationalises key values of grassroots peacebuilding, including amplifying voice, fostering critical reflection, enabling empowerment, and rehearsing collective strategies for social change. These principles align closely with Johan Galtung’s (1996) concept of positive peace, which goes beyond the absence of violence to address underlying structural inequalities, and with John Paul Lederach’s (2005) idea of the moral imagination, which calls for creative approaches to re-envision fractured relationships.

The functions of Dêudã culture closely parallel these theoretical principles, making it a compelling site for analysis. Like TO’s spect-actors, Dêudã breaks down the traditional divide between performer and audience. Anyone in the community may join the circle, clap, sing refrains, or lead verses, creating an egalitarian ethos that

reflects shared participation rather than hierarchical performance. This collective form echoes Galtung's vision of positive peace by reinforcing inclusivity and reducing symbolic hierarchies. The call-and-response format of Dêudã further mirrors TO's forum debates, enabling communal dialogue and critique through playful, metaphorical, and improvisational expression. In doing so, Dêudã cultivates the relational dialogue that Lederach identifies as essential for long-term transformation.

Dêudã also provides a rare platform for women and marginalised groups to articulate their experiences and grievances in public, echoing TO's mission to restore agency and voice to those historically silenced. In many rural contexts where formal forums for dialogue remain inaccessible, participation in Dêudã enables individuals to challenge social hierarchies within a culturally legitimate and socially accepted space. This act of inclusive participation contributes to dismantling forms of structural violence, addressing the deeper conditions Galtung identifies as impediments to sustainable peace.

Finally, the shared rhythms, refrains, and symbolic lyrics of Dêudã facilitate collective reflection and problem-solving. Through the act of singing and dancing together, participants not only celebrate cultural identity but also rehearse the possibility of empathy, unity, and reconciliation. This embodies Lederach's moral imagination, as communities use cultural creativity to envision new possibilities of coexistence beyond past divisions. In this sense, Dêudã functions as a form of living theatre: rooted in tradition yet adaptable to contemporary concerns, it becomes a participatory practice that operationalises both theoretical and practical dimensions of transformative peacebuilding.

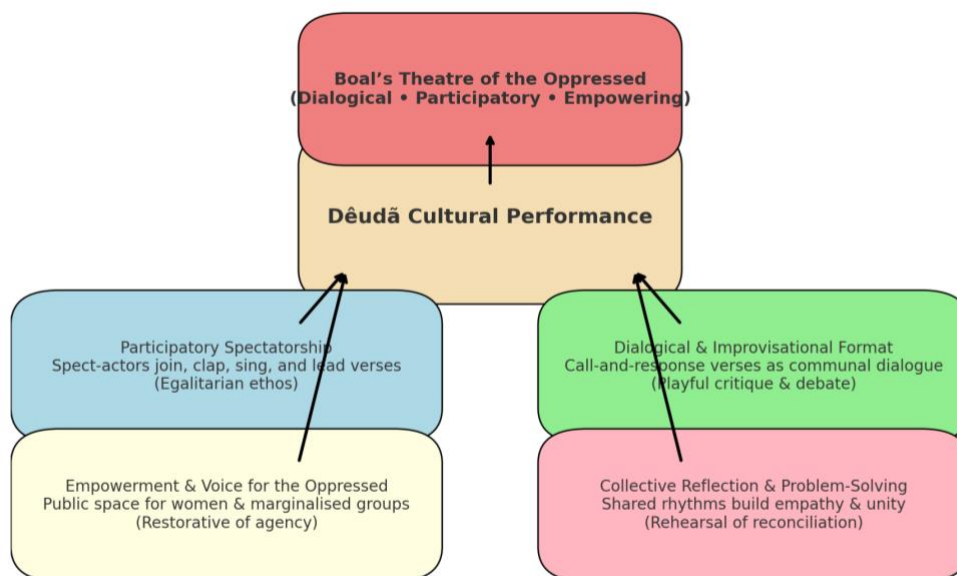


Figure 9 – Augusto Boal's Theatre of Oppressed and Dêudã culture as community peace practices

In line with these perspectives, local artists have played an essential role in conflict-affected contexts, employing art as a medium for awareness-raising, dialogue, and community mobilisation. For instance, in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, which is plagued by drug-related violence, a group of local artists transformed abandoned buildings into vibrant murals conveying hope and resistance messages. This initiative beautified the area and served as a rallying point for community members, encouraging them to reclaim their neighbourhoods from violence (Hernández-Gómez, 2021). Likewise, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the women's collective 'Mamans du Congo' employed music and dance to challenge gender-based violence and advocate for peace. By blending traditional rhythms with contemporary messages, they craft powerful performances that resonate deeply with local communities, fostering a sense of solidarity and collective responsibility for peace (Adepoju et al., 2021). These examples illustrate how local artists can serve as effective agents of change, leveraging their creative talents to address and transform conflicts by engaging communities and reshaping social dynamics.

In many post-conflict contexts, pursuing political and economic liberalisation may not yield optimal outcomes for sustainable peace. An alternative conception of liberal peace, rooted in public engagement through direct action, citizen advocacy, and mobilisation, emerges as a more promising avenue (Franks and Richmond, 2008). In this paradigm, cultural intermingling and artistic expression play pivotal roles because of their pervasive influence across all stages of conflict and their capacity to offer imaginative, innovative, and humane alternatives to disputes and insecurity (Mani and Wessie, 2011). Lederach (2005) compares listening in community ‘peacebuilding’ to the art of writing haiku, a Japanese form of poetry focused on capturing a moment in a few short syllables: This deep ‘observational power’ is essential in community ‘peacebuilding’, merging strategy and creativity into a dynamic process (70).

Fukushima (2011:21) elaborated on the idea, emphasising that art and cultural activities can provide temporary respite from current circumstances and envision alternative scenarios to conflict realities. Artistic endeavours encourage creative inquisitiveness, transcending the binary oppositions accentuated during times of strife (Lederach, 2005:20). Numerous scholars assert that culture and art in post-conflict settings restore individuals’ capacity for reconciliation, facilitating emotional expression and initiating personal healing (Cohen, 2005; Daly and Sarkin, 2010). Societies emerging from conflict face widespread fragmentation, with societal structures, communities and individuals in disarray. In this context, culture and art offer a platform for addressing trauma, allowing survivors to construct new understandings and develop new modes of expression to comprehend their changed reality.

Empirical studies underscore the effectiveness of cultural and artistic initiatives in overcoming trauma and promoting healing. In Tanzania, music is a prominent medium for addressing social and political issues and provides a platform for collective reflection and expression. The Balkan Chamber Orchestra in Prishtina, Kosovo, exemplifies efforts towards inclusivity and inter-ethnic collaboration, with musicians from various backgrounds bridging societal divides through music (Supančič et al., 2021:635). In Batticola, Sri Lanka, artistic activities such as painting, theatre, yoga, and sculpting offer solace and recovery for individuals of all ages within the Butterfly Peace Garden (Lawrence, 2003, cited in Supančič et al., 2021:636). In the Philippines and Indonesia, theatre and drama workshops encourage harmonious coexistence among diverse ethnic and religious groups (Fernandes, 1995). These examples highlight the significance of sociocultural interpretations in understanding the therapeutic aspects of culture and art in post-conflict situations.

While culture and art hold significant potential for contributing to community ‘peacebuilding’, it is crucial to thoroughly examine their impact. Specific cultural and artistic endeavours may facilitate social cohesion without necessarily stimulating transformative discourse on conflicts (Bleiker, 2009; Dirnstorfer and Saud, 2020; Saud, 2021). Such activities can perpetuate harmful ideologies and impede the community ‘peacebuilding’ process, especially if they prioritise political agendas over artistic expression (Bahun, 2014; Supančič et al., 2021). Moreover, even when cultural initiatives foster inter-group dialogue, this does not guarantee a universal improvement in the quality of life or substantial societal transformations. Therefore, a nuanced approach to these endeavours must distinguish between mere dialogue and tangible changes in pursuing peace (Cohen, 2005; Lederach, 2005; Bleiker, 2009).

Performance and Embodied Practices as Peacebuilding Tools

Both TO and Déudã culture illustrate how performance can transform conflict by engaging participants emotionally and bodily, not just intellectually. Scholars such as Lederach (2005), Schirch (2005), and Cohen (2005) affirm that artful, embodied practices provide safe symbolic spaces for dialogue and healing. Déudã culture, as a “medium of identity” for the Far-western Nepali community, also strengthens cultural resilience, validating indigenous knowledge in peace efforts.

Integrating Theatre of the Oppressed and Art-Based Approaches for Nepal

This research therefore adopts a combined theoretical framework: Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and broader art-based peacebuilding theory. Boal’s adaptable, participatory model provides the analytical tools to understand Déudã culture as an indigenous “theatre” of the people, while art-based peacebuilding scholarship (Lederach, Cohen, Schirch) highlights the roles of creativity, empathy, and imagination in healing and transformation. This integration ensures cultural relevance, situating Déudã culture within both global peacebuilding discourse and Nepal’s local context. The framework also informs the research’s methodology—particularly performance observation, lyrical interpretation, and (participant) interviews—as elaborated in Chapter 3.

Having established the theoretical framework that positions Déudã culture as a participatory and dialogical cultural practice aligned with Theatre of the Oppressed, the next section critically analyses empirical evidence on arts and cultural performance in community peacebuilding globally.

Empirical Literature on Arts and Community Peacebuilding

Scholars and practitioners across contexts have documented the role of arts and culture in peacebuilding. Lederach (1997) emphasises the transformative potential of fostering contemplative environments that encourage dialogue among conflicting parties in exploring theoretical approaches to integrating the arts into community ‘peacebuilding’. Such environments enable participants to revisit their past experiences and collaboratively envision a future with improved interpersonal relationships. Scholars focusing on the intersection of the arts and community ‘peacebuilding’ argue that arts-based initiatives create spaces for reflection, which assist participants in reframing conflict narratives and actively engaging in their work’s transformation.

Brauchle’s (2022) research on grassroots initiatives in Indonesia illustrates how art-based activities can initiate open dialogues about pressing issues such as resource exploitation, the marginalisation of Indigenous rights, communal violence, radicalisation, and shifting security dynamics. Through artistic expression, grassroots individuals in Indonesia are empowered to articulate their concerns regarding contentious matters, paving the way for local reconciliation and the pursuit of ‘transformative justice’ (2-10).

Similarly, Thomas (2019) asserts that artistic endeavours stimulate creators and audiences to envision peace by challenging deeply rooted perceptions of conflict and peace (486). The performance and creative reconstruction of conflict narratives present alternative pathways to violence for public consideration. Likewise, Stephenson and Zanetti (2017) highlighted the significant role of arts-based organisations in contesting dominant discourses and imaginaries within post-conflict

communities. They argue that such organisations possess unique capacities to promote peace by fostering reflexivity among individuals and groups (351).

Hunter (2005) also emphasises the importance of arts-based activities in cultivating environments conducive to moral contemplation. These activities facilitate dialogue and enable participants to reimagine social connections, empathise with diverse perspectives, and critically assess their identities within the community. Hunter suggests that the arts are instrumental in initiating the dialogues necessary for social change and embodying the moral contemplation required to envision alternative futures (141-142).

Collectively, these scholarly perspectives underscore the crucial role of the arts and culture in advancing community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts by creating spaces for reflection, dialogue, and transformative imagination. In conflict contexts where dominant powers often suppress grassroots voices, the arts serve as a vital channel through which marginalised communities express their resilience against oppression. Furthermore, they highlight the capacity of arts-based initiatives to creatively challenge hegemonic structures and narratives while facilitating healing and reconciliation across personal, structural and cultural dimensions.

Drawing on experiences from Sierra Leone, Kanyako (2015) reflects on the reconciliation efforts led by Peacelinks and highlights the transformative potential of culturally rooted artistic performances in addressing the scars of war and promoting healing among participants. These initiatives empower individuals by restoring their agency in the reconciliation process (109-110). Likewise, Pinto-Garcia et al. (2022)

advocated for a creative, art-based reconciliation model inspired by the Kintsugi¹⁷ philosophy that aims to initiate behavioural changes and facilitate trauma healing (1528-1532, cited in Niraula, 2023). Their analysis of the Art for Reconstruction¹⁸ project in Medellin, Colombia, demonstrated the effectiveness of arts-based interventions in fostering transformative outcomes.

Building on these insights, McEvoy-Levy (2012) emphasises the role of performative arts in fostering dialogue and healing among participants. This perspective is echoed by Ware (2022), who shares her experience of conducting art-based conflict transformation workshops between 2016 and 2018 in the North-Central Rakhine State, Myanmar. She further highlights the workshops' capacity to promote deep reflection, narrative reimagining, and empathy building among participants, thereby fostering reconciliation among them. However, she also notes the limited effectiveness of these interventions in promoting inter-group dialogue beyond workshop settings, suggesting areas for further exploration and improvement (1-11).

The discourse surrounding the use of the arts in community 'peacebuilding' also encompasses the personal, interpersonal, and structural levels at which these initiatives operate. Shank and Schirch (2008) discuss how various art forms can strategically contribute to community 'peacebuilding' across different societal

¹⁷ Kintsugi is a Japanese method that encourages individuals to mend fractured items rather than discard them. The imperfections are accentuated by incorporating gold into the fissures (Pinto-Garcia, Serna-Hosie, Casas, and Mendes 2022, 1531).

¹⁸ The individuals involved in the Art for Reconstruction initiative included civilians who had survived the conflict, former military and police personnel, ex-combatants of guerrilla and paramilitary factions undergoing reintegration, and delegates from the public and private sectors, civil society groups, universities, and media outlets.

levels¹⁹. They argue that arts-based efforts can transcend mere feel-good activities when artists employ them strategically through coordinated plans and specific actions to foster peace (218). They assert that artists can advance peace by ‘waging conflict non-violently, reducing direct violence, transforming relationships, and building capacity’ (218-220).

- **Music and Healing**

Music has frequently served as a medium for trauma recovery and dialogue. In Kosovo, the Balkan Chamber Orchestra brought together musicians from divided communities (Supančič et al., 2021), while in Tanzania, music enabled collective reflection on social issues. Ntarangwi (2015) and Howell (2022) underscore music’s power to sustain social movements and foster intergroup learning, empathy, and reconciliation.

The use of the musical acts as a catalyst for community ‘peacebuilding’ is multifaceted, as evidenced by a wide range of scholarly perspectives on the subject.

Ntarangwi (2015:844) argues that music has the enduring power to unite and sustain social movements across various temporal and spatial contexts, fostering social harmony, reconciliation, and resistance against prevailing injustices. Expanding on this discussion, Howell (2022) identifies six dimensions of peace that music can foster, ranging from inter-group learning to inner peace, depending on the nature of encounters, conflict engagement, sociality, and audience reception²⁰ (5-15). Similarly,

¹⁹ Invisible theatre, forum theatre, symbolic reinterpretation, spoken word, hip-hop, documentary filmmaking, public murals, agitprop, installation art, chants, dance, local music, rituals, and arts education programs.

²⁰ Howell (2022) identifies multiple dimensions of peace fostered through music. These include promoting intercultural understanding and empathy, encouraging everyday peace through routine interactions in divided communities, and enabling dialogic peace via interpersonal engagement

Wu (2019) highlights music's role in promoting peace through cultural exchange and dialogue among individuals from diverse communities and nations (139-140).

Urbain (2018:2) highlights the dual nature of music, which can promote peace while reinforcing it. He emphasises the importance of peace-oriented messaging, embodied action, and contextualisation in utilising music for community 'peacebuilding'.

Likewise, Howell (2022) warns against superficial or partial peace outcomes resulting from arts-based initiatives, stressing the need for critical reflection on processes and results to ensure their efficacy in community 'peacebuilding' efforts (16). The literature acknowledges that while arts-based approaches to peace hold significant potential, they also present challenges.

Building on these claims, Dirnstorfer and Saud (2020), Rijal (2019), and Saud (2016, 2022, and 2023) discuss the transformative potential of the arts, particularly music, theatre, dance, and poetry in Nepal, as platforms for conflicting parties to creatively express their grievances and bear witness to each other's experiences, thereby establishing grounds for reconciliation. Additionally, Thomas (2019:485) underscores the effectiveness of arts-based interventions, as demonstrated by Ayara in Colombia, in advancing peace by challenging hegemonic narratives and reshaping representations of marginalised youth through hip-hop.

across conflict lines. Music can also advance justice-oriented peace by empowering marginalised groups, supporting human rights advocacy, and commemorating past injustices. At the individual level, it cultivates inner peace, while imagined peace envisions future possibilities through artistic initiatives. Key elements underpinning these processes include encounters between divided groups, active engagement with conflict narratives, structured opportunities for social interaction, and recognition of the audience's role in shaping meaning.

- **Theatre and Dialogue**

Applied theatre, including Playback Theatre and Forum Theatre, has emerged as a transformative practice. In Nepal, Playback Theatre projects enabled participants to share personal stories which were then enacted by performers, fostering empathy (Dirnstorfer & Saud, 2020). Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) note similar impacts from Sarwanam in Nepal and Jana Karaliya in Sri Lanka. Globally, Boal's TO has been used to encourage communities to reimagine oppressive realities (Aguiar, 2020).

Applied theatre is a powerful tool in community 'peacebuilding' efforts, as highlighted by Aguiar (2020). Aguiar explains how applied theatre facilitates intrapersonal discourse and collective reflection, allowing participants to reconstruct and reimagine cultural narratives while working collaboratively towards transformative change. For instance, Aguiar discusses the use of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, where participants act as 'spect-actors,' actively engaging in the performance, which enables them to reflect critically on their personal and social realities. This process allows them to explore and reconstruct cultural narratives in a safe, participatory environment, fostering a collective sense of agency and potential for transformative social change (48-51). Similarly, Miller highlights the role of the Theatre of Witness (TOW) in providing 'safe spaces for authentic storytelling, fostering empathy, and motivating personal and social transformation, dependent on sustained community support' (51). Participatory theatre, as analysed by Mtukwa (2015:89-92), also offers a secure environment for reflection and collective mediation of conflict experiences, promoting understanding, healing, and cultural empowerment among participants.

- **Storytelling and Visual Arts**

Storytelling projects in Northern Ireland and Bosnia (Maiangwa and Byrne, 2015; Opacin, 2022) fostered empathy and cross-community understanding by allowing individuals to share personal narratives that humanised “the other” and created space for collective memory. Such initiatives not only preserved local voices but also contributed to building trust across divided groups. Visual arts initiatives, such as murals in Ciudad Juárez (Hernández-Gómez, 2021) and Mithila paintings in Nepal highlighting gender justice, demonstrate how local traditions can carry peace-oriented messages. These forms of visual expression operate simultaneously as cultural preservation and social critique, providing accessible platforms for communities to address injustices, articulate aspirations, and envision more inclusive futures.

Storytelling initiatives, such as *Towards Understanding and Healing* in Northern Ireland, have also been examined by scholars such as Schmidt et al. (2022), who emphasise their role in providing opportunities for cross-community contact, fostering empathy, and facilitating shared identity formation. These initiatives contribute to dialogue and collective action aimed at community ‘peacebuilding’. Opacin (2022) also underscores the role of storytelling in nurturing empathy and shared identity among communities affected by conflict in Bosnia (177).

While utilising the arts in community ‘peacebuilding’ offers significant potential, it is essential to recognise the inherent complexities and ethical challenges involved in this process. Schmidt et al. (2022:114) warn of the dangers of political manipulation and re-traumatisation, particularly in storytelling initiatives that may inadvertently exploit participants’ experiences for broader agendas. Similarly, Mtukwa (2015) and Opacin

(2022) raise concerns regarding the possible exaggeration of local rituals, the potential lack of legitimacy in these artistic interventions, and the often-slow progress towards achieving lasting peace. Kanyako (2015) also warns of the dangers posed by powerful groups who may view artistic expression as a threat to their interests, leading to potential sanctions or backlash.

Given these challenges, critically reflecting on the nature of manipulation in any intervention is crucial. All community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, including those that utilise the arts, involve some degree of influence on participants and communities. The key question is not whether manipulation occurs, but rather what forms of manipulation are necessary or justified in pursuing peace.

To navigate this ethical landscape, practitioners must ensure that interventions are informed by the context and are sensitive to local dynamics. Any form of manipulation can be justified as it can foster genuine dialogue, healing, and sustainable peace while minimising harm and respecting the agency of those involved. This approach requires a locally grounded strategy that carefully balances community ‘peacebuilding’ goals with the realities of power and influence in the region.

A literature review reveals that the arts and culture are powerful mediums for portraying real people and events through various narrative forms. Scholars emphasise the importance of honesty, accuracy, and truthfulness as essential qualities across different artistic genres. Advancements in locally driven information and technology have further enhanced the arts’ capacity to convey authenticity and truth.

While evidence highlights significant potential, scholars caution against over-romanticising arts-based interventions. Bleiker (2009) and Bahun (2014) note that cultural events can reinforce harmful ideologies or be co-opted by elites. Schmidt et al. (2022) warn that storytelling can risk retraumatisation or manipulation. Howell (2022) emphasises that some initiatives produce superficial outcomes, urging careful evaluation of processes and impacts.

In sum, empirical evidence suggests arts can promote dialogue, healing, and critical consciousness, but their effectiveness is context-dependent and ethically complex. This underscores the need to examine indigenous traditions like Dêudã, which remain underexplored in the literature.

Post-conflict Peacebuilding thought Arts and Culture in Nepal

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 marked a pivotal moment in Nepal's history, bringing an end to a decade-long Maoist insurgency that had left profound social, political, and psychological scars. The agreement ushered in transformative political processes, including the Interim Constitution of 2007, disarmament and reintegration initiatives under United Nations supervision, and the establishment of an inclusive Constituent Assembly (UNDP, 2006; SaferWorld, 2017). Despite these milestones, Nepal's post-war transition has been uneven. The 2015 earthquake, combined with contentious debates over the new Constitution, underscored the fragility of the peace process. Although rapid decentralisation between 2017 and 2018 was intended to broaden democratic participation, the country continues to struggle with persistent ethnic divisions, marginalisation of rural communities, and recurring political instability.

From the perspective of Galtung's (1996) distinction between negative and positive peace, Nepal achieved the cessation of direct violence but continues to grapple with deeper structural inequalities that hinder the realisation of positive peace. In this context, community-based peacebuilding initiatives, particularly those rooted in cultural expression, have emerged as essential complements to formal mechanisms. They offer locally resonant avenues for addressing trauma, rebuilding relationships, and fostering social cohesion. Among these, the indigenous Dêudâ culture has particular significance as a living tradition that embodies dialogue, inclusivity, and the potential to transform relationships fractured by conflict.

- **Culture as a Foundation for Social Cohesion**

Nepal's cultural heritage—comprising more than 125 ethnic and caste groups—offers a complex tapestry of practices that both reflect and mediate social realities.

Historically, festivals, rituals, and communal performances have functioned as what Lederach (2005) describes as “relational spaces” where divided groups negotiate identity and interdependence. For instance, the Chhath festival has long promoted Hindu–Muslim solidarity (Ojha, 2021), while Newar traditions of music, architecture, and communal feasting sustain cultural identity in the Kathmandu Valley. Religion also provides shared ground: Hinduism and Buddhism, through temples and pilgrimage sites such as Pashupatinath and Boudhanath, foster intergroup connections, particularly during collective celebrations like Dashain, Tihar, and Buddha Jayanti (Bhandari, 2019; Woolums, 2022).

Culturally, performing arts, including music and dance, are essential for promoting peace in Nepal. For instance, the burgeoning Nepalese rap movement, referred to as nep-hop, serves as an intervention in the nation's political discourse, potentially

igniting societal transformation (Lundquist, 2021). Educational initiatives in music, spearheaded by volunteer educators, offer additional opportunities for Nepalese youth, acting as advocates and addressing inequalities in educational access (Rijal, 2019). The Tharu community employs traditional Maghi Nach competitions to articulate their struggles as indentured labourers within a human rights advocacy framework, aiming to inspire social transformation and reshape their public image through music and dance performances (Dalsell, 2017; Marsh, 2019). On a broader scale, music fosters platforms for dialogue, mutual understanding, empathy, and conflict resolution, thus enhancing Nepal's community 'peacebuilding' efforts.

The arts and architecture play crucial roles in promoting peace in Nepal. Renowned for their aesthetic appeal, complexity, and spiritual significance, these elements reflect the country's rich cultural heritage (Lepère, 2020). Architectural heritage is prominently showcased in locations such as Patan, Bhaktapur, and the Kathmandu Durbar Square, where intricately carved wooden features highlight the skill of Newar artisans. Traditional arts and crafts, including pottery, weaving, painting, and metalwork, enrich Nepal's cultural landscape. Thangka painting, rooted in Tibetan Buddhism and widely practiced in Nepal, depicts religious deities and scenes from Buddhist scriptures. Burcu (2022) emphasises that arts-based educational processes leverage valuable social interactions and creativity, enriching curricula and fostering understanding through participants' roles as both artists and researchers.

Dêudã culture exemplifies this peacebuilding potential at the community level. Its participatory format blurs social hierarchies, allowing men and women, young and old, and members of different castes to voice experiences and concerns. Beyond entertainment, the performance provides a culturally legitimate space for dialogue and

critique. Through this collective engagement, Dêudã enacts Lederach's notion of the "moral imagination", enabling communities to re-envision fractured relationships and imagine new possibilities for coexistence.

- **Performing Arts and Grassroots Peacebuilding**

Performing arts have played a prominent role in Nepal's reconciliation efforts, aligning with peacebuilding theories that stress the transformation of relationships rather than merely the cessation of hostilities. Pro Public's Playback Theatre (2015–2020) created empathetic spaces where personal war stories were enacted on stage, involving former combatants and civilians alike. This dialogical performance fostered recognition of shared suffering and provided opportunities for healing (Pro Public, 2020). Similarly, Mandala Theatre's *Junkiri*²¹ bus brought plays addressing corruption and gender inequality to rural areas, extending civic education through cultural engagement (Davis, 2010).

Grassroots traditions such as Dêudã offer comparable benefits, but with greater cultural depth and sustainability. Unlike externally funded projects, Dêudã requires no institutional sponsorship, relying instead on the community's own participation and knowledge. Its adaptability allows participants to incorporate contemporary concerns—such as political disillusionment, migration, or the lingering effects of the insurgency—into traditional frameworks of song and dance. This dynamic reflects Boal's (1979) idea of transforming "spectators" into "spect-actors," making participants co-creators of meaning and agents of reflection. Through this process,

²¹ For more: <https://mandalatheatre.com/about/mobile-theatre-bus/#>

Dêudã fosters critical dialogue and nurtures the relational transformation that Lederach identifies as central to long-term peacebuilding.

Beyond Dêudã, other artistic forms reinforce the role of cultural performance in grassroots reconciliation. The rise of *Nep-hop* gave youth a voice to critique social injustices and challenge entrenched hierarchies (Lundquist, 2021), while the Tharu community's Maghi Nach served as both a cultural celebration and a platform for advocating human rights (Dalsell, 2017; Marsh, 2019). Together, these examples affirm that performing arts in Nepal operate as both symbolic and practical tools for fostering positive peace.

- **Literary, Visual, and Media-Based Responses**

The Maoist conflict also stimulated a flourishing of literature, film, and visual art that contributed to peacebuilding by documenting suffering, reflecting on identity, and creating shared spaces for memory. Aditya Adhikari's *The Bullet and the Ballot Box* (2014) and Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Café* (2006) provided nuanced accounts of the insurgency's human and political costs, while Ram C. Khatri's *Rebel* (2015) presented deeply personal narratives of resilience. Michael Hutt's *Himalayan People's War* (2004) and Deepak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati's *A Kingdom under Siege* (2004) analysed the conflict's socio-political roots, highlighting the structural inequalities that persist into the post-war era.

Films such as *Uma* (2013) and *Janayudha* (2008) offered powerful visual narratives of how ordinary lives were reshaped by violence, while Dohori and Dêudã songs provided musical spaces for critical commentary and community reflection (Stirr, 2011; Grandin, 1996). Meanwhile, Mithila paintings increasingly incorporated themes

of gender justice, often facilitated through community-based initiatives like MAP's *Picturing Past, Present, and Future* project²² and the Janaki Women Awareness Society. These efforts demonstrate how traditional art forms can be repurposed for civic engagement and advocacy.

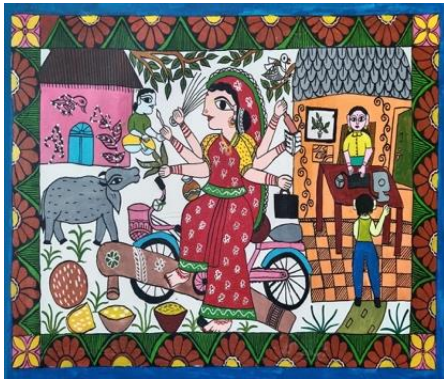


Figure 10: The Multifaceted Roles of Women in Mithila Art, 2023

This vibrant piece of Mithila art vividly portrays the diverse roles of a woman within her family and community. The central figure, depicted with multiple arms, symbolizes her numerous responsibilities—from managing household chores and nurturing her children to contributing to the community's well-being.

The artwork poignantly reflects her aspirations for balanced recognition, respect for her efforts, and a peaceful life. The surrounding elements, including traditional motifs and everyday life scenes, highlight the cultural and social dynamics she navigates daily.

Photo Credit: JWAS

In this cultural landscape, Dêudã occupies a particularly important role because of its unique combination of accessibility, participation, and capacity to engage with both tradition and contemporary issues. Unlike novels or films that often reach urban or literate audiences, Dêudã continues to be performed in rural communities, directly engaging those most affected by the conflict.

Multi-Faceted Peacebuilding Strategies

Beyond traditional and artistic expressions, organisations in Nepal have employed multi-faceted strategies to extend peacebuilding efforts. Search for Common Ground

²² For more: https://map.lincoln.ac.uk/map_project/picturing-the-past-present-future/

(2013) used football tournaments to bring together youth from divided backgrounds, while The Story Kitchen²³'s radio programs gave women a platform to narrate their wartime experiences. These initiatives underscore the importance of diverse, participatory approaches that address different layers of Nepal's conflict legacy.

However, many of these efforts are dependent on external funding and international NGO frameworks, which raises concerns about sustainability and cultural ownership. Dêudã, by contrast, is a community-embedded tradition that persists regardless of external sponsorship, offering a culturally grounded and self-sustaining model for peacebuilding. This distinction strengthens the argument for greater scholarly and policy attention to indigenous cultural practices.

Despite the proliferation of cultural and artistic initiatives in post-war Nepal, scholarly engagement has disproportionately focused on NGO-driven programs and elite forms of art. Indigenous traditions such as Dêudã remain critically underexplored, even though their participatory, inclusive, and dialogical qualities align closely with Galtung's vision of positive peace and Lederach's framework of relational transformation. The neglect of Dêudã in academic and policy discourse represents a missed opportunity to harness one of Nepal's most culturally resonant and widely practiced forms of community performance.

²³ The participatory approach utilised by the Story Kitchen involved motivating, instructing, and directing a cohort of women who had encountered adversities amidst their nation's civil conflict to develop radio programmes for dissemination in their localities. Within this group of women, specific individuals had relatives go missing; some endured the passing of dear ones, and others faced personal mistreatment throughout the decade-long confrontation. Despite the conflict coming to an end in 2006, these women persist in grappling with the enduring repercussions of their ordeals, navigating a fragmented and strained societal environment. For more: <https://www.ictj.org/news/nepal-victims-reporters-story-kitchen>

This research seeks to address this gap by situating Dêudã culture within peacebuilding scholarship. Guided by Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed* and informed by Galtung's and Lederach's theoretical frameworks, it explores how Dêudã performances function as spaces of empathy, dialogue, and moral imagination. By foregrounding a deeply rooted indigenous practice, the research contributes a locally grounded perspective that not only enriches academic debates but also offers practical insights for designing sustainable, culturally resonant peacebuilding strategies in Nepal.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework of the Thesis

The theoretical and conceptual framework positions Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed at the centre of the research, supported by Johan Galtung's distinction between *positive and negative* peace and John Paul Lederach's concept of *moral imagination*. Together, these perspectives frame peacebuilding as a participatory, dialogical, and transformative process. Boal's emphasis on critical reflection and collective action is complemented by Galtung's structural understanding of peace and Lederach's focus on relational engagement and creative envisioning in conflict transformation.

The research adopts an arts-based, qualitative methodology that combines participant observation, interviews, and lyrical interpretation. These methods enable close engagement with the embodied, creative, and narrative dimensions of Dêudã cultural performance. They ensure that the research remains attentive to the affective and communal experiences embedded in song, dance, and storytelling, and to the ways these forms convey social critique, collective memory, and aspirations for change.

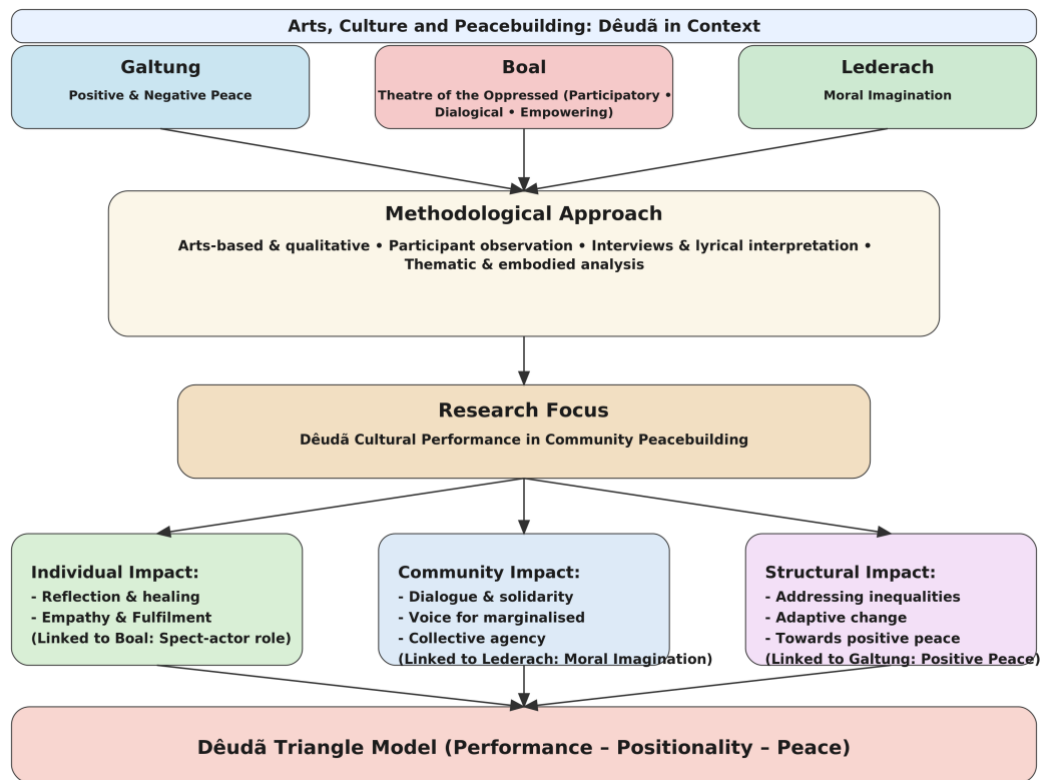


Figure 11 – Theoretical/Conceptual framework for the thesis

The framework guides analysis across three interrelated levels. At the individual level, Dêudã enables reflection, empathy, and healing, resonating with Boal's notion of the *spect-actor*. At the community level, it fosters dialogue, solidarity, and a collective voice, reflecting Lederach's vision of moral imagination. At the structural level, it encourages inclusive participation and challenges entrenched social inequalities, aligning with Galtung's idea of positive peace.

These dimensions converge in the Dêudã Triangle Model, which conceptualises the interaction of performance (as embodied, creative expression), positionality (as the negotiation of social identities), and peace (as a lived, relational process). The model provides a culturally grounded analytical tool for understanding how participatory traditions like Dêudã can facilitate relational repair and social transformation in post-

conflict settings. It affirms that performance is not only a cultural expression but also a lived practice of peace, integral to building inclusive and sustainable futures.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed broad theoretical perspectives on peacebuilding, introduced a combined framework of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and art-based peacebuilding theory, and situated Déudã culture within this lens as a participatory indigenous practice. It then critically analysed empirical evidence on the arts in peacebuilding and focused on Nepal's post-war context, highlighting community initiatives that have harnessed cultural performance for reconciliation. The analysis revealed a clear research gap: the limited scholarly engagement with local traditions such as Déudã culture in Nepal's peacebuilding landscape. Addressing this gap forms the central rationale for the present research, which the following methodology chapter will operationalise.

Drawing on Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, this research positions Déudã as a participatory practice through which communities rehearse dialogue, empowerment, and reconciliation. This theoretical framing directly informs the methodological choices outlined in the next chapter, which employ participatory observation, lyrical analysis and interviews to examine how Déudã functions as a lived practice of community peacebuilding in post-conflict Nepal's Far-western communities.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH PATHWAYS TO PEACE IN DÊUDÃ CULTURE

Introduction

This chapter serves as a crucial starting point for this academic exploration, building on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter. It methodically examines the fundamental principles that guide research efforts. I will begin by analysing the underlying research paradigm, design, and methodological aspects, providing a comprehensive overview of the enquiry's direction. Furthermore, this chapter investigates the composition of the Dêudã culture, presenting it as a compelling case study within the broader research context.

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with secondary data analysis to validate the findings. Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling to capture a broad range of experiences related to the Dêudã culture. This research cross-referenced the interview data with historical records and trends to address the potential limitations of relying solely on anecdotal evidence. Thematic analysis was also conducted to identify recurring patterns across the interviews, thereby enhancing the interpretation of the data.

The following sections detail the research paradigm, methodological choices, and participant selection process, supported by demographic data and engagement activities conducted through the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project.

Research Paradigm/Approach

This research is situated within a constructivist paradigm and a relativist ontology, which accepts that reality is not singular but shaped by multiple, equally valid perspectives. Such a stance challenges the idea of an objective truth and instead values diverse understandings emerging from different social and cultural contexts.

The epistemological position is subjectivist, viewing knowledge as co-created through dialogue and interaction between researcher and participants. Meaning is generated collaboratively, with both parties influencing the interpretation of the phenomena under research.

Methodologically, the research adopts a naturalistic approach, investigating Dêudã culture in its authentic settings. Researching the practice as it naturally occurs enables the capture of subtle social, emotional, and relational dynamics without imposing external structures. This allows for a more faithful representation of its role in community life and peacebuilding.

Truth is treated as context-dependent and socially constructed. It is established through ongoing negotiation with participants and validated by the wider 'stake-holding community.' This process strengthens the credibility of findings while recognising that the researcher's own background, assumptions, and interpretive lens inevitably shape the outcomes.

The research is informed by hermeneutic constructivism, which acknowledges that all interpretations are influenced by historical conditions, linguistic frameworks, and prior experiences. Multiple interpretations can coexist, and meaning is shaped by the interplay of researcher and participant perspectives. This interpretive stance guided

both data collection and analysis, ensuring that the research remained responsive to local realities while producing insights transferable to wider discussions on community peacebuilding and the arts.

Case Study Research Method and Design

Case study research is widely recognised in the social sciences for its ability to investigate complex social phenomena in depth and within their natural contexts. Thomas (2011) observes that although case study research is grounded in varied epistemological traditions, there are shared methodological principles across disciplines. In sociology, education, and psychology, the approach is often interpretive; in business and politics, it may adopt a neo-positivist stance focused on identifying and analysing variables (George and Bennett, 2005; Luker, 2008; Yin, 2009). In medicine and law, case studies frequently illustrate unique or representative outcomes. This diversity reflects the adaptability of the method and its capacity to accommodate multiple analytical perspectives.

For this research, the flexibility of the case research method is essential because it allows for an interpretive, participatory analysis of Dêudã culture, aligned with the theoretical commitments of Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Boal's framework positions performance as both a mirror of lived realities and a rehearsal for social change. This theoretical stance complements the case research's emphasis on exploring phenomena in their specific contexts, enabling the research to examine Dêudã not simply as cultural heritage but as a dynamic, dialogic practice capable of fostering reflection, dialogue, and collective action.



Figure 12: Community as 'Spect-Actors' in Dêudā Khel

Local community members momentarily take on the role of 'spect-actors' during a Dêudā Khel performance in Mellekh, Achham, on April 15, 2023. Their active engagement blurs the line between spectators and performers, highlighting the participatory nature of this cultural tradition.

Photograph by: Gobind Khadka

Across disciplines, case research research has demonstrated flexibility in examining complex, real-life situations. In sociology, education, and psychology, it is often approached interpretively, while in business or political science, it may adopt a more variable-focused, neo-positivist orientation (Thomas, 2011). In all contexts, the core strength of the case research lies in its capacity to investigate phenomena within their real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and setting are blurred (Yin, 2014).

This research draws on the interpretive tradition, seeking to understand the lived experience of Dêudā culture and its role in community peacebuilding. As Simons (2009) notes, the value of a case research lies in capturing the complexity of decision-making and action in context. Here, the focus is on how and why community members use Dêudā to address social division, foster dialogue, and preserve cultural identity. This dual focus on “how” and “why” renders the case research particularly appropriate (Yin, 2014).

The case research is both descriptive and explanatory. It describes how individuals and communities participate in and adapt Dêudã, and it explains why it is perceived as a vehicle for reconciliation, social cohesion, and cultural resilience. These explanatory and descriptive inquiries are grounded in participants' narratives, observations of performances, and analysis of song texts.

This research is also intrinsic in nature (Stake, 1995), undertaken not to generalise or test abstract theory but to understand Dêudã in its own right. It examines the tradition as a living practice, embedded in the historical, cultural, and political realities of Far-western Nepal.

A central interpretive lens in this research is Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which conceptualises performance as a participatory, dialogic space where "spectators" become "spect-actors." In Dêudã Khel, community members blur the boundaries between performer and audience, engaging directly with the narratives and social messages embedded in song and movement. These dynamic transforms cultural performance into an arena for critical reflection and potential social change—an approach that mirrors Boal's vision of performance as rehearsal for real-world action.

Applying this lens deepens the analysis of Dêudã as both cultural heritage and a mode of peacebuilding, allowing the research to explore how embodied participation, collective memory, and symbolic dialogue contribute to community cohesion in post-conflict settings.

Following Yin's (2014) criteria, the choice of case research design was shaped by three conditions:

- Nature of the research questions – focused on “how” and “why” questions concerning cultural practice and social outcomes.
- Lack of control over events – the researcher observed naturally occurring performances rather than manipulating variables.
- Focus on contemporary phenomena – the research examines Dêudã’s role in present-day peacebuilding and cultural preservation, while recognising its historical evolution.

The design incorporates multiple sources of evidence – interviews, participant observation, lyrical analysis, and secondary literature—to capture the multidimensional nature of Dêudã practice. The selection of participants prioritised diversity of gender, age, caste, occupation, and geographical location to reflect the breadth of engagement with Dêudã culture.

By integrating constructivist principles, case research methodology, and Boal’s participatory performance theory, this design enables a rich, context-specific understanding of Dêudã as a living cultural form and a peacebuilding tool. It foregrounds the voices of community members while situating their experiences within broader social, political, and historical frameworks.

Selection of Research Participants

Participants were purposively selected to ensure a broad cross-section of perspectives on Deuda folklore and its contribution to peacebuilding. The research included individuals directly engaged in performance as well as those contributing through research, politics, education, and community leadership. Selection criteria included

gender, caste, ethnicity, age group, professional background, and geographic representation.

Respondents were drawn from all nine districts of Sudurpaschim Province, with some Kathmandu-based participants included for their expertise and ongoing engagement with Déudā and are from the region who are staying in Kathmandu. The participant pool comprised artists, folklorists, priests, journalists, entrepreneurs, teachers, politicians, and former Maoist combatants. Both men and women were represented, alongside Dalit and non-Dalit groups, younger and older generations, and urban as well as rural perspectives.

Table 1: Overview of Research Participants

Category	Description
Total Participants	25 (including one senior scholar/politician as key informant)
Gender Distribution	10 women, 15 men
Age Groups	Young adults (20–35), middle-aged (36–55), elderly (56+)
Caste/Ethnicity	Dalit (e.g., Parki, Pariyar), Brahmin, Chhetri, Badi, and others
Geographic Coverage	All nine districts of Sudurpaschim, plus Kathmandu-based participants
Professional Backgrounds	Deuda singers/performers, folklorists, priests, journalists, entrepreneurs, teachers, cultural experts, ex-combatants, and politicians
Role in Deuda	Lead artists, enthusiasts, researchers, community leaders

To provide a clearer picture of this diversity, a detailed participant profile is presented below.

Table 2 - Sample of Detailed Participant Profile

Name	Background	Address/ District	Gender	Caste/ Ethnicity
Deepak Bhatta	Scholar/ Politician	Kanchanpur/ Kathmandu	Male	Brahmin
Durga Saud	Deuda enthusiast and youth	Achham	Female	Chhetri
Mahesh Auji	Professional Deuda Singer	Baitadi	Male	Dalit
Mamta Dhami	Deudiya	Bajhang	Female	Chhetri
Tulsi Bist	Deudiya (Ex-Maoist member)	Darchula	Female	Chhetri
Dikra Badi	Professional Deuda singer	Kanchanpur	Female	Badi/Dalit
Raj Parki	Dalit leader & former Maoist	Dadeldhura	Male	Dalit (Parki)

As shown in Table 2 (A full version of this table is provided in Annex 4), the participant group reflects diversity across gender, caste, age, and professional background, ensuring that the findings draw on a wide spectrum of experiences and perspectives related to Déudã folklore. These individual narratives were further contextualised and enriched through my engagement as Co-Investigator in the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project, where workshops and community dialogues created opportunities to validate and expand on the themes emerging from interviews.

Engagement through the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) Project

In addition to individual interviews, my role as Co-Investigator in the MAP project provided an important platform for extending the scope of this research. The MAP initiative facilitated structured engagements such as workshops, dialogues, and

cultural events, allowing participants to express collective perspectives in ways that complemented the personal narratives gathered through interviews.

Table 3 – MAP Engagement Activities

Activity	Date	Venue
Discourse on Déudā	13 April 2023	Kathmandu
Field Visit to Mellekh Rural Municipality	15 April 2023	Achham and Dhangadhi
Meetings with Interviewees	September 2023	Dhangadhi and Kathmandu
Disseminational Dialogue on Déudā Folklore Research	17 March 2024	Dhangadhi, Kailali, Sudurpaschim

These activities were conducted in collaboration with Volunteers and Research Foundation Nepal (Kathmandu), Nepal FM (Kathmandu), Mellekh Rural Municipality (Achham), and Sudurpaschim Sahitya Samaj (Dhangadhi, Kailali).

The project also generated a wide range of outputs, including images, 4 videos, 15 interview and focus group transcripts, one academic article, one book chapter, and two stakeholder meeting reports. The integration of interviews with MAP participatory engagements provided a form of methodological triangulation, balancing personal testimonies with community-level observations. This ensured that findings were grounded not only in individual experiences but also in broader collective dialogues, enhancing both their credibility and richness.

Methods and Tools of Data Collection

This case research collected qualitative data using open-ended interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and analysis of documents, and Déudā songs. These interviews and observations were complemented by participatory engagements

conducted under the MAP project, which provided additional opportunities for dialogue and collective reflection.

Thomas (2011) states that case study should not just be ‘seen as a method in and of itself’ but as a ‘design frame that may incorporate several methods.’ It is not the method but ‘analytical eclecticism’ that defines the case research (512). The hallmark of case research is the use of multiple data sources, which enhances the research’s credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Yin (2009, 2014) identifies the following data collection methods as familiar sources of evidence in case studies: direct observation, participant observation, documents, archival records, and interviews (Yin, 2009:10; 2014). In addition, evidence can be collected from other applicable sources (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

This case study collected qualitative data using open-ended interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and analysis of documents, website content, and Dêudã songs. Qualitative research best analyses individuals lived experiences in contemporary settings (Marshall and Rossman, 2016; Luker, 2010), so I used qualitative data to conduct this case research. These interviews and observations were complemented by participatory engagements conducted under the MAP project, which provided additional opportunities for dialogue and collective reflection. Besides, following tools were used to collect data.

◇ **Interviews Based on Open-Ended Questions**

The primary method of data collection involved conducting interviews using open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted in person on limited occasions in Nepal, complemented by informal online discussions. The open-ended nature of these

‘interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of the respondents’ perspectives and experiences, following the case research protocol²⁴ outlined by Yin (2014:190-191).



Figure 13: Research Area (Far-western Nepal)

The respondents were individuals familiar with or keen on Dêudã culture, particularly those involved in producing and distributing related knowledge and those engaged in civil society networks. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of how arts and culture, specifically Dêudã culture, are utilised in

community ‘peacebuilding’. The key areas of focus

included: The subjective interpretations of respondents regarding the use of art and culture for community peace. And these activities bring about personal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural changes within the community.

The contents and contexts of Dêudã songs, performances, websites, and other documents were also analysed. This analysis aimed to understand the resources mobilised by individuals in their community ‘peacebuilding’ activities related to the Dêudã culture. By examining these documents, the researcher verified whether the claims made by the respondents in the interviews were supported by tangible evidence. Interview data provided rich narrative evidence for construct validity (triangulated with other sources), internal validity (pattern matching with

²⁴ The Case Study Protocol is a document that provides essential details about various components of the research. It includes information on the case study questions, the theoretical and conceptual framework, propositions, data collection procedures, data collection questions, and a guide for the case study report. This protocol serves as a roadmap, ensuring that the researcher stays aligned with the planned objectives and scope of the study throughout the research process.

peacebuilding theories), and external validity (replication across communities with similar and differing conflict histories).

◇ **Direct and Participant Observations**

Direct and participant observations were key methods for understanding the lived practice of Dêudã culture in the Sudurpashchim region. This approach was particularly suited to the research's constructivist paradigm, allowing for first-hand engagement with the cultural processes under investigation and enabling the co-construction of meaning with community members.

The research took place in a context historically marked by neglect and marginalisation. Interviews revealed that the Far-western districts, such as Doti and Bajhang, have long been portrayed as “remote” both geographically and politically, with infrastructural development actively discouraged. The Nepal Living Standards Survey (2022–23) confirms that Sudurpashchim has the highest poverty rate in the country (34.16%), alongside deep-seated caste and gender divides. Although practices such as bonded labour (*Haliyah*) and menstrual seclusion (*Chhaupadi*) have been legally abolished, they persist in rural areas, reflecting structural inequalities that continue to shape cultural life.

As a lifelong participant in Dêudã performances, I was able to draw on insider knowledge while adopting the role of a reflexive researcher. Additional targeted participation in events during September 2023 allowed for closer examination of the interactions, rituals, and atmospheres surrounding Dêudã. Field notes carefully distinguished between participant accounts and my own interpretations, documenting

both the factual sequence of events and the nuanced social cues embedded in performance.

Observations extended beyond conventional ethnographic watching, drawing on principles of Arts-Based Research (ABR) to explore how meaning is generated through embodied, affective, and relational practices (Leavy, 2015; Barone & Eisner, 2012). Joining the Dêudã circle involved holding hands, synchronising movements, responding to rhythm, and engaging in call-and-response exchanges. These embodied actions fostered trust, attentiveness, and mutual reliance among participants, revealing how peacebuilding values are enacted in practice.

Through this lens, participant observation captured not only the lyrical and narrative content of Dêudã but also its deeper social functions—solidarity, empathy, and shared identity—which underpin its capacity to support community peacebuilding.

Table 4 – Embodied features of Dêudã culture and their peacebuilding functions

Embodied Feature of Dêudã culture	Peacebuilding Process Fostered
Holding hands in the circle	Trust, mutual reliance, and emotional safety
Coordinated rhythmic movements	Solidarity, interdependence, and collective identity
Call-and-response lyrical format	Dialogue, inclusivity, and shared voice
Non-verbal communication (gestures, eye contact)	Empathy, attentiveness, and recognition of others
Shared rhythm and music	Unity, emotional connection, and a sense of belonging

To strange with Yin (2014)’s four tests of research validities, the observation data strengthened internal validity through real-time behavioural evidence, construct

validity by grounding interpretations in observed practice, and reliability by enabling consistent documentation across sites. Analysis of Dêudã songs and observation notes identified recurring themes such as satire, reconciliation, and memory of conflict. Opinions were cross-referenced with interviews to verify claims and with observations to confirm how content was performed and received. Lyrics analysis contributed to construct validity by serving as tangible cultural records; to internal validity by enabling thematic comparison with peacebuilding theory; and to external validity by facilitating comparisons across different communities and time periods.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

This analysis is based on data collected through interviews, participant observations, lyrical interpretation, and Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project engagements. Together, these methods offered a multi-layered perspective on the role of Dêudã in post-conflict peacebuilding. The inclusion of MAP activities enabled the cross-verification of narratives, enhancing the reliability and depth of the findings.

The analysis was guided by the Dêudã Triangle Model, which served as the core analytical framework. This model directed attention to three interrelated dimensions – performance, positionality, and peace – allowing for a focused interpretation of how performative practices shape identity negotiation and peacebuilding processes. Interview transcripts, observational fieldnotes, and lyrical content were thematically coded according to these three dimensions.

To ensure analytical transparency, the data are presented through individual texts, tables, and excerpts, allowing readers to evaluate the evidence prior to interpretation (Yin, 2011:15). Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently, in line with

qualitative case research methodology, to maintain coherence between emerging themes and research design. As Yin (2011) notes, qualitative analysis may begin prior to, during, or after data collection, depending on the research's philosophical assumptions and methodological sequencing. This research adopted a concurrent approach to preserve interpretive flexibility.

Anchored in the propositions outlined in Chapter 2 – regarding the intersection of arts, culture, and community peacebuilding – the analysis integrates empirical data with the conceptual framework (Baxter and Jack, 2008). According to Yin (2003), this alignment supports targeted analysis and allows exploration of competing interpretations. Throughout the research, the initial propositions evolved in response to field engagement, in line with Yin's (2011) guidance that case research propositions should remain open to refinement during the research process.

The analytic process employed open coding to identify emergent themes and conceptual relationships. Early coding involved examining data clusters and relational patterns across the three dimensions of the Dêudã Triangle Model. These initial codes were then grouped into thematic categories and analytical clusters, which helped reframe the relational dynamics within the conceptual framework. Thematic synthesis followed, allowing for interpretation and integration of findings into a coherent narrative that illuminated the underlying structures of community peacebuilding (Marshall and Rossman, 2011:219).

To strengthen analytical rigour, the research also considered rival explanations—an essential aspect of case research design (Yin, 2011). This included seeking alternative

perspectives through data triangulation, peer debriefing, and theoretical exploration²⁵ (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Yin, 2011). This critical-reflective stance ensured that interpretations remained open, tested, and situated within broader scholarly debates.

Validity, Reliability and Researcher Positionality

This research, grounded in a constructivist paradigm, emphasises the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue with community stakeholders (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Recognising that truth is shaped by social interaction and multiple realities, the research process was designed to ensure rigour while remaining attentive to context, reflexivity, and participant perspectives. The framework proposed by Yin (2014:127–128) for construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability informed the methodological choices.

Multiple sources of evidence were used to capture the richness and complexity of Dêudă culture. These included historical texts, local customs, interviews with community elders, and observations of live performances. A chain of evidence was maintained by systematically documenting each step from data collection to analysis. Key informants, such as cultural practitioners and local scholars, reviewed the draft case research report to verify accuracy and ensure that interpretations aligned with community realities. This process ensured that operational measures for cultural practices and the concept of community ‘peacebuilding’ were appropriate and credible.

²⁵ I reviewed the literature to determine if there is an alternative explanation or critique of the learning achieved through the case study.

Pattern matching was used to compare observed outcomes of Dêudã practices with expectations drawn from community peacebuilding theories. For example, the relationship between communal singing and increased social cohesion was examined against theoretical models. Explanation building further clarified how Dêudã contributes to reconciliation and trust-building. Rival explanations—such as the influence of political interventions or economic programmes—were considered to ensure that findings were not attributed solely to cultural factors without sufficient justification.

Replication logic guided the selection of cases across multiple communities in Far-western Nepal. Both literal replications (communities with similar experiences) and theoretical replications (communities with differing conflict histories) were included. This approach enabled meaningful cross-case comparison, allowing the findings to be generalised to comparable contexts while recognising cultural and historical specificities.

A detailed case research protocol was developed and applied consistently. This included interview schedules, observation guidelines, and data recording procedures to ensure that each field interaction followed comparable processes. Structured interviews, for example, adhered to a common framework while allowing flexibility for participants to share relevant stories and insights.

As a researcher from Far-western Nepal, I hold an insider perspective on Dêudã culture, including familiarity with its language, traditions, and social meanings. This cultural embeddedness provided valuable access to participants and deepened contextual understanding. However, it also posed risks of bias in data interpretation. To mitigate this, I maintained a reflexive field diary to record assumptions, emotions,

and positional shifts, and engaged in regular discussions with academic supervisors and peers to critically examine my interpretations.

My role often alternated between observer and participant. In some contexts, active participation in performances enriched my understanding of Dêudã's embodied and communal aspects; in others, adopting a more detached stance allowed observation without influencing group dynamics. This dual position mirrors Boal's concept of the "spect-actor," blurring the lines between audience and performer, and reflects the performative nature of the cultural practice under research.

By acknowledging the interplay between personal history, cultural familiarity, and scholarly analysis, this reflexive practice strengthened the research's credibility. The integration of methodological rigour with positional transparency ensures that the knowledge produced is both contextually authentic and analytically robust.

To further clarify how rigour was maintained, Table 6 summarises the operationalisation of Yin's (2014) four-test framework across the different sets of data collected in this research, including interviews, observational fieldwork, and lyrical/cultural artefact analysis.

Table 5 – Summary of Yin's Four Tests/Validities

Types	Application in This Research	Interviews	Observations	Lyrics / Cultural Artefacts
Construct Validity	Use multiple sources; maintain chain of evidence; seek participant verification	Triangulated with historical records, local customs, and field notes; draft reports reviewed by key informants	Cross-checked with interview accounts and archival data	Compared with interview data and documented practices

Internal Validity	Pattern matching, explanation building, and rival explanations	Compared participant narratives with theoretical models of peacebuilding; explored alternative explanations	Matched observed behaviours with expected social cohesion patterns; noted exceptions	Analysed thematic content for peace-related messages; compared with political and social events
External Validity	Replication logic across cases	Interviews conducted in multiple communities with different conflict histories	Observations in varied settings (festivals, local meetings)	Lyrics collected from diverse districts for comparative analysis
Reliability	Consistent case research protocol; standardised tools of UCA followed	Structured interview guide used in all cases	Observation checklist applied consistently	Systematic coding scheme for lyrical content

Ethical Considerations

Yin (2014) elucidates the ethical considerations inherent in case research research involving theoretical propositions, wherein researchers may attempt to substantiate a predetermined position (183). Addressing ethical challenges during the data collection phase necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the relevant issues under investigation (Becker, 1958, 1967, as cited in Yin, 2014:183). However, this scenario may engender biases and predispositions among researchers regarding the propositions, potentially leading them to corroborate such propositions while disregarding contradictory evidence. Consequently, researchers may inadvertently

exhibit partiality towards endorsing a specific orientation to the issues rather than critically evaluating competing propositions (Yin, 2014).

During my research, I encountered a significant ethical dilemma that required careful consideration. To address this challenge, I employed a strategy of engaging community stakeholders regarding the data they provided to the research. For instance, when examining the perceptions of Dêudã's role in "peacebuilding, I requested participants to elaborate on cases in which they believed Dêudã did not contribute positively to peace efforts.

Furthermore, adaptability and openness were maintained throughout the research process, particularly in integrating information that contradicted the initial research proposal. This approach facilitated the consideration of a broader range of perspectives and mitigated potential biases in the interpretations. Engaging in reflective practice was crucial, enabling the continuous scrutiny of biases and interpretations. This process aided in validating the data provided by the respondents and fostered a more rigorous and balanced analytical understanding.

Yin (2014) emphasises the importance of actively seeking contradictory evidence, which can uncover 'documented contradictions' and diminish biases in the research process (184). This approach was instrumental in maintaining the integrity and credibility of the research, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the complexities of the impact of Dêudã on community 'peacebuilding' initiatives.

The commitment is centred on producing trustworthy scholarly work without plagiarism or falsified data. Upholding honesty, adhering to the case research protocol, and assuming responsibility for the research were of paramount importance.

Following the Research Ethics Code of Practice (2020) established by the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), obtaining consent for interviews in either verbal or written form was an essential component of conducting ethically sound research. Measures were implemented to protect the human subjects associated with this research by adhering to all required procedures.

Limitations and Scope of Research

The interviews revealed recurring themes on the role of Dêudã culture in sustaining social ties, supported by historical data and participatory MAP engagements. This triangulation strengthened the credibility of the findings, though some divergences emerged. While many participants perceived Dêudã as a positive cultural force, others raised concerns about its potential to create long-term financial burdens. These contrasting views highlight the complexity of Dêudã's impact: although it often acts as social glue, its influence varies depending on local context. Such variability underscores the need to avoid overgeneralisation and instead recognise the culture's diverse manifestations across settings.

The scope of this research is geographically and thematically specific. It focuses on the Far-western region of Nepal and examines how Dêudã culture is utilised in community 'peacebuilding', with data drawn exclusively from 2022 and 2023. The aim is not to measure the effectiveness of such initiatives but to understand how they are conceptualised and practised by community members. Consequently, the conclusions have limited universal applicability.

Critics such as Yin (2011) and Flyvbjerg (2006) note that case studies are often challenged for lacking statistical generalisability. However, they argue that such

studies provide analytical generalisability, offering deep contextual insights that may be applied to similar phenomena elsewhere. This research is intrinsic in nature, seeking to understand community ‘peacebuilding’ through the lens of local arts—specifically Dêudã—within authentic social settings. The knowledge generated here, while context-bound, retains relevance for analytical generalisation.

To enhance credibility, the research employed triangulation and considered alternative interpretations of the data. Nevertheless, findings remain shaped by both my perspective and those of the participants. Following Flyvbjerg’s (2006) view, the immersive nature of case research can counterbalance such biases by enabling deeper situational understanding. As both an indigenous resident and a researcher, I was able to embed myself in the community’s social fabric, which helped minimise preconceptions and situate interpretations within lived realities.

The research was conducted in two phases—November to December 2021 and September to October 2023. Across these periods, I conducted interviews, attended live performances, reviewed audiovisual materials on social media and YouTube to observe evolving content, and undertook iterative data analysis leading to the final thesis.

The findings are presented in three subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 analyses the impact of conflict on the region, identifying cultural patterns that emerged from the data. Chapter 5 examines the role of Dêudã culture in community ‘peacebuilding’, linking the findings to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter 6 discusses the limitations of local peacebuilding processes involving arts and culture, offering an integrated reflection on the Dêudã Triangle Model and this research’s contributions. Together, these chapters demonstrate the significance of Dêudã culture as both a cultural heritage and a peacebuilding practice.

CHAPTER 5: THE EFFECTS OF (ARMED) CONFLICT ON CULTURAL PATTERNS IN NEPAL'S FAR-WESTERN REGION

Introduction

Having described the research methods in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the research's findings related to the effects of conflict on cultural patterns in the far western region of Nepal, interpreting their significance in the context of existing literature. By integrating the data with insights from the literature, I aim to provide an understanding of the research questions, which will be further explored in Chapters (5 and 6).

This transition from methodology to results and discussion marks the progression from describing the research process to presenting and analysing the findings, thereby contributing to advancing knowledge in the field. While the findings suggest that Dêudâ may contribute to fostering social cohesion and reconciliation, acknowledging the limitations of this research is essential. The conclusions drawn here are based on empirical experiences, anecdotal evidence, secondary source analysis, and international examples of community 'peacebuilding' that may not fully align with Nepal's specific context. Consequently, the validity of these claims is constrained by the research methods employed, and detailed case studies are necessary to substantiate these preliminary findings.

Also known as Sudurpashchim Province, the culture of this research location is deeply rooted in its natural environment and intricately linked to its social, cultural, and political history. However, the decade-long conflict from 1996 to 2006 profoundly altered its cultural landscape. This chapter asks the critical question: How

did this period of conflict reshape the cultural patterns in the far western region of Nepal?

To answer this question, this chapter examines how the conflict has impacted the region's traditional practices, arts, cultural identity, education, economic activities, and social cohesion. I aim to illustrate the broader concept of 'community 'peacebuilding' ' by examining how these cultural shifts mirror the ongoing processes of building relationships that follow such a festive period.

The primary goal of this chapter is to explore the cultural changes brought about by the conflict in Nepal. I examine how traditional practices were disrupted, how Dêudâ's artistic and cultural values were affected, and how cultural identities have evolved. Specifically, I delve into the development of Dêudâ culture, an essential part of the region's heritage. This includes examining changes in identity and assessing their impact on education, economic activities, and social relations.

Through a detailed examination of these areas, this chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics underlying these cultural changes. I will highlight how everyday 'peace practices have been maintained or altered, how the local economy and educational systems have adapted, and how social cohesion has been affected. This thorough analysis reveals the broader implications of these transformations, offering insights into the ongoing processes of community 'peacebuilding' and cultural resilience in the region of Nepal. It is essential to present a brief background of the research location to set the stage for the research.

Historical Context of the Research Area

Understanding the cultural landscape preceding the conflict and the socio-political context of the conflict in the research area is essential for placing the observed cultural transformations in context. Before the conflict, the region was characterised by elaborate rituals and ceremonies that reinforced societal norms and values. Major life events, such as births, marriages, and deaths, are marked by enthusiastic community involvement. Festivals such as Bishu and Gaura are central to social and religious life, featuring family reunions and communal gatherings. These occasions allow people to express their love for their birthplace through singing and performing Dêudã, as illustrated below:

काशी गया प्रयाग गया, गँया पनि गया ।
घरको जसो काइ नाई पाया, तबै फर्की आया ॥

*I went Kashi, and I went Gaya as well.
Nowhere did I find a place like home, so I
went back home.*

These occasions served as opportunities for celebration and as crucial mechanisms for upholding social connections and cultural heritage. Festivals are religious observances and opportunities for social bonding and the transmission of cultural knowledge. The rituals performed during these festivals have significant symbolic meaning and are vital for maintaining the region's cultural heritage. This is how a respondent remembers the importance of Bishu to the community:

“The Bishu festival is an important part of our culture, especially in the rural areas of Nepal where I grew up. For us, Bishu marks the Nepali New Year and is celebrated enthusiastically, symbolising family unity and community harmony. During the festival, my family and I participated in various rituals and traditions that embodied the festival's spirit. One of our favourite activities in the Achham district was creating ‘Vishu Lori’—intricate designs that decorate the walls of our homes. However, this is different today as before.” (Saud, 2023).

The Maoist conflict began in 1996 and sought to overthrow the monarchical system and establish a people's republic in the country. The conflict caused widespread

disruption, resulting in loss of life, displacement, and socioeconomic instability, and the Far-western region was not an exception. The conflict's key events included the declaration of the People's War by the (then) Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), escalation of violence through attacks on government installations, and imposition of states of emergency by the government. The conflict peaked around 2001/2002 and continued until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006.

The root causes of the conflict lie in deep-seated social, economic, and political inequalities. With its historical marginalisation and underdevelopment, the far western region became a fertile ground for Maoist recruitment and activities (Thapa, 2009). Issues such as poverty, landlessness among Dalits and ethnic groups, caste and gender discrimination, and limited access to Kathmandu fuelled the region's insurgency. Consequently, the conflict disrupted traditional practices and customs, significantly altering the cultural life of the area. Later, community members continued to adopt a disrupted Dêudã culture by reviving communal and religious celebrations such as marriages and jatras (festivals).

Furthermore, as a resident, I have observed firsthand how festivals serve as religious observances and crucial opportunities for social bonding and the transmission of cultural knowledge. The rituals performed during these festivals hold significant symbolic meaning and are essential for preserving our region's cultural heritage. The following section explores these issues further.

Before the conflict, the Far-western region's cultural life was characterised by vibrant festivals, elaborate rituals, and strong communal participation in life-cycle events. Celebrations such as Bishu and Gaura were central to both religious observance and social life, drawing families and villages together through song, dance, and ritual

performance. Dêudã was a key feature of these occasions, providing an expressive outlet for love of place, as reflected in traditional verses and in respondents' recollections of intricate festival customs such as "Vishu Lori" wall designs. The Maoist conflict (1996–2006) disrupted these traditions, displacing communities, weakening social networks, and altering the cultural landscape. Nevertheless, post-conflict efforts to revive Dêudã and related communal celebrations indicate a strong cultural resilience.

These findings reveal how festivals and Dêudã performances once acted as embedded mechanisms for sustaining community bonds, transmitting cultural knowledge, and reinforcing a shared identity. Conflict-related displacement and insecurity interrupted these mechanisms, replacing continuity with fragmentation. The partial revival of Dêudã in the post-conflict period suggests that while cultural practices can be disrupted, they can also adapt and recover—though often in altered forms. The resilience observed mirrors patterns documented in other post-conflict contexts, where the revival of cultural traditions plays a role in restoring collective identity and cohesion. However, the quality and inclusivity of participation in these revived practices may differ from pre-conflict norms, with potential implications for their peacebuilding capacity.

Within the Dêudã Triangle Model, pre-conflict festivals demonstrate the synergy between performance (ritual song, dance, and shared activities), positionality (roles and identities shaped by caste, gender, and community status), and peace (the cohesion and harmony fostered through shared cultural expression). The conflict disrupted this interplay by limiting safe spaces for performance, altering social positionalities through displacement and loss, and undermining the peace once

maintained through cultural continuity. Post-conflict revival efforts represent attempts to re-establish these linkages, showing how the DTM can be applied to understand both the erosion and reconstruction of cultural peacebuilding mechanisms.

Traditional Practices and Customs

This research suggests that the conflict caused fear and instability in the lives of local people, likely interrupting many traditional rituals and ceremonies. Local people's experiences indicated that fear of attacks and displacement made it difficult for communities to gather and celebrate cultural events due to security concerns.²⁶ The respondents later affirmed that revitalising these traditions had been challenging, and people gradually adopted such changes, such as conducting a one-day marriage ceremony, as given below:

“When I got married in 2012, it was a challenging experience. On the wedding day, we had to travel five hours by road and then walk to the groom's family home. After the ceremony, which took at least six to seven hours, we had to return the same way, making the journey even more difficult. We had no choice but to follow the traditional one-day marriage custom. Despite the difficulties, I vividly remember that things were far from normal, but we managed to go through with it successfully. In contrast, a two-day marriage would be more convenient, fun-filled, and religiously fulfilling” (Madaï, 2023, Kanchanpur).

Looking at the last three decades, the traditional practices of the folk culture in the region, somewhat distanced from the rapid advancements in science and technology, remained primarily unchanged before the conflict. Laxmi Kant Jhosi, a priest, shared:

“In the past, marriages were mostly arranged based on children's birth *Kundalis* (horoscopes), and ceremonies were conducted according to astrologically auspicious times. Brahmins perform rituals, such as *Chulo*

²⁶ As a long-term inhabitant who spent their childhood in the region, I have had personal experiences and numerous formal and informal discussions with community members during the visits to various areas, which affirm this perspective.

Potnu (unwrapping the kitchen/yard with mud), *Janai Lagaunu* (wearing thread linen), wearing white *dhotis* (sacred white cloth) while preparing and eating rice, and consuming rice in a separate kitchen (Pant, 2008). Women used to sing traditional songs such as *Phag*, *Mangal*, and *Sagun*, while oil was burned on a domestic machine – called *Kol*, rice was pounded in *Okhal* (rice mill), and flour was ground in *Pani Ghatta* (water mill). Most importantly, the Dalit communities of the region were entitled to adhere to specific skilful roles such as tailoring, carpentry, pottery, metallurgy, singing, and music for their livelihood for generations” (Joshi, 2023, Bajhang).

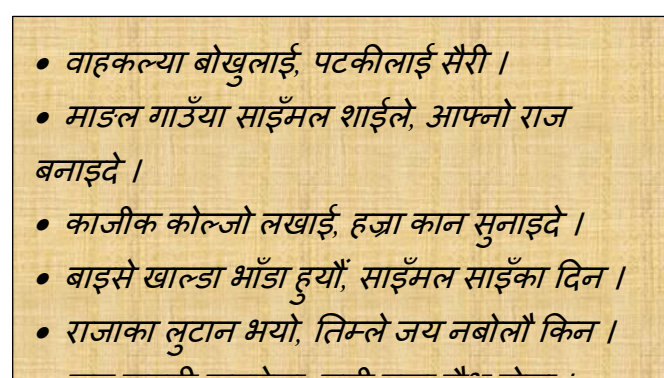
Likewise, Trailokya Nath Pathak recalls during the interview:

“Local people used to regard their favourite deity as a stone; consult shamans for serious illnesses; build and worship at deity temples; organise *Jatras* (God-festival); make vows for wish fulfilment and perform goat sacrifices. For instance, *Bisuparva* is celebrated on the first day of *Baisakh* (1st calendar month in Nepal), involving traditional foods like *Chukaauni* and *Batuk*. Thorns are hung above doors during *Shrawan Sankranti*. *Olko* (a wooden ring made from bamboo strips which are later used to sew leaves to make plates for worship purposes) is given to the household according to caste during festivals, *Jamara* (barley seed leaves) are kept during Dashain, and *tika* (colourful spot) is applied from respected elders (Pathak, 2024).

Similarly, Upadhyaya (2023) documented that *Gaura Parva* was celebrated, women fast on *Haritalika Teej* and *Gaura* for family peace, and lamps are lit on *Deepavali* using clay or *Amilo* leaf lamps. During *Gaitihar*, cows are worshipped; at *Kagtihar*, crows are fed; at *Kukurtihar*, the dog is worshipped and well fed as a guard of the family; during *Gbardhanpurja*, Oxen are worshipped and well fed for their hard work paid to feed the family through the cultivation of the field (158-162).

o²⁷ For their prosperity, progress and peace in life, brothers offer gifts and vows to protect them. ²⁸ Bhailo is played. Food (*khanjopajo*) is given to daughters in *Magh* and *Chait*, respectively. Men sing *Dêudâ* about Shiva, Krishna, and Rama and play it at fairs. *Swasthani* is recited at home during *the festival*. *Maijha* is performed during planting, and songs like *Chanchari* and *Bhani* are sung while planting and harvesting rice and millet in some districts (Pant, 2007: 7-8).

For instance, Saimal Shahi's Chanchari is a well-known song in the region. During



the ancient regime (before the unification of Nepal), it was customary to confiscate people's property and land as punishment, a practice known as

dashing. This act was frequently repeated, causing significant suffering among the people. King Saimal Shahi of Karnali ended this custom, greatly relieving the population. As the king stopped the tradition of confiscating property for minor offences, the people were delighted with Saimal Shahi. They praised and blessed him to thrive like dubo (a resilient grass). Furthermore, Upadhyaya (2023:62-63) mentioned that *Hudkeli* and *Chhalia* are played during *Chaiti*, *Nwaran* (naming), and marriage, but *Dhamari* and *Balo* are in some cases. Hair is not combed during

²⁷ Bhaitika, celebrated on the final day of the Tihar festival in Nepal, honours the bond between brothers and sisters. Sisters apply a multi-coloured tika on their brothers' foreheads, offer garlands, and present gifts, while brothers reciprocate with gifts and tika. The ritual involves special prayers for the brothers' longevity and prosperity, using sacred items like mustard oil and dubo grass. Families come together to enjoy festive meals, including traditional dishes such as Sel roti and sweets. Bhaitika is a vibrant celebration that strengthens familial ties and community bonds.

²⁸ Bhailo is a traditional Nepali folk song and dance performed during the Dashain/Tihar festival, where groups of people visit homes to sing, dance, and receive gifts and sweets to celebrate the festival.

Ratyauli, houses are covered with red and white mud, and cypress trees are planted on roofs to protect them from lightning. Dignitaries are shown respect, heads and feet are touched, and guests are welcomed with kind words.

Bar-peepals are planted along roads, *Chautari* – a resting place, is built, and mutual assistance is provided during births, marriages, and deaths. At *Bhojbhater* (community party), rice is eaten in *Tapri* (leaf plate), and vegetables and chutney are served in *Duna* (leaf cup). Brahmins research Sanskrit, practice *Pandityaai* (priesthood), and build two- or three-storied houses with *Atali* (balconies). Cattle are kept in barns, men only plough the fields, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law avoid bodily contact, *Tulsi* plants are kept in courtyards, and *Radipakhi* (rugs) are woven from sheep's wool. These customs have shaped the region's folk culture.

Unfortunately, these customs could not be experienced to some extent in the communities studied. It can be considered that the conflict was also responsible for its impact on them. However, the conflict also had positive consequences.

In contrast, the conflict brought about significant changes in cultural norms, values, and beliefs, including alterations to gender roles, family structures, religious practices, and community values. To this point, Chakra Maal, a former Maoist cadre, aged 40, insisted:

“If you look at the situation in our community over the last two decades, you will see significant changes in the lives of underprivileged people such as Dalits, women, and the poor. Dalits now live with dignity compared to the past; women have access to property and can raise their voices against discrimination, and poor people have access to government support, for example. Decentralised governance has made it much easier to obtain government services. Most importantly, people know their rights and duties. This results from the recent socio-political changes backed by the Maoists” (Chakra Maal, 2023).

The conflict has undeniably brought about significant changes in cultural norms, values, and beliefs, particularly regarding gender roles, family structures, religious practices, and community values. Reflecting on these shifts, Chakra Maal, a former Maoist cadre, highlighted the notable improvements in the lives of underprivileged groups, including Dalits, women, and people with low incomes, over the past two decades. He asserted that Dalits now live with greater dignity, women have gained access to property and are more empowered to speak out against discrimination, and poor people have better government support due to decentralised governance in the village.

While evidence supports these claims – such as the increased assertion of rights by Dalits in certain regions (Kumar, 2020) and the rise of Dalit feminism empowering women to challenge caste and gender discrimination (Bhaumik, 2023) – significant challenges remain. Ongoing discrimination, inconsistent access to government support, and systemic barriers hinder the full realisation of these benefits (Narendra, 2023; Prajapati and J, 2023). Therefore, while socio-political changes have brought about significant progress, the journey towards full equality and dignity for these marginalised groups remains incomplete.

Likewise, gender has historically played a significant role in shaping societal roles since birth. In a patriarchal society, the birth of a boy is celebrated, whereas the birth of a girl does not warrant a celebration in the community. This system led to distinct gender roles, influenced partly by the community's remoteness and illiteracy. This system led to distinct gender roles, influenced partly by the community's remoteness and illiteracy. Consequently, females by birth had limited access to education and well-being, while males had better access to these resources. The conflict and

resulting social changes began to challenge these traditional norms. However, the transition was complex, with some progressive changes embraced while others were resisted due to deeply entrenched cultural beliefs. These evolving dynamics reflect the ongoing struggle between traditional values and the push for social equality and modernisation. Ram Ayer and Paarur Khadka of Dadeldhura satirically regret losing the authenticity of their traditional livelihoods:

“There is nothing in the community as it was 20 years ago. Today, there are no priests for worship, no dharmi jakri (shamans) for jatras, and no bhoot (ghosts), and the Dalit community has left their family profession of serving high-caste people. Women no longer listen to their male counterparts and make their own decisions. People have stopped taming domestic animals and started buying goods from the market instead. Many have also begun going abroad for earning...” (2023, Dadeldhura).

This changing scenario indicates that significant changes have occurred over time, impacting the livelihoods of local people. Such evidence from interviews and oral histories indicates that the Maoist conflict disrupted long-standing rituals, festivals, and occupational roles that had defined the cultural fabric of the Far-western region for generations. Before the conflict, marriage rituals, seasonal festivals such as Bishu and Gaura, and caste-based artisanal roles were deeply embedded in community life. Practices such as multi-day wedding ceremonies, deity worship, agricultural song traditions, and caste-specific crafts created a coherent system of performance, belief, and social organisation. Respondents recalled how the fear of attacks, displacement, and instability made it difficult to gather, leading to the simplification or suspension of many customs. Post-conflict revival has been partial and selective, with some traditions, such as one-day marriage ceremonies, becoming the norm. At the same time, new socio-political realities—including greater Dalit participation in public life,

increased property rights for women, and decentralised governance—have altered the meaning and structure of traditional roles.

The findings illustrate a complex interplay of cultural loss, adaptation, and transformation. While the conflict accelerated the erosion of certain customs, it also catalysed social changes that disrupted entrenched hierarchies, particularly around caste and gender. These shifts align with broader patterns observed in post-conflict societies, where war-induced upheaval can open spaces for marginalised groups to claim rights and visibility (Kumar, 2020; Bhaumik, 2023). Yet the transition remains uneven: persistent discrimination, inconsistent access to resources, and resistance to changing gender norms limit the depth of these gains. The testimonies also highlight tensions between preserving authenticity in cultural practices and embracing modernisation, as seen in the decline of ritual specialists, artisanal trades, and agrarian livelihoods. The move from subsistence-based occupations toward market dependency and overseas employment has further reshaped community identity and interdependence.

The DTM helps clarify how these transformations affect peacebuilding dynamics. Performance, once expressed through multi-day festivals, ritual songs, and caste-based arts, has been reduced or reshaped, altering the community's shared cultural rhythms. Positionality has shifted in notable ways: Dalits and women have gained greater voice and agency in some domains, yet these gains remain contested and incomplete. Peace, as an outcome of inclusive participation, now depends on whether revived or adapted traditions—such as simplified weddings or modernised festival practices—can maintain their integrative function across caste, gender, and generational divides. The DTM underscores that cultural change is not simply about

preserving or losing traditions, but about how shifts in who performs, how they perform, and on what terms participation occurs determine the capacity of these practices to foster equitable and lasting peace.

Impacts on Marriage Practices

Respondents acknowledged that changes have occurred in the organisation of marriage ceremonies since the conflict began. Similar to Bhumi Madai's experience, another respondent, a priest whose main occupation is the priesthood, described the traditional mode of marriage, that is, two-day-long marriages were practised before the conflict. These ceremonies involve various rituals performed by the bride and groom's families. During these ceremonies, the bride, along with her family, relatives, and a musical band, would travel to the groom's family for the marriage in the evening. Depending on the distance, they might leave home sooner or later on the first day and spend the night in the bride's village, and the next day, they would return to their home village. The marriage rituals continued for two days and were accompanied by fellow villagers. After completing all the rituals, the bride brings the groom to her home the next day. The entire community was engaged in the marriage, although the primary responsibilities lay with the bride and groom's families. However, it was equally important for other villagers and relatives to participate in fostering community ownership. He further narrated:

“Things are different these days. People gradually limited their marriage activities when the conflict began because of the fear of conflict. Over time, people began to adopt one-day marriages. Marriage-related activities were condensed into a single day for safety and security. As a result, communal gatherings were limited to a few hours from days. Initially, this change was not well-received, but nowadays, people have adapted to it.” (Durga Dutt Bhatta, 2023).

Changes in marriage practices are noticeable, particularly when considering the impact of the transition from two-day to one-day ceremonies. During traditional two-day marriages, community members have ample opportunities for social interaction. They can act as hosts, welcoming guests and relatives, preparing food for the participants, and meeting and sharing with fellow community members. Musical activities like *Dêudã* and *Chhala khel* were integral to the celebrations, providing enjoyment and a sense of togetherness



Furthermore, while the bride and groom’s families were busy with religious and priestly rituals, other guests and hosts participated in music and dances, fostering community bonding and relationship building. These performances were drivers of emotional connection and healing in the audience. The two-day ceremonies allow the community to allocate adequate time for these activities, enhancing social cohesion.

In contrast, one-day ceremonies allow for a different level of engagement because of time constraints. This limitation reduces opportunities for social interaction and enjoyment derived from extended celebrations. Consequently, the depth of community bonding and the emotional benefits associated with these traditional

practices have diminished. In many cases, it has become common for loved ones of married couples to be unable to attend ceremonies in communities.

Additionally, another dynamic of marriage practices was the prevalence of inter-caste marriages within the cadres of the then insurgents (Maoist) (Mottin, 2008; Subedi, 2013). A significant number of Maoist cadres entered into inter-caste marriages, which had both positive and negative impacts on the communities. Engaging in inter-caste marriages was not easy within these communities due to deep-rooted caste systems.

The conflict provided a space for social change, challenging traditional norms and offering opportunities for inter-caste marriages to occur. However, this shift has also led to complications. While some couples successfully navigated the challenges posed by the caste system, others were unable to cope, resulting in separation. This dynamic reflects the progressive and regressive impacts of insurgency on societal norms and relationships.

Participation in and the frequency of rituals and ceremonies saw a sharp decline. For instance, weddings and funerals, which traditionally involved large community gatherings, were often conducted in secrecy or with limited attendance to avoid drawing attention to them. Many festivals were either curtailed or abandoned. The traditional harvest festival, which required collective labour and communal feasting, was one such practice that suffered due to the breakdown of festivities and fear of violence.

Impacts on Festival Celebrations

Respondents acknowledged the region's richness in the number of festivals and the diverse ways in which they are celebrated across different communities throughout the year. Festivals in the area serve as crucial opportunities for families, friends, and loved ones to gather, share experiences, and find solace and joy while partaking in communal meals. While national festivals in Nepal are celebrated uniformly from *the Mechi* to *Mahakali* regions, the far western region boasts unique cultural festivals that reflect its distinct heritage. The villages in this area are vibrant, with traditional festivals.²⁹ Celebrated since ancient times, such as *Bisu* and *Gaura*.

Furthermore, residents of the region, primarily engaged in agriculture, face relentless work under varying weather conditions and challenging terrain. The daily routine of household chores and farming can be monotonous and exhausting. Festivals and fairs offer a vital reprieve, lifting spirits and bringing joy to the community. During these times, people wear colourful attire, join friends and relatives, play traditional dances like *Dêudâ*, also known as *Nyaula*, and enjoy a unique sense of communal happiness. Festivals also provide opportunities to visit scenic natural sites such as rivers, temples, and forests, offering a refreshing break from daily hardships.

²⁹ Upadhyaya (2024), in his book *Kali-Karnaliko Loksahitya tatha Sanskriti*, has provided a comprehensive list of festivals celebrated in the region. These include, but are not limited to, Ganga Dashahara, Harishayani Ekadashi, Saune Sankranti, Nag Panchami, Malika Chaturdashi, Olke Sankranti, Janai Purnima, Ananta Chaturdashi, Rotya Tihar, Krishna Janmashtami, Gaura Festival, Teej, Ganesh Chaturthi, Rishi Panchami, Ghase Sankranti, Bada Dashain, Deepawali, Haribodhini Ekadashi, Kartik Purnima, Kojagrat Purnima, Pusepandra, Bhaile Purnima, Shaurya Festival Bhuwo, Makar Sankranti, Shreepanchami, Swasthani Purnima, Maha Shivaratri, Holi, Chaitra Dashain, Ram Navami, Chaitalo, Hareri Puja, Atwari Festival, Gurahi Festival, Harduba, Auli Festival, Maghi Festival, Chaile Charai, Baisakhi Charai, Jhiji Festival, Dola Festival, Ghadi Puja, Bhajani Charai, Asadi Festival, and Deepawali. Additionally, the Sauka community observes Gabla Puja, Badani Puja, Nyungtang Puja, and Byas Rishi Puja (15-17).

The region is home to many impoverished families that struggle to meet their basic needs. Economic hardships force many men to leave their families and work as guards or labourers in India. Festivals such as Holi, Shivaratri, Bisu, Gaura, Dashain, and Tihar are significant as they mark these men's temporary return. They allow family reunions and shared celebrations, thus providing much-needed relief and joy amidst their complicated lives.

Impacts on Occupational Engagements

According to the latest census report (2021) in Nepal, the demographic configuration of Sudurpashchim Province reveals a multi-faceted array of caste and ethnic variability. Historically linked to the warrior and governing elite, the Chhetri community constitutes the predominant faction within the province. For example, Chhetris often hold positions of power and influence in local governance and the military. Coexisting with them are the Thakuris, a subset of the Chhetri caste recognised for their regal and aristocratic heritage, often serving as local leaders and landowners. The Brahmin (Hill) or Bahun community, primarily involved in religious duties, also represents a substantial segment of the population. Traditionally, Brahmins have acted as priests and scholars, playing a crucial role in religious and cultural activities. However, despite their substantial influence, Brahmins have diversified into various professions, including government jobs and businesses, owing to their access to education and economic advantages.

Interviews informed that various Dalit groups, well known for their specific artistic skills, such as the *Kami* (traditionally associated with metallurgy), the *Damai or Dholi* (recognised for their roles as clothiers and musicians), and the *Sarki* (who have usually been involved in leather crafting), reside in the province. These historically

marginalised Dalit groups have faced significant socio-economic challenges. For instance, the Kami community's expertise in metalwork has become less viable in the modern economy, prompting a shift away from traditional occupations to more modern ones. Indigenous ethnicities such as the Magar, Rai, and Tamang, each possessing unique languages and cultural customs, contribute to the province's diversity. However, they were more influenced by the region's caste and culture than their ethnic values, leading to the blending and sometimes erosion of their distinct cultural identities. Although Muslim and Newar communities are minorities, they add to the region's multi-cultural tapestry with their distinctive religious practices and rich artistic and architectural heritage.

This intricate composition underscores the province's complex social and cultural framework. However, these local communities uniformly engage in traditional occupations. For example, while a few Brahmins continue to serve as priests, most have leveraged their educational advantages to secure government jobs or venture into business. This shift indicates broader socio-economic changes, wherein access to education has facilitated upward mobility for specific groups. Similarly, traditionally involved in military and security roles, the Chhetri community now sees many of its poorer members migrating to different parts of India or the Gulf countries in search of better livelihoods. This migration reflects limited local economic opportunities and community adaptability in the face of financial necessity.

The most noticeable change is within the Dalit community, which has almost completely abandoned its traditional profession. Historically bound to occupations such as metallurgy, tailoring, and leatherworking, Dalits are now seeking alternative livelihoods to support themselves. This abandonment is driven by economic necessity

and a desire to escape the stigmatisation associated with these traditional roles. In contrast, many women, regardless of caste, have adopted roles as clothiers in cities and small towns, proudly embracing a self-sustaining occupation. This trend highlights a shift towards more inclusive and economically viable professions for women, challenging traditional gender roles and contributing to the region's socioeconomic fabric.

The transition from traditional occupations to more modern and diverse livelihoods reflects broader socio-economic changes and challenges. These shifts highlight the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity and the region's struggle for socioeconomic mobility and inclusivity.

Transforming Customs

Transformed customs and practices emerged in response to the conflict, reflecting altered socio-political realities. The evolving participation of women in traditional customs such as Dêudã reflects significant changes in the gender dynamics within the community. Traditionally, Dêudã was dominated by men because of the patriarchal structure of society. For instance, men are often the primary performers in many rural areas, with women relegated to passive roles or domestic spheres. This male dominance in cultural practices mirrors the broader societal norms that limit women's roles and visibility.

“लिलाम भयो राष्ट्रियता मिचियो
सिमाना
छ भने क्रान्तिमा जुटौं देशभक्ति
भावना”

(Dharma Bohara, 2023, Doti)

*Our nationality's been auctioned off, our
borders overrun,
If spirit of patriotism still lives, rise for the
revolution begun.*

However, the conflict period saw a shift, as women increasingly participated in Dêudã, using it to voice their perspectives and experiences. For example, women began composing and performing Dêudã songs that highlighted their struggles, resilience, and contributions during the conflict. This shift amplified women's voices and enriched the content of the Dêudã with new narratives and themes.

डडेल्धुरा आलिताल सौराई झलिमलि।
 बिरानो नभए माइती मेराई जन्म्याथलि ॥
 भएन मनको जसो गै जान लाग्या दिन।
 जिउ खान्या सन्तति रैछ, जोवन खान्या
 रिन॥
 साइका दिन पर्देसै बाइग्य नइ त बनई
 धन।
 बालबच्चा 'बा' भनि रुना कस्या बुझाऊ
 मन॥

Despite this progress, challenges remain to be addressed. Traditionalists who view the integration of women into these cultural practices as a departure from 'authentic' customs sometimes resist this integration. Moreover, women's participation is often limited by their ongoing responsibilities and

societal expectations, which restrict their time and opportunities to engage in cultural activities. This evolving gender dynamic in Dêudã is a testament to the broader social changes occurring in the community, linking traditional customs to contemporary gender equality and empowerment issues.

The subject matter of traditional customs, such as Dêudã, has evolved significantly, reflecting broader societal changes and contemporary issues. Historically, Dêudã songs have focused on local topics and emotions such as love, nature, and community events. These themes were deeply rooted in the daily lives and experiences of the community, providing a cultural record of their history and values.

However, during and after the conflict, the themes of Dêudã expanded to encompass migration, political change, and social justice. For instance, many Dêudã songs began to address the impact of migration on families, the socio-economic challenges faced

by those left behind, and the political turmoil affecting their lives. This evolution has allowed Dêudã to remain relevant and resonate with contemporary audiences, providing a voice to the community's collective experience during a turbulent period.

उदासी चैतका महिना बैना भेटाई झाउला।
कोसेली म लायै आउला बांडी चुड़ी खाउला॥
आमा मर्या बाबा मर्या नान छनैका मुल्या।
चैत महिना भेटाई लेख्या मेरा माइती
भूल्या॥
केहि गर्न सकिन मैले मेरे यी हातले।
पराइ भर जानु पर्ने छोरीका जातले॥
तोल्या बन काफल पक्या गुराँसिला भया
आँखा भरि आँसु थिया बगेर ताल भया
कर्मले दिएको चोट दुख कस्त सहैइ।
~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The different Dêudã song presents a similar theme. This Dêudã song, sung in the Thadi bhaka style, captures a woman's heartfelt emotions as she navigates her daily life and destiny. Living in a village, she juggles raising her children and managing household chores while her husband works abroad in India because of the lack of local job opportunities. The song is divided into

five parts, each revealing a facet of the singer's story. She expresses love and longing for her current home and her motherly home (Maiti), pleading not to forget. She reflects on life's hardships and caring for her children in her husband's absence despite their strained relationship. She shares the pain of his prolonged absence and the burden of loans, feeling heartbroken when her children miss their father.

However, she endures these challenges with a hidden love for her husband and remains hopeful for a future reunion, believing that their love will survive. This song poignantly portrays women's emotional and practical struggles in similar situations, emphasising themes of love, resilience, and hope amid adversity.

Some community members and cultural custodians express concerns that contemporary issues might dilute the traditional essence of Dêudã. Balancing cultural heritage with the need to reflect current realities remains an ongoing challenge. This

evolution in subject matter underscores the dynamic nature of artistic practices, linking them to the community's ongoing journey through social and political change. This Dêudã song expresses contemporary society's deep emotional bonds and social realities. A significant example is the song “*उदासी चैतका महिना...*” by Jayaraj Bhatt (2023), which is presented here:

This dialogic song between a brother and sister explores themes of familial love, separation, and longing, vividly reflecting the cultural and emotional fabric of the region. The brother promises to visit his sister and bring gifts, symbolising efforts to maintain familial bonds and provide emotional support despite physical separation. Conversely, the sister expresses her deep sorrow over the loss of their parents and the resulting sense of abandonment, reflecting the profound impact of these losses on her emotional health.

The brother's promise to visit and bring gifts symbolises his love and care for his sister, highlighting their efforts to maintain their bond despite the physical distance, and demonstrating how Dêudã songs can express deep familial love and longing. The sister's response reflects her sorrow and sense of abandonment following their parents' deaths, underscoring the emotional and physical distance between her and her brother and highlighting themes of loss and separation. The brother acknowledges his helplessness in changing their fate, emphasising the societal expectation that daughters must leave their homes and rely on others, revealing the traditional roles and challenges women face in the region.

The sister reminisces about their childhood, the beauty of their homeland, and their playful days, which now seem far away. These memories comfort and pain her, making her situation even more challenging and complex. Despite their sadness, both

siblings showed resilience. The brother encourages his sister to endure hardships and look forward to their reunion, while the sister, despite lamenting her fate, hopes for better days and cherishes her bond with her brother despite their separation.

Traditional songs often serve as vital cultural repositories that encapsulate a community's collective memory, values, and experiences. According to research on the role of traditional music in cultural identity, songs rich in cultural references, such as the ripening Kafal fruit and the singing Nyaule bird, symbolise more than just the natural cycle of life; they also embody the passage of time and the enduring connection between people and their environment. These symbols foster a sense of continuity and belonging among community members (Miller and Shah, 2018).

Moreover, such songs play a critical role in preserving cultural traditions, particularly in the context of familial love, the pain of separation, and the hope for reunion, which are common themes in many traditional societies. These emotional narratives, set against cultural and societal expectations, help individuals navigate their personal experiences within a shared cultural framework, reinforcing community bonds and resilience (Klein and Raj, 2020).

Further research suggests that cultural expressions, such as Dêudã songs, contribute to community resilience by promoting a shared sense of identity and emotional solidarity among community members. This collective identity, reinforced through communal singing and the transmission of cultural knowledge, helps communities cope with social issues such as migration, economic hardship, and social change by providing a means to express and process collective emotions (Tiwari and Paudel, 2021). These songs document and address social issues, highlighting the power of cultural expression in sustaining social cohesion and resilience.

Impacts on Education

Education in Nepal has played a contentious role in the conflict, reinforcing socially and culturally biased values and institutionalising inequitable practices, thus becoming central to the conflict (Pherali, 2012). As a result, schools and educational institutions have faced violence, abductions, and financial extortion. They were utilised as symbols of power and strategic targets, exacerbating social inequalities and disrupting social cohesion during the conflict. Chakra Maal (2023), who fought as a Maoist commander, agrees, stating, “that was the need of contemporary time to fight against the state and bourgeoisie educational system” to some extent. Although the end of the conflict in Nepal has lessened physical attacks on education, political interference in the education system persists. Schools and other educational institutions have become power centres and hotspots for multiparty political disputes (Pherali, 2013). Despite these challenges, the government has amended educational policies to grant local governments greater power. Similarly, arts and culture education has been incorporated into the school curriculum.

Informal learning through family and community mechanisms also faced challenges due to the conflict, but adapted innovatively. Families and communities play a crucial role in maintaining cultural transmission, using oral histories, storytelling, and traditional practices to educate the younger generation. Despite these disruptions, these informal methods have proven to be resilient and adaptable.

Giri’s (2023) analysis of the evolution of Dêudã highlights how this traditional practice has adapted to societal shifts and ideological transformations. Initially centred around themes of sorrow and traditional beliefs, Dêudã now addresses

broadier societal issues, such as women seeking freedom. These two examples contradict this argument.

बाटोमा जोतेको घट्ट, पिठो छ छरपस्ट साइ लाग्यो मुग्लान तिर, म छाडी बर्बट्ट <i>The mill I laboured on by the road, its flour is scattered wide, Desire pulled me towards Muglan, leaving my home aside.</i>	नयाँ सत्ता नयाँ सेवा नयाँ छ सस्कृति चल्दैँन पुरानो चलन हट्दैँ छ बिकृति <i>A new power, new service, a new way of life to see, The old customs fade away, and the ills are made to flee.</i>
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The first song, sung by a woman, expresses her disappointment with her husband for leaving her alone in a village, highlighting the nature of the past patriarchy. In contrast, the second song challenges societal norms and advocates for personal freedom and empowerment.

Families and communities have been pivotal in preserving culture amidst conflict. Through oral histories, storytelling, and traditional practices, they ensured the transmission of cultural knowledge to the younger generations. These methods not only preserve cultural memory but also adapt to incorporate themes of conflict and resilience, reflecting the lived experiences of the community. This is further supported by the statement related to the Bishu festival:

“Elders in our community also make makeshift gardens and swings, symbolising the renewal of life and happiness. These rituals are still deeply rooted in our culture, bringing us together and preserving a sense of continuity” (Bhim Saud, 2023).

Education systems are pivotal in transmitting cultural and linguistic heritage, especially in the face of increasing globalisation. Recent studies have shown that while globalisation has brought about significant socio-economic changes, it has also threatened the survival of minority languages and cultures. Inclusive and culturally responsive education can be a powerful tool for cultural preservation.

Research on Nepal's education system reveals that, despite constitutional provisions promoting multiculturalism and linguistic diversity, there is a significant gap in implementing policies that support these ideals. Nepal's education system tends to prioritise the national language, Nepali, over indigenous languages, leading to the marginalisation of these languages and cultures within the formal education framework (Sharma, 2020). This marginalisation is exacerbated by the limited government initiatives to support linguistic and cultural diversity in schools.

Local communities often bear the responsibility of preserving their linguistic and cultural heritage. However, with adequate support from the education system, these efforts are usually sufficient to counteract the homogenising pressures of globalisation (Rai and Thapa, 2019). This highlights the urgent need for more comprehensive and culturally inclusive educational policies in Nepal to ensure that education transmits knowledge and sustains the diverse cultural and linguistic identities of its people.

Impacts on Livelihood

The conflict significantly altered economic activities and livelihoods, profoundly affecting the region's socio-economic fabric of the region. This section examines the disruption of agricultural practices, shifts in employment patterns, and adaptation of traditional livelihood strategies.

The conflict has profoundly impacted traditional livelihoods, which are primarily based on agriculture and local crafts. Agricultural production has declined due to displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and landmines. For instance, contemporary Roopai practices, a traditional agrarian festival in Achham district,

have significantly changed. Historically, Roopai was a communal activity characterised by mutual support and cultural significance. However, modern Roopai requires a sense of community and mutual support, with traditions losing importance amidst financial incentives and personal benefits.

This disruption forced communities to seek safer and more stable sources of income, leading to changes in traditional economic activities in the region. Communities that are heavily reliant on agriculture face severe hardships, with many households losing their primary source of livelihood. The case studies illustrate the adaptive strategies employed by these communities to cope with economic disruptions.

Field data indicated that economic disruption in the region has significantly altered traditional livelihoods. Communities once heavily dependent on agriculture have faced severe hardship, with many households losing their primary source of income. Case research evidence shows that, in response, some farmers diversified into small-scale trade and handicrafts, using these activities as alternative income sources. This adaptive behaviour illustrates local resilience in the face of structural change. As one participant, Dan Bhandari (2023), reflected:

“Over the past two decades, Dadeldhura has undergone significant economic changes. In the past, money was scarce, and even the small amounts earned from agriculture were often hoarded and used only during festivals. Multiple income sources have emerged, notably through remittances sent by family members working abroad and deposited and invested in banks and cooperatives. The community has witnessed improved economic conditions, with more people building homes in urban areas such as Terai and Kathmandu. However, some individuals prefer to purchase food rather than cultivate their own and left taming livestock.” (Bhandari, 2023, Dadeldhura)

Bhandari’s account aligns with broader field observations of a gradual shift from subsistence agriculture toward mixed and smallholder economic practices. The

emergence of remittances as a major income stream has altered local consumption patterns, increased investment in housing and urban migration, and in some cases reduced engagement with traditional farming and livestock rearing. While these changes have improved material conditions for some households, they also indicate a weakening of agricultural self-sufficiency and associated communal practices.

In the context of this research, these economic transformations intersect with the positionality and peace dimensions of the Dêudã Triangle Model. Economic diversification and migration reshape community composition and availability for cultural participation, potentially influencing who engages in Dêudã performances and under what conditions. This has implications for the sustainability of cultural traditions as spaces of inclusion and cohesion, suggesting that shifts in livelihood strategies must be considered alongside cultural and social change in post-conflict community resilience.

Changes in Agricultural Practices and Employment Pattern

This conflict has led to notable changes in agricultural practices and employment patterns. The destruction of farmland and displacement of communities have resulted in a decline in agricultural productivity. To sustain themselves, many rural households have turned to alternative livelihoods, such as small-scale trade and handicrafts. For example, the people's economic activities in the region have evolved, with remittances from family members working abroad becoming crucial sources of income. These changes reflect broader shifts in employment patterns and economic strategies in the country.

The shift from traditional agricultural practices to alternative livelihoods highlights the adaptive capacity of affected populations. However, this transition also poses

challenges, as new forms of employment may offer different levels of stability and security than traditional livelihoods. Reliance on remittances, for instance, can create significant vulnerabilities if economic conditions in host countries deteriorate.

Local testimonies reflect this shift. For example, Raj Parki, a resident who spent 20 years abroad before returning home in 2023, observed that remittances and related financial activities have substantially boosted the local economy. However, he also noted a generational preference for overseas employment over continuing traditional crafts, citing low earnings and limited capital as key deterrents. This pattern reflects changing aspirations influenced by greater access to education and exposure to global opportunities.

The movement away from subsistence agriculture toward mixed livelihoods demonstrates the adaptive capacity of post-conflict communities. Remittances have supported recovery by improving living standards and funding social infrastructure, but they also create dependency on external labour markets. Economic downturns or policy changes in host countries could threaten household stability. Moreover, reduced engagement with farming and craft-based work can weaken local production systems and erode the communal labour networks traditionally tied to these livelihoods.

These economic changes intersect directly with the positionality and peace dimensions of the Dêudã Triangle Model. Labour migration reshapes community demographics, altering who is present and able to participate in Dêudã performances. Declining agricultural and artisanal activities—often the settings in which songs were composed and performed—may reduce the informal spaces where cultural exchange occurs. At the same time, remittances can increase the resources available for festivals

and gatherings, potentially strengthening the performance dimension. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing how economic transformation influences the role of Dêudã in fostering inclusion, cohesion, and peace in post-conflict Nepal.

Impact on Social Relationships

The conflict in Nepal led to displacement and violence, disrupting traditional community structures, and the Far West was no exception. This disruption undermined established social hierarchies and networks, leading to the fragmentation of conventional social cohesion. Incidents of violence and betrayal during the conflict have created deep-seated mistrust among community members. This erosion of trust within and between communities has weakened social cohesion, leading to migration.

धोती मैलि टोपी मैली, धोइ दिन्या कोइ छैन परदेश मरन्याको, रोइदिन्या कोइछैन	<i>Clothes from head to toe are dirty and there is no one to wash them, Nor is there anyone to shed tears for those dying abroad</i>
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In this case, Dêudã songs help connect with the family, emotionally. This song portrays the reality of a male family member who has migrated but longs to live with his family in the village. However, he feels forced to live in desperation, neglecting his personal hygiene and emotional health.

Family structures were heavily impacted by displacement, loss of family members, and economic pressures. These disruptions forced families to adapt, often changing traditional gender roles and family dynamics. Similarly, this song tells the melancholic story of seasonal workers who go to India to earn money for their families to survive. It emotionally expresses their helpless fate rather than connecting through the song itself.

बम्बे झान्या रेलगाडीका, पैया छु टन लाग्या पहाडका डाँडा काँडा, आब छु टन लाग्या	<i>The train for Bombay is all set to leave with wheels starting to move, The beloved undulation of hills is slowly receding out of sight</i>
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Despite these disruptions, the shared experience of conflict sometimes fostered stronger community bonds and collective action. Communities facing common threats and challenges often come together to support each other, rebuilding trust and cooperation through gathering and participating in Dêudã performances. Dambar Khadka, another respondent, who usually uses TikTok to share his Dêudã awareness and entrainment, shares,

“I have been invited to Dêudã festivals in this region as a lead artist (Gitaru) for over a decade. I enjoy connecting with people through the power of Dêudã songs and performances. We improvise songs about women’s empowerment, social discrimination, and migration issues. When the participants listen to such songs, they feel their story is performed and they are happy” (Khadka, 2023, Kanchanpur).

Displaced families and individuals formed new social networks in host communities, providing essential support systems. Evidence shows that these reconfigured networks play a vital role in helping individuals and families recover and rebuild their lives post-conflict. Consequently, there is a growing trend of forming groups of displaced people from the same region living in different locations such as Kathmandu (Nepal), Bangalore (India), and London (UK). During gatherings on special occasions, these groups meet to play Dêudã and share their feelings, further supporting each other emotionally and culturally.

सुख राति छ जङ्गलको बाटो, सर्प चिल्ला कि /	<i>On a dark night through the jungle path – will the snakes be sleek or sly? A brother’s share of the father’s land – will love keep it, or pass it by?</i>
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भाइको भाग बुबाको अंश, माया मिल्ला
कि /

During the conflict and subsequent period, increased awareness and education contributed to a decline in gender—and caste-based discrimination in the region. This shift promoted greater social inclusion and equal access to services for people with disabilities. For example, in this song, a daughter raises her voice for equal rights among siblings regarding parental property rights. She demands equal respect within the family and community in a patriarchal society.

Interviews with community members and experts highlighted the role of cultural practices, such as Dêudã, in fostering social cohesion. These cultural activities have been pivotal in maintaining mutual respect and identity during and after conflict.

Furthermore, interpersonal relationships were deeply affected, influencing family dynamics and social networks. The adaptations made by families and individuals during the conflict period reflect significant shifts in social norms and social structures.

उत्पीडित जाति क्षेत्र, लिंग सबै मिली /
एकताले बन्छ नेपाल, हुन्छ झिलिमिली /

*Oppressed castes, regions, and genders –
all united as one,
With unity, Nepal will shine, its brightness
like the sun.*

The conflict in Nepal profoundly impacted social relationships within the research community, resulting in negative and positive outcomes. Efforts to rebuild and the role of cultural practices are crucial in restoring social cohesion and demonstrating community resilience and adaptability. Interviews with community members and experts provided a deeper understanding of the context of the Dêudã culture. These

firsthand accounts detail the impact of the conflict on cultural practices, identity, and social dynamics and offer perspectives on the ongoing challenges of respecting Dêudã as a tradition.

Theoretical Integration and Contribution to New Perspective

The resilience and adaptability of Dêudã culture provide important insights into how participatory cultural practices can serve as mechanisms for peacebuilding and reconciliation in post-conflict settings. This research demonstrates that Dêudã culture is more than entertainment; it is a relational and performative space where communities forge emotional bonds, reinforce social cohesion, and navigate processes of social change. The DTM – linking performance, positionality, and peace – emerges as a useful lens for analysing these dynamics.

Empirical research in Nepal and other post-conflict contexts reinforces this interpretation. Bist's (2015) work in Nepal shows how regular participation in Dêudã reinforces intergenerational ties, preserves linguistic heritage, and maintains disrupted community networks – findings echoed in this study's participants' accounts of Dêudã gatherings as spaces of dialogue, humour, and shared memory. In Cambodia, Ledgerwood and Vijghen (2002) observed traditional dance as a medium of healing after the Khmer Rouge era, while Schirch (2005) found that intentional cultural rituals can mediate tensions and foster trust. Dêudã's satirical and improvisational qualities extend these observations, enabling participants to negotiate positionality – particularly around caste and gender – while preserving cultural continuity.

The therapeutic and participatory nature of Dêudã supports with research on expressive arts and trauma recovery (Malchiodi, 2005; Arai, 2009) and with findings on community arts as visible markers of resilience and collective identity (Bishop,

2012). However, as noted in Kingston (2012) and Upreti (2012), cultural practices can also reproduce inequalities. This research observed instances where women and lower-caste participants experienced subtle exclusion, underlining the DTM's positionality dimension: performance-driven transformation depends on equitable access and voice.

By situating these findings within comparative empirical and theoretical work, this research appears how Dêudã's peacebuilding potential is grounded in both its embodied performance practices and its capacity to adapt to contemporary realities.

The DTM synthesises relevant theoretical concepts:

- Appadurai's (1996) cultural adaptability explains how resilience arises when core traditions are maintained while accommodating innovation.
- Durkheim's (1912) collective memory clarifies how Dêudã's shared performances reinforce social harmony.
- Shils' (1981) continuity of tradition and Hobsbawm's (1983) invented traditions illuminate the interplay between preservation and reinvention.
- Bourdieu's (1977) social reproduction and Giddens' (1991) reflexive modernisation reveal how power dynamics and social change shape participation.

Applied through the DTM, these frameworks support a new perspective: tradition is not an immobile inheritance but a dynamic process in which performance enables dialogue, positionality reflects inclusion or exclusion, and peace emerges through sustained relational engagement.

While theorists such as Bourdieu, Giddens, Durkheim, Hobsbawm, and Habermas are referenced, their ideas are not explored in depth here; they are included to signal

potential avenues for future theoretical engagement, requiring further empirical testing in Nepal's post-conflict context.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the research's findings on how the conflict reshaped cultural patterns in Nepal's Far-western region and interprets these shifts within the context of existing scholarship. Understanding these transformations is essential for evaluating the state of artistic and cultural activities and for adapting them to evolving socio-political realities. The evidence demonstrates that the conflict altered traditions, customs, livelihoods, and education, thereby influencing the role and form of cultural expression. These findings address the central research question by showing both the vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities of the arts, culture, and peacebuilding in this context.

Amidst these changes, Dêudã culture has endured as a dynamic medium for storytelling and satire, addressing subjects that range from intimate personal experiences to community-wide social issues. For instance, politically charged songs parody leaders who make grand promises of prosperity that remain unfulfilled, providing both entertainment and social critique. This aligns with the *Performance* dimension of the DTM, as Dêudã's participatory and expressive nature allows communities to articulate dissent, question authority, and reflect on collective experiences.

Dêudã has also reinforced regional identity and safeguarded linguistic diversity through dialects such as Doteli and Baitadeli. Its communal performances foster belonging and preserve cultural heritage, while lyrics transmit moral and philosophical lessons. This educational role strengthens social cohesion,

corresponding to the *Peace* dimension of the DTM, in which shared cultural expression cultivates mutual understanding and collective resilience.

Economically, the tradition has adapted to broader socio-economic changes. While the commercialisation of Dêudã offers financial benefits to performers and organisers, it also raises concerns over the dilution of traditional elements. This tension reflects the *Positionality* dimension of the DTM, where evolving audience expectations, market forces, and shifting power relations influence who participates, who benefits, and whose voices are amplified.

Importantly, the sustainability of Dêudã rests largely on grassroots commitment. In the absence of substantial institutional support, local communities have remained its primary custodians, ensuring that the practice continues to evolve while retaining its core values. This community-led preservation underscores the adaptive interplay between continuity and innovation, a balance critical for maintaining Dêudã's peacebuilding potential.

Overall, the findings suggest that Dêudã culture not only survived the disruptions of conflict but also adapted to address new realities – political change, migration, economic shifts, and evolving social norms. Through the lens of the DTM, these adaptations illustrate how *performance*, *positionality*, and *peace* intersect to sustain cultural resilience and offer pathways for reconciliation in a post-conflict setting.

The following section examines how Dêudã culture fosters community peace, addresses challenges, and focuses on local initiatives to promote peace. The conflict disrupted social structures and relationships and offered valuable lessons for revitalising artistic and cultural activities. These activities can help bridge communities and foster better relationships for a cohesive future.

CHAPTER 6: THE DÊUDÃ CULTURE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO PEACEBUILDING IN THE COMMUNITIES

Introduction

Building on insights from the previous chapter regarding the impact of conflict on community culture in Far-western Nepal, this chapter examines the role of Dêudã culture by analysing specific examples as evidence of its contribution to promoting peace in Far-western Nepal. The chapter also highlights how Dêudã, as a cultural art form and practice, fosters trust and unity in regions affected by conflict, underscoring the potential of cultural traditions to build relationships and promote peace. This exploration is structured to comprehensively understand Dêudã's evolving role within a socio-political context, highlighting its effectiveness as a tool for community bonding and peace.

The findings presented in this chapter are informed not only by interviews and lyrical interpretation but also by my embodied engagement in Dêudã performances through participant observation. Drawing on arts-based research approaches (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015) by aligning Boal's 'Theatre of Oppressed', my participation enabled me to witness and experience how physical acts such as holding hands, synchronised movement, and rhythmic collaboration fostered trust, solidarity, and collective agency. These embodied practices provided critical insights into how community peacebuilding was enacted beyond verbal articulation.

Contextual Review of Dêudã Culture

Historically, Dêudã culture has functioned as a vibrant space for emotional expression, entertainment, and the preservation of cultural narratives. Participant testimonies and historical accounts indicate that before the outbreak of conflict, it was deeply integrated into daily life – particularly during festivals and communal gatherings – where it celebrated local heritage and folklore. Within the framework of the Dêudã Triangle Model (DTM), these traditions demonstrate how performance has long been central to sustaining cultural continuity and fostering communal connection.

During an interview on 28 September 2023 at his home in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur, cultural historian and respected elder Laxmi Kant Joshi (84) traced the etymology of “Dêudã” to the Sanskrit term *Bakroli*. According to Joshi, it derives from *Bakra* (irregular or shapeless) and *Uli* (song or storytelling), reflecting the tradition’s irregular melodies and improvisational storytelling. In DTM terms, this highlights performance not as mere entertainment, but as a flexible, participatory practice that allows for both direct and indirect social commentary. Joshi’s reflections also reinforce Dêudã’s historical role as a positionality space—a platform through which community members could express identity, values, and critique, thereby shaping relational dynamics.

Dêudã’s cultural and emotional influence is evident in its religious, social, and satirical forms. Rooted in sacred texts such as the *Ramayana* and *Bhagvat Gita*, it has been used to convey intimate feelings and moral critique. For example, devotional verses like *जयति तेऽधिकं जन्म नाथ जयति इन्द्रिय संयोधनम्...* express the deepest

sentiments of the *Gopinis* toward Lord Krishna. Here, performance and peace intersects, as the act of singing fosters shared emotional resonance and reinforces collective spiritual identity.

Equally significant are the social and political commentaries embedded in Dêudã lyrics. In Bajhang district, Bishnu Khatri recounted how the song *क्या खानु मास्टरको नोकरी, भए कि हेड हुनु...* inspired him to reject a school principalship and pursue civil service, reshaping his life trajectory. This example illustrates Dêudã's capacity to influence decision-making and personal agency, aligning with the model's positionality dimension by demonstrating how individuals reimagine their roles within society.

Other songs engage directly with social justice and structural inequalities. Lyrics such as *घुम्दै जुम्ली जुम्ला बाँझ्यो... हाम्नालाई ठाउँ रैन* address caste discrimination, while *लछ्वाका घरम सुन छ... गरीब हुन्छ हेलो* critiques economic disparity. Similarly, *घाँस काट्न हात कावटयो...* vividly portrays life under poverty. In DTM terms, these performances use artistic expression to challenge exclusionary structures, negotiate identity, and articulate visions of peace grounded in equity and justice.

Taken together, these historical accounts, personal testimonies, and lyrical analyses show that Dêudã has long been a cultural arena where performance mediates positionality to influence pathways toward or away from – peace. This relational interplay, captured by the Dêudã Triangle Model, situates Dêudã not only as heritage but as an evolving practice with the potential to shape community identity, contest injustice, and strengthen social bonds in post-conflict Nepal.

Situating Dêudā Culture during and after the Conflict

The Maoist conflict repurposed Dêudā as a communicative tool for disseminating political ideologies and mobilising support, particularly by emphasising themes of social justice. Interviews with cultural practitioners at the time, including Tulsi Bohara and Surendra Bhandari, revealed a strategic shift in the lyrical content of Dêudā, which aligned with Maoist objectives to address poverty, inequality, and caste and gender disparities in the Terai region. For instance, Tulsi Bohara, a member of a cultural group, frequently sang Dêudā songs and performed dances to raise awareness of political ideologies and contemporary social issues in the region before the conflict ended. She shared that she was not only fighting against the state with arms but was also helping reduce caste and gender injustices within communities. This situation was a significant reason for her joining the Maoist movement and seeking personal emancipation from the constraints of patriarchy. She recalls,

“As a daughter in my family, I often felt unhappy about the gender-based discrimination I encountered and observed in the village. The Maoists occasionally visited our school to identify students who could sing and dance. Due to my interest in music, I can sing Dêudā songs. Eventually, I decided to join the movement, aiming to contribute to change through singing. Once I joined, I sang songs and assisted women whose male counterparts were tortured. I feel very proud of the help I was able to provide.” (Bohara, 2023)
Doti)

When sharing examples of Dêudā songs with the researcher, she asserted that her group was not merely using the songs to inform and entertain the community. The songs advocated for social change through the involvement of community members, striving to create an equitable and accessible society for poor and marginalised communities.

Similarly, Surendra Bhandari, another member of the Dharma group, explained that they used Dêudã songs not only to highlight issues and criticise the current regime but also to illuminate the community members' hope for a better future.

सात जिल्ला क्रान्तिका किल्ला वीरताको खानी, पाटन साँफे मंगलसेन दुस्मन भो खरानी
बादल फाटी भंग लाग्यो कुहिरो त घुम्दैछ, दश बर्ष लडाइँमा बित्यो अब केही हुँदैछ

Surendra Bhandari, 2023, Dadeldhura

*Seven districts – forts of revolution, mines of valour's store,
Patan, Sanphe, Mangalsen – the enemy's ash, no more.*

*The clouds have split, the mist begins to break and roam,
Ten long years of war have passed – now change is coming home.*

These examples indicate the culture of Dêudã during conflicts. The Maoists employed such art to raise awareness, manipulate, and entertain the community over time. In areas where traditional gatherings were disrupted by conflict, Dêudã performances played a crucial role in reestablishing communication channels within the community. These performances address themes of peace, reconciliation, and social harmony, serving as educational tools and inspiring communities towards peaceful coexistence. Including contemporary issues in Dêudã songs ensures that the dialogue remains relevant and meaningful, addressing the community's immediate concerns. This argument aligns with Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed, in which participatory performances facilitate social reflection and transformation.

In the aftermath of the conflict, Dêudã evolved into a medium for social critique and an agent of community awareness of contemporary issues. Dêudã's repertoire has expanded to include songs addressing public health crises, environmental disasters, and the remnants of the conflict, serving as a tool for educational and dialogic engagement within communities. Other respondents observed that the conflict created

numerous problems owing to the inactivity of these cultural activities, primarily due to security threats before the conflict concluded, which directly affected their livelihoods. For them, Dêudã culture serves as an artistic practice and a vital source of income, intertwining economic sustenance with cultural expression. This dual role was particularly significant in the region, where traditional arts provided economic opportunities and social recognition to women.

As Lederach's (1997) highlights, cultural practices such as Dêudã culture enable emotional healing and foster trust, making them crucial for post-conflict recovery. Dêudã culture has become a cornerstone for connecting people through performances, rituals, jatras, and sharing and caring. These activities closely align with community 'peacebuilding' efforts, emphasising the transformative power of cultural heritage in promoting societal well-being and harmony by providing a platform for narrative building and communal reflection. To support this argument, I present the following examples. There are numerous songs on various themes, including songs celebrating the majestic beauty of the Himalayas (अग्ला हिमचुचुरा धन्य हो मालिका), symbolising Nepal, a country that has long been a beacon of peace and natural splendour. In contrast, other lyrics address the harsh realities of conflict, particularly its impact on vulnerable populations, such as women and children (द्वन्द्वका मसला भया महिला बालबालिका).

Likewise, the call for people in some songs not to engage in conflict (*दाजुभाइ नलड अब देशको बिहाल गर्न*) resonates with community 'peacebuilding' efforts that emphasise unity, reconciliation, and the avoidance of violence. The hope expressed in the possibility of the rebirth of Buddha, who is synonymous with peace and

enlightenment, further underscores the desire for lasting peace (होला कि बुद्धको जन्म फेरि शान्ति छन्).

यति अग्ला हिमचुचुरा धन्य हो मालिका
द्वन्द्वका मसला भया महिला बालबालिका
दाजुभाइ नलड अब देशको बिहाल गर्न
होला कि बुद्धको जन्म फेरि शान्ति छन्

Bisnadevi Rokaya
Manakot-1, Kaudakot, Bajura

*So high the snowy peaks – blessed is Malika’s reign,
Yet women and children have borne the conflict’s strain.
Brothers, fight no more – let the nation’s fate be mended,
Perhaps the Buddha will be born again, with peace to be extended.*

The songs under research reflect a profound intertwining of cultural identity and aspirations for peace. They begin by celebrating the majestic beauty of the Himalayas, which serve as a symbolic anchor of national unity, before shifting to the harsh realities of conflict and its impact on vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. This narrative trajectory underscores the disproportionate burdens of conflict on marginalised populations, echoing findings by Krause (2019), who documents how women and children often bear the brunt of post-war instability. In the Nepali context, these lyrics not only highlight suffering but also assert the need for inclusive peace processes that address such inequities.

The call within the songs for “brothers to unite” and to reject violence resonates with Lederach’s (1997) conception of reconciliation as the rebuilding of trust and social fabric fractured by war. Unlike abstract theoretical articulations, however, these performances embed reconciliation within a communal cultural practice, aligning with Stirr’s (2011) analysis of Dohori and Dêudâ songs as vehicles for challenging social hierarchies and fostering critical self-awareness. While Lederach emphasises

dialogue as the basis for relational transformation, the participatory call-and-response form of Dêudã suggests that musical performance itself becomes a dialogical arena, allowing participants to rehearse social unity through rhythm and verse.

Moreover, the invocation of Buddha as a symbol of peace illustrates the use of spiritual imagery in sustaining hope and non-violent ideals, a practice also noted by Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) in their research of theatre initiatives in Sri Lanka. In both contexts, cultural and spiritual symbols serve as motivators for communal resilience and reconciliation, reinforcing Galtung's (1969) argument that peace is sustained not only through structural reforms but also through symbolic practices that nurture positive peace. These findings suggest that Dêudã performances operate as more than cultural entertainment: they provide a platform where collective memory, spiritual identity, and aspirations for peace converge, advancing both the affective and structural dimensions of peacebuilding.

Now, I discuss how this Dêudã culture has become an approach to community 'peacebuilding' in the research communities as key research findings.

Dêudã Culture as a Common Platform

Field visits and interviews confirm that Dêudã has long served as a platform where people gather, share, and connect through music and storytelling. Historically, leaders such as Bhim Dutt Pant used Dêudã as a tool for social mobilisation, embedding messages of justice and equality within its verses. Historically, leaders such as Bhim Dutt Pant have used Dêudã to raise awareness about social justice issues. For example, he encouraged people to challenge inequality and discrimination through

song. For instance, such messages can also be found in this Dêudâ song used by Pant³⁰:

लेक फुल्यो लेक बरुँस, लेकै रह्यो रङ्ग तमु खान्या मु खालो, लाग मेरा सङ्ग अब राज्य नेताको, खेदिन्या हुनु ठालु गरीब खान्ना बासमती, ठालु खान्ना आलु	<i>The hills bloom, the hills blush, the highlands keep their hue, Whoever troubled you may trouble me – so let me share it too. Now the state belongs to leaders, the idle chase their play, The poor will eat Basmati rice, the rich eat potatoes every day!</i>
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This illustrates how Dêudâ has long functioned as a medium for raising political consciousness, resonating with Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which emphasises the use of participatory performance as a way for communities to voice grievances, imagine alternatives, and collectively rehearse social change.

Likewise, respondents repeatedly described how Dêudâ permeates daily life. As one explained: "*In Achham, Bajhang, and Bajura, Deuda is even used in daily conversations. It has surely quieted down these days and is sung more for entertainment's sake, but there was a time when even normal conversations and exchanges in these areas would be carried out in Dêudâ.*" Just as Boal's spect-actors transform theatre into lived practice, Dêudâ integrates performance into daily dialogue, turning cultural expression into an everyday vehicle for reflection and solidarity. Similarly, Joshi further reinforced "the belief that good things happen to

30 On 1st April 1952, Bhim Datta Pant, a farmer's leader who fought against the contemporary oppressive system, initiated the Dêudâ performance in Kanchanpur, Brahmadev, beginning a new awakening. His contribution to using Dêudâ to bring about social change and instil psychological insights in the masses is unparalleled. The farmer movement he led is considered the first and most organised farmer movement in Nepal's history. He utilised Dêudâ as a medium for political, social, and religious reform (Kalauni, 2023, Kathmandu).

those who do good, while those who engage in negative actions face adverse consequences” (Joshi, 2023, Kanchanpur).

The integration of historical accounts and contemporary testimonies shows how Dêudã continues to contribute to community peacebuilding and cohesion. By providing a participatory, dialogical space, Dêudã embodies TO’s principles of inclusivity and empowerment: everyone can join the circle, improvise verses, and co-create meaning. In doing so, Dêudã fosters trust and unity, enabling communities affected by conflict to address shared concerns and strengthen their bonds.

Community members incorporate this into their lives, political parties utilise it to advance their agendas, and local government and non-government agencies use it to raise awareness among community members regarding the implementation of programs and interventions in the region. For instance, “*Dêudã sung by Halis (forced labourers) often express the history of labour exploitation and the changing nature of compensation, from little food and compassion to dedicated amounts of grain or small pieces of land*³¹” which was not possible to express in normal lives in communities where caste-based discrimination exists. This reflects Boal’s goal of creating spaces where marginalised groups can speak truth to power, restoring agency through collective expression.

Furthermore, Dêudã’s platform is not confined to cultural practice alone. Community members use it for everyday interaction, political groups employ it to mobilise support, and local governments and NGOs adopt it to raise awareness of policies and interventions. This multiplicity reflects TO’s central premise: that performance can

³¹ Ram Rawal, a journalist, expressed this in an interview in Kathmandu on 22 September 2023.

serve as a rehearsal for social action, enabling participants to experiment with dialogue, critique power structures, and imagine new possibilities for justice.

In this way, Dêudã functions as more than a cultural tradition: it is a participatory, dialogical platform that brings people together across divides, challenges entrenched hierarchies, and cultivates solidarity. By embodying the principles of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Dêudã demonstrates how indigenous performance can function as both cultural preservation and a grassroots mechanism for peacebuilding and social transformation.

Inclusivity and Empowerment thorough Dêudã Culture

One of the most significant aspects of Dêudã culture is its inclusivity, particularly its ability to provide space for women and marginalised communities such as the Dalits, who have historically been excluded from many public and cultural forums. Freire's (1970) concept of cultural action is particularly relevant here. Freire argues that when marginalised groups actively participate in cultural practices, they develop critical consciousness that enables them to question entrenched hierarchies and pursue social change. Dêudã exemplifies this process by offering participants the opportunity to speak, sing, and perform in ways that confront patriarchal and caste-based exclusion.

Mamta's story as a Giteru illustrates this transformation. Initially using Dêudã as a private outlet, she eventually became a lead singer, breaking long-standing gender barriers and gaining both recognition and economic independence. Her testimony demonstrates how participation in Dêudã fosters not only self-expression but also empowerment, reflecting Freire's notion that cultural practice can be a vehicle for liberation. Similarly, Dêudã songs addressing caste discrimination amplify the voices of those historically silenced. As one respondent explained, "Even father and son can

talk to each other in Dêudã... it is important that the whole village can sing and dance together.” Such accounts illustrate how Dêudã’s participatory form embodies egalitarian dialogue, resonating with Lederach’s (2005) emphasis on reconciliation through relational and creative interaction.

Women’s participation in festivals such as Bishu parv, marriages, and Jatras underscores the cultural centrality of Dêudã. Mamta (2023) noted that female leaders were once rarely invited to lead performances, as communities doubted their capacity. Over time, however, attitudes shifted, and women began to take on prominent leadership roles. This progression echoes broader empirical findings: Stirr (2011) documented how Dohori performances in Nepal provided women with new avenues for leadership, while Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) observed similar dynamics in Sri Lanka, where participatory theatre enabled women to challenge gender norms. In both cases, cultural performance served as a transformative site for shifting gender dynamics.

Attending festivals and ceremonies such as *Bishu* parv, marriages, and *Jatras* in and around the villages offers women an opportunity to express themselves and to be heard. Dêudã performances are compulsory during these events, providing a platform for social integration and enhancing gender dynamics through a call to action. A narrative from a female respondent adds meaning to this observation.

“A few years ago, we [female Giteru leaders] were rarely invited to lead the team simply because we were female. The community did not believe in our capacity to improve the song, or perhaps our male counterparts felt reluctant to respond to a female leader. However, this situation has changed gradually. It is much easier now, and society is more open compared to the past” (Mamta, 2023, Bajura).

Lyrics themselves often challenge gender and caste hierarchies. For instance, songs such as *घोगा लाडी घर लाया, फलाटवक बाँसी...* address the unequal distribution of resources and rights, while Padam Kalauni's verse *लाइ तेरो कपडा मेरो चोलो सिद्धे दर्जी/ जात-भेदको छुवाछुत नहेर एकै हराँ मर्जी* uses clothing as a metaphor for shared humanity, calling for an end to caste discrimination. These lyrics explicitly confront structural violence, a concept Galtung (1969) defines as the systemic exclusion that perpetuates inequality and suffering. By embedding such critiques in cultural performance, Dêudã creates a socially legitimate and emotionally resonant medium for contesting injustice.

The increasing involvement of women in Dêudã not only signifies progress in gender equality but also empowers women to engage more actively in cultural and social spheres. Tulsi from Doti recounted, "In Doti, I was the first woman to play Dêudã with men. There are still other regions where women are not allowed to enter. All the women in Doti told me that they had never seen a woman play Dêudã with men. Now they are also encouraged to do that." This quote illustrates the transformative impact of women's participation in Dêudã, which breaks traditional barriers and encourages broader female participation. The shift towards gender and class inclusivity in Dêudã reflects broader societal changes towards equality and empowerment, showcasing the potential of cultural practices to drive social progress within the community. The given Dêudã presents the compulsion of the Dalit community by expressing caste discrimination.

घुम्दै जुम्ली जुम्ला बाँझ्यो, वाँ माथि गाउँ
रैन,
जन्ती न मलामी तमा, हाम्राई ठाउँ रैन

*Going around Jumla, Jumla has passed by;
up there, there was no village.
Neither wedding guests nor funeral mourners
were yours; for ours, there was no place.*

Similarly, while Dêudã has made strides in addressing caste-based discrimination, deeply entrenched societal norms continue to challenge its efforts. Dêudã practice allows for open dialogue and questioning of social constructs, providing a platform for marginalised voices to be heard. One respondent stated, “During songs, questions and answers are allowed. So, irrespective of the social constructs around caste or class, we can stand in front of them and truly express our questions”. This quote highlights Dêudã’s role in facilitating conversations about caste and social hierarchy, enabling participants to challenge and reflect on these constructs. However, the persistence of caste-based discrimination indicates that while Dêudã can promote social change, there is still a need for continued efforts towards social equity and inclusion when they are performed publicly.

Yet respondents also acknowledged the persistence of caste-based discrimination. One noted, “*During songs, questions and answers are allowed... irrespective of caste or class, we can truly express our questions.*” This demonstrates both the potential and the limits of Dêudã. While it fosters open dialogue and empowers marginalised voices, structural hierarchies remain deeply entrenched, requiring sustained cultural and political action beyond the performances themselves. This aligns with Bates’ (2016) caution that arts-based interventions may not always yield immediate structural change but can catalyse awareness and long-term transformation.

Public Dêudã performances thus serve as inclusive forums where communities negotiate identity, express emotion, and rehearse visions of equality. By integrating Freire’s framework of cultural action, Galtung’s analysis of structural violence, and Lederach’s conception of moral imagination, Dêudã emerges not simply as a cultural

tradition but as a practice that facilitates empowerment, challenges oppression, and nurtures reconciliation. Documented instances of female leadership in traditionally male-dominated performances highlight a progressive shift toward gender equality, catalysing broader social acceptance and participatory equity.

Emotional Resonance in Dêudã Culture

Dêudã transcends its surface function as a musical tradition to serve as a profound medium for emotional and communal healing. Rooted in cultural and historical contexts, Dêudã encapsulates deeply personal and collective narratives of joy, suffering, resilience, and hope. For instance, Dikra Badi, a well-known Dêudã singer, recalled: *“I especially sing in Thadi Bhaka. It is sung during experiences of sorrow, loss, heartbreak, and abuse. Fellow sisters used to cry listening to my words in songs because they felt like I was singing about their lives.”* This illustrates how Dêudã operates as a mechanism for individuals to externalise personal suffering in a supportive communal context. Nussbaum (2001) argues that emotions are not irrational impulses but central to cultivating empathy and moral understanding. In line with her perspective, Badi’s testimony demonstrates how the emotional resonance of Dêudã creates pathways for empathy and recognition, allowing participants to experience their private pain as a shared reality.

The importance of this emotional resonance is amplified in post-conflict societies, where trust and social cohesion have been severely eroded. Lederach’s (2005) concept of the moral imagination emphasises the creative capacity to envision new relationships in the wake of violence. Dêudã facilitates this by fostering shared emotional experiences that rebuild relational trust. In these communal performances, individuals move beyond isolated suffering and begin to rehearse possibilities of unity

and reconciliation. This dynamic reflects Galtung's (1996) notion of positive peace, in which the transformation of structural and relational inequalities is as crucial as ending direct violence.

Dêudã's emotional functions extend beyond personal healing to strengthen collective identity and solidarity. Maya Prakash observed, "*One of the most beautiful aspects of Dêudã is its ability to bring people together. During Dêudã performances, the community participates, creating a strong sense of unity and shared identity.*" Comparative evidence supports this view: Stirr (2011) documented how Dohori performances created participatory spaces for dialogue and critique in rural Nepal, while Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) highlighted similar dynamics in Sri Lankan participatory theatre, where emotionally charged performance enabled dialogue across divided communities. These parallels suggest that the participatory, affective dimension of Dêudã is key to its peacebuilding potential.

The adaptability of Dêudã also ensures its relevance as a form of social commentary. As Dikra Badi observed, contemporary Dêudã increasingly addresses issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, and political corruption. This resonates with Burcu's (2022) findings on Mithila art, which reoriented traditional motifs to highlight gender justice, and Howell's (2022) work on arts-based activism, which emphasises the civic role of cultural expression. Through its evolving lyrics, Dêudã transforms from a folk practice into a platform for raising awareness and challenging entrenched injustices, underscoring its dual role as cultural heritage and social critique.

The testimonies of practitioners further illuminate the affective breadth of Dêudã. Prakash Bhatta explained that Dêudã "*aims to build relationships through sharing*

emotions to create social cohesion.” Ram Bohara elaborated on its origins as monologues of loneliness, struggles, or longing that evolved into collective performances. This evolution reflects Nussbaum’s (2001) argument that shared emotions provide a moral bridge between private experience and communal solidarity, transforming personal expression into a collective practice of healing. Moreover, by providing a socially acceptable medium to express complex emotions such as anger, love, and frustration with injustice, Dêudã enables constructive engagement with sensitive issues that might otherwise remain suppressed.

Even in contexts of geographical displacement, Dêudã retains its emotional resonance. Mahesh, a musician based in Kathmandu, noted: *“Even when we create songs here in Kathmandu, we carry the memories of that place in our hearts. We can draw inspiration from those memories, so there’s no fundamental difference in the essence of the music whether we create it there or here.”* This illustrates how Dêudã sustains cultural memory and emotional ties across distances, echoing Lederach’s emphasis on the imaginative reconstruction of identity and belonging in fractured contexts.

Taken together, these findings highlight the transformative potential of Dêudã’s emotional dimensions. By integrating Nussbaum’s theory of emotions, Lederach’s moral imagination, and Galtung’s positive peace, this research shows how Dêudã fosters empathy, enables reconciliation, and sustains cultural identity in the aftermath of conflict. Yet its continued impact also raises critical questions of accessibility and inclusivity. While Dêudã provides platforms for marginalised voices, entrenched hierarchies—particularly regarding caste and gender—still limit full equity in

participation. As Bates (2016) cautions, arts-based practices may not always yield immediate structural change but can catalyse emotional readiness for transformation over time. Addressing these complexities is vital to ensure that Dêudã continues to function as a culturally grounded and adaptive instrument for healing and peacebuilding, both in Nepal and in diasporic contexts.

Connecting People and Building Relationships

At its core, Dêudã brings people together and builds relationships. Whether during a local festival or a casual gathering, Dêudã creates an environment in which people share their stories and experiences. During festivals in the Dadeldhura, Kailali, Kanchanpur, and Achham districts, people from different areas/villages come together to sing and dance, celebrating their shared heritage. The participants believe that such gatherings help reduce misunderstandings and build trust between individuals and communities. In this section, I present Dêudã Khel as it is performed during the Gaura Festival in Dhangadhi, Kailali, Nepal. My analysis draws on participatory observations conducted on 15 August 2022. Through this observation, I aim to uncover how this performance not only reflects but also strengthens communal bonds and cultural heritage, ultimately promoting peace at personal, interpersonal, and communal levels.

The Dêudã Khel, or dance, was organised by a group known as ‘Gadgarkha’—residents of what is now Nawadurga Rural Municipality in Dadeldhura, who currently reside in Kailali district. These individuals have roots in one of the Garkhas of Dadeldhura District. The dance is performed during the auspicious Gaura Festival, which is dedicated to the goddess Gaura, the consort of Lord Shiva. This festival is a

time of collective celebration, with the Dêudã dance playing a central role in uniting community members from diverse social groups.

As a participant observer, I engaged with the Dêudã dance not only from an academic standpoint but also as an active participant in the ritual. This experience revealed the vital role of dance in fostering social cohesion. Participants, ranging from youth, women, men, and elders, contributed to the collective energy of the performance. The inclusiveness of the dance was evident in the way the circle expanded and contracted, seamlessly incorporating new participants.

During the performance, the act of holding hands while moving in synchrony created palpable trust among participants. My own participation revealed how physical vulnerability, such as relying on one another for coordinated steps, was met with mutual support, generating an immediate sense of solidarity. This embodied insight, possible through arts-based participant observation, clarified how peacebuilding in Dêudã is experienced at both emotional and relational levels.

One significant observation was the subtle leadership displayed by the elderly members of the community. These individuals often took the lead in maintaining rhythm and guiding movements and were respected and followed by other participants. This dynamic reflects the community's deep respect for age and experience and the role of tradition in preserving social order.

The participatory nature of the Dêudã dance also highlights the fluid boundaries between observers and participants. Initially, I hesitated to join the dance, concerned that my involvement might disrupt the authenticity of the performance. However, the community's warm and welcoming attitude quickly dispelled this concern, allowing me to fully immerse myself in the experience of the festival. This interaction

underscored the inclusive nature of the Dêudã dance, where participation is accepted and encouraged, regardless of one's familiarity with the tradition. My case was different.

As a local resident and being familiar with the tradition, it was easier and convenient for me despite I did not have experience of attending such dances. The Dêudã dance can be analysed through the lens of performative theory, which suggests that cultural performances not only reflect social realities but also shape them (Schechner, 2003). In the case of the Dêudã dance, the performance acts as a medium through which the community's values and social structures are expressed and strengthened. Dancing together, singing in unison, and following the lead singer as respected Gitaru contribute to the community's collective identity and cohesion.

This observation is consistent with Victor Turner's concept of "communitas" (1969), which describes how communal rituals generate a sense of unity and equality among the participants. The Dêudã dance exemplifies this phenomenon by blurring the boundaries between individual and collective identity. During the performance, social hierarchies are temporarily suspended, fostering communal harmony while subtly upholding respect for traditional authority. Participation in Dêudã likely provides relief and enjoyment for individuals as they engage with others – individually or in groups—and reconnect with members of their community in a new setting, thereby reinforcing a sense of communal belonging.

The Dêudã dance in Kailali provides a powerful example of how cultural performances function as both a reflection and reinforcement of communal identity. Through my participatory observation, it became clear that the dance is not merely a cultural expression but also a social practice that fosters unity and continuity within

the community. This case research contributes to a broader understanding of the critical role of traditional performances in Nepal in maintaining cultural heritage and social cohesion.

While interview participants spoke about the joy and unity of Dêudã, my embodied involvement revealed how these sentiments were not merely rhetorical but performed through rhythm and movement. The tactile and non-verbal dimensions of the practice thus reinforced the discursive emphasis on togetherness.

These embodied interactions echo Boal's (1979) notion of the 'spect-actor,' as participants, including myself, actively shaped the performance rather than observing passively. They also resonate with Lederach's (2005) concept of moral imagination, as the physical synchrony of Dêudã opened a shared imaginative space for new relational possibilities.

Harmonising Traditions with Modernisation and Digitalisation

While Dêudã has deep roots in tradition, it has also adapted to modern times, ensuring its relevance for younger generations. In recent years, Dêudã has incorporated new elements such as rap music, making it increasingly popular among youth and urban audiences, including Nepali diasporas abroad. This blending of the old and the new illustrates how cultural heritage evolves dynamically, enabling Dêudã to maintain continuity while embracing innovation. As one respondent observed, "These days, when explaining or analysing Dêudã or other songs of Nepal, there are different aspects and outlooks to analyse them. Now folklore and folk [songs]..." Such reflections point to the layered meanings that contemporary audiences attach to Dêudã.

However, modernisation presents both opportunities and challenges. Habermas (1984) argues that cultural practices retain authenticity when they sustain dialogue and shared understanding within the public sphere. Applied to Dêudã, this suggests that its survival depends on balancing innovation with the preservation of its dialogical essence. While incorporating modern influences makes Dêudã appealing to youth, it also risks diluting its symbolic value if performances prioritise commercial popularity over communal meaning.

Empirical evidence shows that Dêudã has successfully transitioned into Nepal's commercial music industry, particularly in Kathmandu, expanding its reach beyond rural origins. Stirr (2012) documents how this shift broadened Dêudã's accessibility, merging rural traditions with urban consumerism. Remix versions—including rap collaborations—have resonated with young audiences, embedding Dêudã in contemporary cultural landscapes. Yet this transition also carries risks. As one respondent noted, “vulgar or indecent lyrics aimed solely at achieving viral success” may overshadow songs celebrating national identity (Maya Prakash, 2023). This reflects Howell's (2022) warning that commodification of folk traditions can lead to a loss of cultural depth, as economic incentives reshape artistic expression.

Despite these tensions, Dêudã continues to serve as a voice for marginalised groups, including peasants, women, and Dalits. Ayer (2023) notes that subaltern consciousness expressed in folk songs channels suffering, protest, and resilience, underscoring their enduring social relevance. Similarly, Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) found that in Sri Lanka, arts-based performances enabled communities to articulate grievances in culturally resonant ways despite modern pressures. This

suggests that Dêudã's adaptability has not diminished its critical role as a medium of social commentary.

The growing presence of Dêudã songs and their artists on digital platforms plays a crucial role in advocating for the national recognition of Far-western art and culture. This digitalisation effort effectively bridges regional traditions with the national cultural narrative, fostering inclusivity and a broader appreciation of the Dêudã culture. Digital transformation not only helps preserve the traditional roots of Dêudã but also ensures its relevance in the digital age by adapting it to contemporary settings (Stirr, 2012). However, there are claims about Dêudã's role in reconciliation and community bonding, such as "*the story of a man's estranged wife returning home after hearing his song on the radio.*"³² (Lal, 2023), these assertions would benefit from more concrete evidence to substantiate the emotional and relational impact of traditional arts. Critical reflection on this claim suggests that while Dêudã undoubtedly has a significant cultural and emotional influence, specific instances of reconciliation must be documented and analysed to robustly support such statements.

Digitalisation has amplified this role by bringing Dêudã into national and global spaces. Online platforms have allowed artists to advocate for the recognition of Far-Western art and culture, bridging regional traditions with Nepal's broader cultural narrative. As Stirr (2012) notes, digital circulation both preserves tradition and reshapes it for new contexts, fostering inclusivity and expanding cultural recognition. Yet claims about Dêudã's direct role in reconciliation—such as reports of estranged families reunited after hearing songs on the radio (Lal, 2023)—require further documentation. As Bates (2016) cautions, arts-based practices can inspire

³² Interview with Lal Bahadur Dhami, 23 September 2023, Dhangadhi, Kailali.

emotional resonance, but concrete evidence is needed to assess their impact on structural reconciliation.

At the same time, Dêudã's increasing commercialisation raises concerns about artistic integrity. Respondents highlighted tensions between maintaining cultural devotion and adapting to market-driven pressures. Ayer (2023) similarly argues that economic imperatives risk shifting the focus of traditional arts from communal expression to financial gain. This tension echoes Galtung's (1996) analysis of structural violence: when cultural expressions become subordinated to economic hierarchies, they risk perpetuating rather than challenging inequality.

The use of Dêudã for political purposes further complicates its role. While political movements often mobilise cultural forms to advance social justice, respondents expressed unease about the potential for manipulation, where performances prioritise partisan agendas over communal unity (Prakash 2023; Kailai). This underscores Lederach's (2005) insight that authentic peacebuilding requires spaces of relational trust that cannot be reduced to political instrumentalisation.

In sum, the modernisation and digitalisation of Dêudã demonstrate its adaptability and enduring relevance, but they also raise critical questions about authenticity, inclusivity, and integrity. By situating Dêudã within Habermas's framework of dialogical authenticity, Galtung's structural critique, and comparative empirical evidence, this analysis shows that sustaining Dêudã requires careful balance: innovation must not undermine its role as a vehicle of emotional resonance, social critique, and cultural cohesion.

Building Peace Through Dêudã Culture

During the Maoist conflict, Dêudã was not merely a form of entertainment but an important medium for raising awareness of social issues such as caste discrimination and gender inequality. Beyond its cultural value, Dêudã provided participatory spaces where individuals could voice grievances, process trauma, and collectively reflect on community concerns. This function resonates strongly with Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which reconceptualises audiences as "spect-actors" capable of co-creating meaning and challenging structures of oppression. In a similar fashion, Dêudã's call-and-response format breaks down the performer–audience divide, allowing any participant to join, improvise, and contribute to the dialogue. In this way, Dêudã embodies Boal's vision of theatre as a rehearsal for social change.

Dêudã continues to play a key role in bringing people together, helping them overcome divisions, and building a shared vision of peace in the country. Dêudã inspires communities to work towards a more just and harmonious society through songs that convey messages of reconciliation and hope.

This participatory ethos also echoes Lederach's (2005) framework of reconciliation, which emphasises the rebuilding of fractured relationships through relational dialogue and the exercise of moral imagination. While Lederach often situates reconciliation within structured peacebuilding initiatives, Dêudã demonstrates how such relational work can be embedded in local cultural practices. Through metaphor, humour, and rhythmic performance, communities use Dêudã to re-envision fractured relationships and enact unity, thereby contributing to long-term peacebuilding.

Empirical studies reinforce the transformative potential of such practices. Stirr (2011) shows how Dohori songs in Nepal enabled marginalised groups to critique social

hierarchies and foster empathy, while Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) illustrate how participatory theatre in Sri Lanka created safe spaces for communities to confront trauma and imagine alternative futures. Similarly, Shank and Schirch (2008) highlight the role of arts in evoking emotional responses essential for empathy and understanding, and Cohen (2011) documents how community arts programmes provide safe spaces for processing trauma. Dêudã extends these dynamics through its indigenous, self-sustained character, maintaining cultural legitimacy without reliance on external facilitation.

- **Community Dialogue and Healing**

In the context of the Dêudã culture, this artistic and cultural practice has shown significant potential for contributing to community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, particularly in post-conflict regions such as Nepal. Several key mechanisms are described below.

One of the findings was that the Dêudã culture facilitated community dialogue and understanding through songs and cultural activities. Most respondents agreed that Dêudã culture provides a platform for dialogue among community members, including where conflict has left deep scars in the past or ongoing conflicts in daily lives – personal, interpersonal, and community levels. It is evident how Mamta Dhami empowered herself to this level despite her painful past during the conflict. She shared,

As a single mother in a patriarchal society, I have found that performing Dêudã is much more than just a cultural expression; it has become my lifeline. Initially, I treated Dêudã as a diary, a personal friend to whom I could express my feelings. Writing in diaries has always been a way for me to ensure that if anything happened to me, there would be something left behind for my friends to remember me. Over time, I began to sing and perform Dêudã, which

allowed me to connect with others in my community in a meaningful way. What began as a personal solace gradually evolved into a source of income. Today, members of my community invite me to perform as a Gitaru, which has become a vital means of earning a living. Despite my difficult circumstances, performing Dêudã helps me care for my children and navigate the challenges of being a single mother in a society that often marginalises women like myself.

Findings from this research confirm that Dêudã facilitates community dialogue and understanding, particularly in contexts scarred by conflict. Respondents consistently noted that Dêudã provides a platform for dialogue across personal, interpersonal, and communal levels. For example, Mamta Dhami, a single mother, described how Dêudã evolved from a personal outlet into a vital source of empowerment, income, and community connection. Her testimony illustrates how performance can transform private suffering into collective recognition, echoing Nussbaum's (2001) view that shared emotional expression fosters empathy and moral understanding.

Agreeing with her notion of initiating dialogue, Tulsi Rawal (2023) further emphasised how this culture supports fostering understanding, "As the lead artist in Dêudã performances, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand how the participatory nature of this tradition can bring people together, regardless of their backgrounds or even any conflicts they may have had. Through the shared experience of music and dance, I have seen individuals open up, express their emotions, and gain a deeper understanding of each other. These moments were significant for me. In my performances, I always strive to convey a message of respect and unity through my songs, encouraging everyone to honour and appreciate one another." Similarly, while serving as a Maoist performer, Bohara shared a story of helping a woman in a village of Bajhang district who was supposed to be a victim of her husband and how she

made the town understand the reality of GBV through the story of a drunkard husband torturing his wife. She recalls:

“I remember when our group was mobilised in a village in the Bajhang district. As we spent time there, I often chatted with the locals to better understand their lives. During one of these conversations, I learned about a woman whose story had a profound impact on me. Her husband, a habitual drunkard, tortured her daily without reason. She was in such a dark place that she was having suicidal thoughts, but she held on because she had to care for her children. Her pain was unbearable, and I felt that I had to do something. I decided to contact her secretly, hoping to provide some support. My group and I decided to incorporate Dêudã performances into our campaign, focusing on the themes of reducing gender-based violence and empowering women through art. At that time, our voices were seen as a threat, and we knew we had to be ready for any consequence. Looking back, our efforts have made a difference. Although it was a small step, it gave hope that violence against women could be reduced through awareness and solidarity.

Such shared experiences help bridge divides by transcending language and cultural barriers, offering a medium for sharing and understanding emotions and stories in greater depth. For example, the Dêudã festival in Achham District has evolved into a significant community-driven event that celebrates cultural heritage while promoting dialogue and unity. This festival preserves cultural practices and serves as a platform for addressing social issues and fostering dialogue among community members, thereby contributing to community ‘peacebuilding’. These examples demonstrate how Dêudã serves as a medium for moral instruction and collective problem-solving, aligning with Lederach’s call for creative spaces that enable communities to transform conflictual relationships. Such experiences are not isolated. The annual Dêudã festival in Achham has grown into a community-driven event that both preserves cultural heritage and promotes dialogue on pressing social issues. This reflects Howell’s (2022) argument that arts can provide platforms for civic engagement while

strengthening local identities, though their impact depends on cultural resonance and sustained participation.

- **Narratives of Forgiveness and Social Critique**

Dêudã songs frequently feature narratives of forgiveness, compromise, and social critique, which are crucial for rebuilding trust in post-conflict societies. These performances function as both educational and inspirational tools, encouraging communities to move beyond grievances toward coexistence. Hunter (2005) and McEvoy-Levy (2012) argue that such cultural narratives promote empathy and moral observation, directly contributing to reconciliation.

The participatory nature of Dêudã amplifies these messages: collective singing and dancing create inclusive environments where unity and forgiveness can be expressed and embodied. Evidence from Shank and Schirch (2008) supports the claim that community-based art initiatives enhance trust and cooperation, reinforcing social cohesion.

Likewise, the Dêudã culture calls for help in community healing and reconciliation. Dêudã culture has been instrumental in healing communities affected by conflict. Participating in Dêudã performances – singing, dancing, or simply listening – provides a collective space for processing trauma and rebuilding identity. This culture is particularly evident in stories from performers and participants who have used Dêudã to explore themes of forgiveness and unity, aiding reconciliation. For instance, the lyrics below reflect the deep-seated frustrations and feelings of suppression experienced by peons in remote government offices in Nepal. The peon compares the current power dynamics to the past, where the former kings have been replaced by

new elites (पहिला छिया कोट्या राजा अहिले भया ठालु). This power shift has not improved the situation for ordinary people, as those in authority continue to exploit and oppress the masses, leading to their suffering (सोसी खान्या शासकका सुकीगया तालु).

पहिला छिया कोट्या राजा अहिले भया ठालु
सोसी खान्या शासकका सुकीगया तालु
मा मरी मुल्याहा चल्ला रुखका रुखै छन्
जा सम्म राजतन्त्र होला वा सम्म दुखै छन्

Santosh BK
Martadi-2, Jilli, Bajura

The imagery of withered trees symbolises the withering hopes and unfulfilled promises of justice and equality (मा मरी मुल्याहा चल्ला रुखका रुखै छन्). The peon further laments that as long as the remnants of the monarchy and the associated hierarchical structures persist, so too will the suffering of ordinary people (जा सम्म राजतन्त्र होला वा सम्म दुखै छन्). This narrative resonates strongly with peace and conflict studies themes, particularly the enduring nature of structural violence and the importance of addressing deep-rooted inequalities and power imbalances to achieve lasting peace and social justice (Galtung, 1969). The lyrics express profound disillusionment with existing power structures and a call for genuine change, reflecting broader discourses in peace scholarship on the need to dismantle oppressive systems and promote inclusive governance that genuinely addresses the needs of the marginalised (Krause, 2019). Such songs aim to empathise with the victims and call for changing the behaviours of so-called high caste/class people.

The imagery of withered trees symbolises withering hopes, reflecting the persistence of structural violence. This resonates with Galtung's (1969) concept of structural

violence, underscoring the necessity of addressing systemic inequalities in post-conflict peacebuilding. By embedding these critiques within cultural performance, Dêudã calls for both empathy with victims and systemic change, complementing Krause's (2019) argument that inclusive processes are necessary to address the needs of the marginalised.

- **Challenging Caste Discrimination and Inequality**

Dêudã performances also challenge caste-based discrimination, a pervasive form of structural violence in Nepal. By highlighting issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, and the impact of the civil war, Dêudã's performances contribute to the broader discourse on social justice. The growing presence of Dêudã on digital platforms and its incorporation into local festivals further amplifies these messages, making them accessible to a broader audience. For instance, the annual Dêudã festival in the Achham district features workshops and discussions focused on community 'peacebuilding', effectively leveraging Dêudã as a medium of community development and social integration. Likewise, the lyrics below speak to the deep-rooted issues of caste discrimination and the call for unity in the face of such social divisions: The metaphor of clothing, where one person's fabric becomes another's garment (लाइ तेरो कपडा मेरो चोलो सिद्धे दर्जी), symbolises the shared humanity that transcends superficial differences like caste. The plea to disregard caste-based discrimination and embrace unity (जात-भेदको छुवाछुत नहेर एकै हरीं मर्जी) reflects a powerful message against the social injustices perpetuated by caste-based exclusion and untouchability.

लाइ तेरो कपडा मेरो चोलो सिद्धे दर्जी

जात-भेदको छुवाछुत नहेर एकै हराँ मजी
*Your fabric, my blouse – the tailor sews them both straight.
Do not look at caste discrimination and untouchability – let's live as equals, as we wish.*

Padam Kalauni,
Kathmandu

This sentiment aligns with critical peace and social justice scholarship discussions that challenge and dismantle entrenched social hierarchies that perpetuate inequality and conflict. Caste discrimination, a form of structural violence, not only marginalises individuals but also perpetuates cycles of poverty, exclusion, and social unrest.

This reflects broader peace and social justice scholarship, which stresses the dismantling of entrenched hierarchies as a prerequisite for sustainable peace (Galtung, 1996; Krause, 2019). By framing such critiques in culturally resonant forms, Dêudã culture provides communities with a legitimate and accessible platform to contest inequality. Comparative research affirms the effectiveness of such practices: in Bosnia, Opacin (2022) found that storytelling projects fostered empathy across ethnic divisions, while Mithila art in Nepal has been used to advance gender justice (Burcu, 2022). Dêudã stands alongside these initiatives, but with the distinctive advantage of being both indigenous and widely practiced across generations.

- **Documentation and Sustainability**

Finally, the need to document and sustain Dêudã as a tool for peacebuilding is urgent. Supporting community-based initiatives that emphasise local ownership and cultural legitimacy is essential for ensuring long-term impact. Collaborations with cultural organisations and state institutions can provide the resources necessary for Dêudã initiatives to flourish, while systematic documentation of performances, oral histories, and lyrics will preserve this heritage for future generations. As singer

Mahesh Auji reflects, even when composing in Kathmandu, performers carry the memories of their homeland, underscoring Dêudã's deep cultural resonance.

Documenting and supporting Dêudã is not only a matter of cultural preservation but also a peacebuilding imperative. Festivals and performances strengthen intergenerational dialogue, reinforce cultural values, and provide spaces for communities to address contemporary social issues. By sustaining Dêudã, Nepal can leverage its cultural heritage as a dynamic resource for reconciliation, healing, and social cohesion in the aftermath of conflict.

Documenting Dêudã practices and narratives is essential for preserving cultural heritage and providing resources for future community 'peacebuilding' initiatives in the region. Oral histories, recordings, and written accounts serve as valuable tools for education and advocacy, ensuring that the knowledge and values embedded in Dêudã are preserved and accessible. Mahesh Auji, a Dêudã singer, reflects, "Even when we create songs here in Kathmandu, we carry the memories of that place in our hearts. We can draw inspiration from those memories, so there is no fundamental difference in the essence of the music whether we create it there or here." This highlights the importance of Dêudã in various contexts to ensure its relevance.

In summary, while Dêudã culture is primarily a traditional artistic form, it plays a critical role in community 'peacebuilding' by fostering dialogue, empathy, healing, and social critique in the post-war context. Its ongoing relevance and adaptability underscore its importance as a dynamic cultural practice that supports individual and collective healing in post-conflict settings. Integrating Dêudã into broader community 'peacebuilding' frameworks can serve as a model for leveraging cultural heritage to promote social cohesion and sustainable peace in the region. By continuing to support

and document Dêudã, we can ensure that this rich cultural heritage remains a powerful force for peace. Festivals and performances underscore Dêudã's vital role in strengthening community bonds, fostering a sense of belonging, and facilitating intergenerational dialogue, which is essential for the sustainability of cultural practices and preservation of community cohesion. Through these communal activities, Dêudã continues to serve as a bridge between generations, promoting cultural knowledge and values and supporting the transmission of this rich cultural heritage to younger community members.

While Dêudã culture is deeply rooted in tradition, it plays a vital role in post-war peacebuilding by fostering dialogue, empathy, forgiveness, and social critique. Through the combined lenses of Boal, Lederach, Galtung, and Nussbaum, and supported by comparative empirical studies, Dêudã emerges as a unique and powerful practice that transforms cultural expression into a vehicle for healing and justice. Its adaptability and enduring relevance highlight its potential as a model for culturally grounded and sustainable peacebuilding.

A Pathway to Financial Independence and Livelihood

Dêudã culture has maintained its cultural significance and emerged as a crucial economic activity for its practitioners. Economic narratives from participants, such as Lal Parki (2023), underscore the dual role of dêudã in providing both a source of income and a platform for social appreciation, thereby supporting the livelihoods of individuals engaged in this art. He highlighted this symbiotic relationship: "I take it as an occupation. First, it is a means of my livelihood. Second, it is something I know and am good at. From a very young age, I have been involved in Dêudã, and along with livelihood, it has also given me opportunities to gain fame and popularity among

people.” This quote underscores how Dêudã enables individuals to support themselves financially while contributing to the perpetuation and celebration of their culture. It also supports Cohen’s (2005) integration of livelihood with cultural activities that demonstrate the sustainability and resilience of traditional practices in contemporary society, where economic and cultural needs often intersect for peace.

Similarly, this research found that Dêudã transcends mere entertainment as a powerful medium for social awareness and political commentary. Its versatility allows it to address various issues, from health crises to political unrest, making it a relevant and impactful form of social expression in the digital age. For instance, one practitioner noted, *“I also sing Dêudã to raise awareness in society. The subject matters vary; for example, I sang to raise awareness against AIDS, during floods, about the civil war, and on a few political satires.”* The Dêudã song in the box vividly backgrounds the plight of individuals suffering from leprosy, highlighting their harsh conditions, such as the biting cold, and their profound need for love and care. While today, leprosy patients receive free medication, and the disease is considered treatable, historically, it was perceived as a manifestation of severe sins from past lives and was deemed both incurable and highly contagious. Consequently, leprosy patients were forcibly isolated in remote caves to prevent disease spread. Driven by concerns for their families, patients often willingly accepted isolation. As their condition deteriorated, they grew increasingly weak and ultimately died in profound misery, cut off from the warmth and compassion they desperately needed.

Moreover, our research found that the narratives within Dêudã songs play a critical role in promoting empathy and healing among the listeners. By sharing stories of suffering, resilience, and hope, Dêudã performances create shared emotional

experiences that help to mend fractured relationships. This deep emotional resonance fosters empathy among participants, which is essential for conflict resolution and community healing. Additionally, Dêudã's emphasis on collective participation reinforces social bonds and builds a sense of solidarity, thus strengthening social cohesion.

This highlights Dêudã's role in communicating critical social messages and engaging the community in meaningful conversations. Dêudã's ability to adapt to contemporary issues while maintaining its traditional roots underscores its enduring relevance and capacity to contribute meaningfully to sociopolitical discourse.

Bridging Generations through Dialogue

This research identified some challenges and strategies concerning the continuity and adaptation of Dêudã in the face of generational shifts and modernisation. Adopting a social science perspective, the participants in this research highlighted Dêudã's enduring role in organising revolutionary consciousness and transmitting cultural messages across generations. As Ram Bohara (2023) observes, *"the impact of singing one Dêudã or the same Dêudã multiple times varies greatly. However, what stays constant is the way it organises revolutionary consciousness and transmits messages across generations."* This insight underscores Dêudã's function as a cultural practice and a dynamic tool for social education and activism.

Community-driven efforts prioritising local traditions and needs are crucial to ensure the relevance and impact of Dêudã in promoting peace and social cohesion. Trilokya Nath Pathak emphasises the importance of local ownership, stating,

"The Dêudã culture embodies a diverse and vibrant heritage that is deeply rooted in the far western region of Nepal. Through Dêudã culture, we preserve

our local history and moral teachings and forge connections with our religious, social, and cultural heritage” (Pathak, 2023).

These reverberate with Boal’s (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which conceptualises performance as a participatory space where communities collectively rehearse responses to social oppression and explore pathways for transformation.

Furthermore, I present Dêudã Khel as it is performed during the Gaura Festival in Dhangadhi, Kailali, Nepal. My analysis draws on participatory observations conducted on 15 August 2021. Through this observation, I aim to uncover how this performance reflects and strengthens communal bonds and cultural heritage, promoting peace at the personal, interpersonal, and communal levels.

The Dêudã Khel, or dance, was organised by a group known as ‘Gadgarkha’—residents of what is now the Nawadurga Rural Municipality in Dadeldhura, who currently live in the Kailali district. These people have roots in one of the Gurkhas (local units) of the Dadeldhura District. The dance is performed during the auspicious Gaura Festival, dedicated to the goddess Gaura, consort of Lord Shiva. This festival is a time of collective celebration, and the Dêudã dance plays a central role in uniting community members from diverse backgrounds.

As a participant observer, I engaged with the Dêudã dance from an academic perspective and as an active participant in the ritual. This experience revealed the vital role of dance in fostering social cohesion. Participants, ranging from youth, women, men, and elders, contributed to the collective energy of the performance. The dance’s inclusiveness was evident in the way the circle expanded and contracted, seamlessly incorporating new participants.

One significant observation was the subtle leadership displayed by older community members. These individuals often took the lead in maintaining rhythm and guiding movements and were respected and followed by other participants. This dynamic reflects the community's deep respect for age and experience and the role of tradition in preserving social order.

The participatory nature of the Dêudã dance highlights the fluid boundaries between observers and participants. Initially, I hesitated to join the dance, fearing that my participation might compromise the performance's authenticity. However, the community's warm and welcoming attitude quickly eased my worries and immersed me fully in the experience. This interaction emphasised the inclusive nature of the Dêudã dance, where participation is accepted and encouraged, regardless of familiarity with the tradition. My situation was different; as a resident familiar with the tradition, I found it easier to participate, even though I had little prior experience attending such dances. In Boalian terms, participants did not remain passive "spectators" but became "spect-actors": community members who actively shape the performance by joining, clapping, singing refrains, or improvising verses. This transformation of audience into participants reflects the essence of TO, breaking down hierarchical divisions between performer and observer.

Likewise, collaboration with cultural organisations and government agencies is pivotal in providing the necessary resources and support for Dêudã initiatives. Such partnerships can facilitate the organisation of performances, documentation of practices, and promotion of cultural heritage, thereby enhancing Dêudã's role in community 'peacebuilding'. However, as Bohara pointed out, *"While there is some support from the government for preserving Dêudã, it is largely the local communities*

who actively sustain this cultural practice. More targeted efforts and funding are needed for its preservation.” This highlights a critical area where increased support could significantly bolster Dêudã’s impact on fostering community cohesion and peace.

Generational shifts in cultural engagement pose significant challenges to the continuity of Dêudã. Influenced by global cultural trends, younger generations often show less interest in traditional folklore, leading to a decline in its practice and its transmission. A noted Dêudã artist lamented, *“Dêudã is the preservation of our culture. However, today’s youth are more interested in discos and bars, including RAP in Dêudã. As a result, the Dêudãs are disappearing from the landscape. However, it is still popular in Western Nepal, especially in religious places and among pilgrims.”* This observation reflects a broader trend in which traditional cultural practices struggle to compete with modern entertainment forms, risking the loss of valuable cultural heritage.

Theories of cultural performance, such as those proposed by Turner (1982) and Schechner (2002), emphasise the importance of collective artistic expression in fostering a sense of belonging and community. The participatory nature of Dêudã performances can create an environment of inclusivity and shared purpose, which is vital for promoting social cohesion and strengthening community bonds. However, the challenge remains to make Dêudã appealing to younger audiences by incorporating contemporary themes that resonate with their experiences and interests.

Dêudã serves as a bridge between generations, facilitating the transmission of cultural knowledge and values and promoting understanding and respect across age groups.

This intergenerational dialogue is crucial for the sustainability of artistic practices and

the preservation of community cohesion. Engaging younger generations in Dêudã performances ensures the continuity of the tradition while fostering a sense of responsibility towards cultural preservation and community ‘peacebuilding’. As Mahesh Auji noted, *“My interest in Dêudã stems from my upbringing in the Far-western where I was exposed to its art, culture, language, and way of life.”*

The testimonies of practitioners further underscore this role. For example, respondents emphasised that during Dêudã, “questions and answers are allowed,” enabling participants to challenge social constructs such as caste or gender hierarchies through performance. This improvisational, dialogical quality parallels Boal’s “forum theatre,” where participants act out social realities and propose alternative outcomes. In this sense, Dêudã functions as a cultural rehearsal for dialogue, critique, and change.

Elders play a crucial role as custodians of Dêudã folklore, passing songs and practices on to younger members. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge strengthens community cohesion and promotes mutual respect among community members. As one interviewee noted, *“Dêudã organises the people’s revolutionary consciousness, expands this consciousness to others, and transverges the messages across generations.”* The involvement of elders in teaching and performing Dêudã ensures that cultural knowledge and values are preserved and transmitted, fostering a sense of continuity and identity in the community. This echoes Boal’s vision of theatre as a dialogical process in which everyone can intervene, question, and reshape narratives. In Dêudã culture, the collective participation suspends rigid hierarchies, at least temporarily, creating a shared space of negotiation, solidarity, and emotional expression. My own initial hesitation to join the performance quickly dissolved as the

community welcomed me into the circle—demonstrating Dêudã’s inclusive ethos and its alignment with Boal’s participatory ideals.

Bridging the generational divide is essential for the sustainability of Dêudã. Efforts to engage youth and integrate contemporary themes can help ensure the relevance and continuity of Dêudã in modern community ‘peacebuilding’ contexts in the future.

Incorporating themes that resonate with younger audiences, such as social justice and personal identity, can revitalise interest in Dêudã. As one practitioner noted,

“I aim to reflect the social issues and atmosphere prevalent in the region. My songs cover many topics, including love, patriotism, and a deep connection to one’s homeland and community.”

This approach can help make Dêudã more appealing to younger generations, fostering a sense of ownership and participation in cultural preservation and community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts.

Generational continuity emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity. While elders act as custodians of Dêudã, transmitting knowledge and songs, younger participants are increasingly drawn to modern entertainment forms. One artist lamented: *“Dêudã is the preservation of our culture. However, today’s youth are more interested in discos and bars, including RAP in Dêudã.”* Yet some youth also adapt Dêudã with contemporary themes, reflecting Boal’s insight that theatre must remain responsive to changing social realities. By integrating issues such as love, migration, and social justice, younger performers keep Dêudã dynamic while sustaining its role as a tool for collective reflection.

Ultimately, Dêudã serves as a bridge between generations, not only preserving cultural heritage but also enacting the principles of Boal’s Theatre of the

Oppressed. Its participatory format transforms cultural performance into a dialogical

space where communities confront inequality, rehearse alternatives, and cultivate solidarity. In doing so, Dêudã illustrates how indigenous cultural forms can embody the values of empowerment, critical reflection, and collective rehearsal for social change that are central to Boal's framework.

Conclusion

Dêudã culture exemplifies how traditional practices can function as powerful tools for peacebuilding, social inclusion, and emotional healing. Rooted in the cultural heritage of Nepal's Far-Western region, Dêudã has consistently provided a participatory space for dialogue, solidarity, and the expression of collective memory. Through its call-and-response format and open invitation to participation, Dêudã transforms community members from passive spectators into active "spect-actors," in line with Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. This participatory ethos enables individuals – particularly women and marginalised groups – to articulate grievances, rehearse alternatives, and build shared visions of justice and reconciliation.

Historically, Dêudã has demonstrated adaptability and resilience. During the Maoist conflict, it was used to disseminate political messages and mobilise communities; in the post-war context, it has evolved into a platform for reconciliation, dialogue, and cultural continuity. Its role in addressing sensitive issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, and domestic violence highlights its function as a grassroots mechanism for empowerment and critical reflection, echoing Boal's view of theatre as a rehearsal for social change. At the same time, Dêudã provides economic opportunities for practitioners, merging cultural expression with livelihood and reinforcing its relevance in contemporary society.

Modernisation and digitalisation have extended Dêudã's reach to urban centres and diaspora communities, allowing it to resonate with younger generations. Remix versions and digital platforms have brought new audiences into contact with the tradition. Yet these shifts also pose challenges: the pursuit of commercial success risks diluting Dêudã's authenticity and reducing its capacity for meaningful social critique. Sustaining its transformative potential requires careful balance, ensuring that innovation does not undermine the dialogical and inclusive core that makes Dêudã a force for peacebuilding.

This research also underscored the importance of intergenerational transmission. Elders act as custodians, ensuring that songs, values, and practices are passed on, while youth bring contemporary themes that keep Dêudã dynamic. This interplay illustrates Dêudã's role as a bridge between generations, fostering continuity, mutual respect, and collective identity. Participant observation further revealed how peacebuilding is enacted not only through lyrics and narratives but also through the embodied, rhythmic, and communal dimensions of performance.

In sum, Dêudã culture stands as a dynamic, community-driven practice that integrates cultural preservation with peacebuilding functions. By embodying the principles of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed – dialogue, inclusivity, critical reflection, and collective rehearsal – Dêudã demonstrates how indigenous traditions can contribute to sustainable peace and social cohesion. However, its continued effectiveness depends on engaging younger generations, supporting community ownership, and balancing adaptation with fidelity to its cultural essence. The following chapter turns to a critical examination of the limitations of local peace initiatives that employ arts and culture,

focusing on how effectively Dêudã has been integrated into Nepal's community peacebuilding efforts and where challenges remain.

CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS OF LOCAL ARTISTIC PROCESSES IN COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING

Introduction

Building on the findings of the previous two chapters, which examined the effects of conflict on communities and the impact of Dêudã culture on community ‘peacebuilding’ activities, this chapter presents the limitations of local artistic processes when integrated into broader community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks. This exploration is centred on a regional perspective. The central research question guiding this analysis is as follows: What are the limitations of local artistic processes when creatively integrated into community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks?

This chapter aims to critically present and discuss the identified challenges and constraints that local artistic processes encounter in community ‘peacebuilding’, particularly in light of reflections on local arts and culture, such as Dêudã culture, from Nepal. This chapter highlights the potential and barriers faced by these cultural practices by understanding these limitations. This discussion encompasses structural, social, cultural, practical, political, and economic limitations, supported by theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence.

The literature review revealed compelling scholarly insights and underscored the practical applications of theoretical frameworks in exploring the intersection of arts, culture, and community ‘peacebuilding’. Vicki-Ann Ware et al. (2021) work in Myanmar exemplified how the arts can subtly yet significantly influence conflict dynamics. Their findings highlight a critical issue: the theoretical frameworks in developmental studies lack robustness, thereby limiting the scalability of successful

interventions. This analysis aligns with the challenges and expands upon existing theories, reinforcing the potential for replicating and scaling effective strategies.

Contextual Background

Alpha M. Woodward (2012) discussed the psychological and logistical challenges that artists and community people face in conflict-affected regions to illustrate these points further. Issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, cultural erosion, and unresolved inter-community tensions hinder the creative process of the youth.

Woodward criticises the disjointed and unsustainable project-based approach adopted by many international organisations, advocating for a more supported and coherent structure in arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’ activities. This structure echoes the need for a robust framework that effectively addresses deep-seated psychosocial needs of the elderly.

Similarly, Wilén and Chapaux (2011) identified critical obstacles in collaborations between local artists and international organisations in post-conflict settings. The disparity in knowledge, motivations, and structural constraints of these groups hampers practical cooperation. Overcoming these barriers is essential for fruitful collaboration and maximising the impact of community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives, underlining the importance of building mutual trust and understanding.

Stefanie Kappler and Antoinette McKane (2019) shifted the focus to the sustainability and funding of arts projects in conflict-prone areas like Belfast. They argue that project sustainability remains uncertain without continuous financial support and community support. This highlights the need for robust funding strategies to ensure the longevity and success of these initiatives, addressing one of the core challenges in scaling up arts-based interventions.

In a different context, the Dêudã culture in Nepal illustrates the intrinsic link between the arts and community ‘peacebuilding’. This culture naturally fosters community engagement without the need for external collaboration or support, as it is inherently community-based. However, its integration into broader community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks presents challenges similar to those discussed by Laura Soriano Ruís and Samuel Silveira Martins in 2018. They highlighted that, although creative methodologies are crucial for fostering collective memory and empowering communities, these initiatives remain marginalised within formal community ‘peacebuilding’ processes. This marginalisation reduces their impact on the broader political and social structures.

This thesis builds on these discussions by examining how the deep-seated cultural practices of the Dêudã culture can be effectively integrated into community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks to foster and sustain relationships in post-conflict settings. This framework involves leveraging local art for community engagement and addressing cooperation, sustainability, and funding challenges. By synthesising these insights, this research contributes to the potential for a community ‘peacebuilding’ perspective and the limitations of arts-based peace initiatives. It provides a foundation for theoretical advancement and practical application in local-level community ‘peacebuilding’.

Based on the previous academic debate, research on integrating Dêudã culture into community ‘peacebuilding’ activities in Nepal has identified the following limitations and challenges: This section discusses the challenges to effectiveness and sustainability.

Social and Cultural Limitations

It has been observed in many academic and development scholarships that community ‘peacebuilding’ at the local level through arts and culture is increasingly recognised to have significant potential for transforming conflict-affected societies in both qualitative terms and participative processes (Schaefer, 2010; Richmond, 2009; Bräuchler and Naucke, 2017; Hunter and Cohen, 2019). However, the social and cultural limitations of such works are significant and must be considered to enhance their effectiveness. Dêudã culture predominates in far and mid-western Nepal, which is relatively underdeveloped compared to Kathmandu and other regions of Nepal. This factor has also kept its outreach and influence entirely confined to the region. Therefore, national-level peace initiatives have not incorporated the Dêudã culture into their functioning.

However, the respondents agreed that Dêudã culture could play a considerable role in realising individual and community issues by encouraging people to accept their circumstances. Most interviewees focused on the fact that many elements of Dêudã culture are, in one way or another, part of their lives. They commented that it could be celebrated anytime in any community setting, giving hope to individual and community’s well-being.

Concerning these opinions, I argue that songs across the Dêudã culture embody and perpetuate communal values and hopes, offering more than mere entertainment by providing psychological and social benefits to individuals and the community. This concept is vividly illustrated through the traditional Nepali genre of Dêudã songs, which are integral to community gatherings and resonate deeply with themes of hope,

resilience and collective well-being. The following lyrics from a representative Dêudã song are considered:

सुन जोरुया सुनारले लैगो पितल	<i>The goldsmith came to weigh the gold, but</i>
जोरुया काटो ।	<i>weighed the brass instead,</i>
रुनी हुन्नी मेरी आमा हेर्नी हुन्नी बाटो	<i>My mother would weep, yet she cannot see the</i>
//	<i>road ahead.</i>
लेकका बहाडी छाना उतिसका खामा ।	<i>The mountain roofs are steep and high, the</i>
म चिठी पठाउ दैउला जन रोया आमा	<i>valleys lie below,</i>
//	<i>I send a letter from afar – dear mother, do not</i>
	<i>weep in sorrow.</i>

These lyrics celebrate resilience (the migration journey may bring financial backing) and emphasise the support inherent within the community (a mother's love brings charm, hope, and protection). This analysis highlights how Dêudã songs serve as a vital conduit for conveying and reinforcing the solidarity and hope. Likewise, the song described below poignantly captures the conversation between a wife and her husband. In it, the wife urges her husband to come home so they can be together, while the husband expresses his hope to reunite with their son once he overcomes his current challenges with the blessings of the land and their love. Such dialogue enriches the song's narrative and underscores the cultural importance of family bonds and perseverance. The example presented below conveys a similar message.

गैलीहोइ करुवामनि भर पानी भर ।	<i>Go, my love, and fill the pot with water to the</i>
खेत बेचौला रिन तिरौला आइजा सुवा घर	<i>brim,</i>
//	<i>We'll sell the field, repay the debt – come</i>
परदेश बस्न्या प्यारी बैनी मन मेरो छिएइन	<i>home, my dear, with him.</i>
/	<i>Living abroad, my dearest sister, has torn my</i>
साउका रिनले म दुःखीलाई घर बस्न	<i>heart in two,</i>
दिएइन //	<i>The landlord's debt has left me sorrowed,</i>
	<i>with no home to return to.</i>

Thus, examining the lyrics features the significant role of such songs in nurturing and maintaining the community's psychological and social fabric. These songs encapsulate the essence of cultural resilience and hope, reinforcing the argument that music serves crucial social and psychological functions within communities. This approach strengthens the argument and pays homage to the cultural richness and importance of Nepali musical traditions in sustaining the community values.

A significant limitation is the element of sensitivity and acceptance at the local level regarding culture. Culturally sensitive community 'peacebuilding' efforts are essential, although local cultural practices may not be monolithic or oriented towards reducing violence. For instance, some local practices may contribute to perpetuating inequities and conflicts, making it challenging to develop universally applicable strategies for community 'peacebuilding'. The liberal approach to community 'peacebuilding', which typically emphasises individual rights, democracy, and market-oriented reforms, often romanticises local cultures and civil societies by ignoring their vicious and deep-rooted caste-based hierarchies favouring colourful natives and their customs. This romanticisation can be superficial or instrumental, failing to genuinely engage with local communities' actual needs and realities. Thus, romanticism can be detrimental when it leads to the imposition of foreign values and methodologies that do not resonate with the local population (Richmond, 2009). The song expresses a narrative that highlights the richness of a deep-rooted culture.

उत्ति माया माइत्या देश उत्ती जन्मभूमि ।

दिनदसा सप्पयाउडा सुवा आउला रिटीघुमी ॥

दुई वारिकी दुई पारिकी दुई जनी दर्नाकी ।

हासीबोली दिन काटौला डर छैन मर्नाकी ।।

[As much love for my maternal home, that much love for my birthplace.

Dreaming of better days – my dear, they will return dancing and spinning.

Two on this side, two on that side – two women from Darna(a place).

Let's pass the days with smiles and talk – no fear of dying.]

The song exemplifies a profound emotional attachment to cultural roots, highlighting the complexities discussed in arguments about culturally sensitive community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts in the region. It romanticises the narrator’s home culture, expressing a sense of longing and appreciation despite the freedoms experienced abroad. This underscores the genuine emotional ties that individuals maintain with their places of origin. However, in the Far-west, Nepal and South Asia, these cultural attachments are often embedded within patriarchal and conservative frameworks, which can be restrictive and counterproductive to progressive social change.

The song’s portrayal of the tension between the freedoms of a foreign land and the pull of one’s birthplace underscores the challenges of applying foreign methodologies and values to community ‘peacebuilding’. Such approaches may not fully resonate with or address local communities’ deep-rooted cultural identities or emotional connections. Both the song and the argument emphasise the need for community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts that are not only sensitive to but also deeply grounded in the intricate cultural contexts of these communities. For community ‘peacebuilding’ to be effective and sustainable, it must align with and respect these local identities and emotional connections rather than impose external values that may conflict with them.

Although the role of the arts in community ‘peacebuilding’ is increasingly acknowledged for its potential to foster dialogue and understanding among conflicted communities, as Bräuchler and Naucke (2017) suggest, integrating anthropological insights into community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives can help navigate complex cultural landscapes and prevent the decontextualisation of local cultures. However, the employment of the arts in community ‘peacebuilding’ is not without risks. Hunter and Cohen (2019) caution that while the arts can be powerful tools for healing and reconciliation, they also have the potential to cause harm. For example, arts-based activities can inadvertently re-traumatise victims by bringing up painful memories or experiences in ways that are overwhelming or distressful. Additionally, the arts can be misused as propaganda, where the aesthetic representation of suffering is manipulated to serve political or ideological purposes rather than to foster genuine understanding or healing. This duality highlights the importance of a careful and sensitive approach when integrating the arts into community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts, ensuring that they are used to support rather than harm the individuals and communities involved.

For instance, consider the following song lyrics, which seem to propagate a narrative focusing on blaming high-caste and rich individuals within the research community for injustices and discrimination:

पहिला छिया कोट्या राजा अहिले भया ठालु	<i>Once fierce, tiger-like kings have now</i>
/	<i>become mere lords,</i>
सोसी खान्या शासकका सुकीगया तालु / /	<i>The rulers who exploit have had their</i>
मा मरी मुल्याहा चल्ला रुखका रुखै छन् /	<i>proud crests shorn.</i>
जा सम्म राजतन्त्र होला वा सम्म दुखै छन्	<i>Since the mother bird has died, her chicks</i>
/ /	<i>remain in the tree's hollow,</i>
	<i>As long as monarchy endures, so long will</i>
	<i>our sorrows follow.</i>

This song, while potentially a powerful expression of local sentiment, illustrates the risks outlined by Hunter and Cohen. It simplifies the complex issues of discrimination and injustice to the actions of a specific social group, which might mislead the audience and exacerbate tensions by promoting a divisive narrative.

Using such a song in a community ‘peacebuilding’ context is a critical reminder of the dual potential of the arts. While the arts can facilitate understanding and promote reconciliation, they must be employed with a deep awareness of their potential to cause harm if not appropriately contextualised. This does not mean that community ‘peacebuilding’ should avoid addressing or critiquing issues related to the ruling classes or castes. In contrast, community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts should be informed by comprehensive cultural insights and include a careful evaluation of the intended impacts and potential unintended consequences of artistic interventions. This ensures that such interventions are effective and mindful of the complex social dynamics they may influence, including power imbalances and social injustice.

In addition, local community ‘peacebuilding’ models hinge on unique social, cultural and historical contexts in different areas. In Cambodia and Mindanao (the Philippines), peacebuilding’ approaches represent local actors’ differences in identity and interests with effectiveness and acceptance at various levels. As Lee (2018) points out, the effectiveness of local community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts is further influenced by the extent of community engagement and the socio-demographic factors of the population. Ethnic and religious tolerance are essential for community participation in sustainable peace (Hartoyo et al., 2020).

In the context of Nepal, the Dêudã culture blends local tradition and peacebuilding. Dêudã songs from the far western region of Nepal have significantly helped convey

the regional identity and aspirations of being identified at the national level. Such songs, carrying the feelings and experiences of the local people, help address the problems of marginalisation and seek inclusivity within the broader national modality. The sentimental expressions in Dêudã songs represent the following common emotions: pain, suffering, compassion, and heroism, which act as a medium through which social cohesion and mutual understanding are achieved by all parties involved (Air, 2022).

The song “Sudurpaschim Sworgasari” by Mahesh Kumar Auji, sung in the Dêudã musical style, exemplifies the role of local cultural expressions in community ‘peacebuilding’. This is particularly significant in community ‘peacebuilding’ contexts, where cultural fragmentation or historical conflicts may exist.

नौ जिल्ला सुदुरका मेरा सुदुरपश्चिम स्वर्ग सारी ।

सिर्मा सैपाल राती कथै नट्टोस पिरिमको डोरी । ।

*[The nine districts of the Far-west – my whole Far-west is like a heaven.
Saipal is the crown; may the bond of love never break, even in the night.]*

The song’s lyrics celebrate the natural and cultural heritage of Sudurpaschim, or the far western region, portraying it as a heavenly place on Earth. The mention of Saipal, a crucial local mountain, not only as a natural feature but also as a cultural symbol akin to a presiding deity, deepens the residents’ connection to their land. This spiritual and emotional attachment fosters a sense of pride and belonging among community members.

In community ‘peacebuilding’, such expressions through Dêudã music can be compelling and effective. They reinforce communal identities positively, strengthening intra-community bonds and promoting harmony. These songs help

cultivate a shared identity that transcends individual differences by glorifying their region's natural beauty and cultural richness. This shared sense of pride and belonging is essential for mitigating conflicts and enhancing social cohesion.

Therefore, Dêudã culture can be a critical community 'peacebuilding' tool. It uses cultural expressions to rebuild and reinforce the social fabric torn by conflict or divided by historical grievances. By celebrating regional beauty and unity, Dêudã helps to create a narrative of peace and togetherness that is crucial for long-term peacekeeping and community building. This approach underscores the importance of integrating traditional cultural practices into modern community 'peacebuilding' efforts, ensuring that peace is about resolving conflicts and celebrating and strengthening the cultural bonds that hold communities together.

Local community 'peacebuilding' through the arts and culture is thus promising, yet it is constrained by innumerable social and cultural factors. Effective community 'peacebuilding' is a sensitivity towards a cultural approach, genuine engagement with local contexts, and an understanding of local cultures' complex and dynamic nature. All this can be helped only by artistic expression through songs like the Dêudã in Nepal to overcome these limitations and spread the motto of mutual inclusion and recognition for an improved, more sustainable impact of community 'peacebuilding' efforts through changing social and cultural dynamics.

The evolving role and themes of Dêudã music, as evidenced by the transformation in its lyrical content, underscore the adaptability and responsiveness of this traditional form to contemporary societal issues. Historically focused on themes of sorrow and local challenges, Dêudã has become a medium for addressing broader societal issues

such as migration, political changes, and social justice, reflecting its dynamic nature within the community's cultural practices.

The lyrics of two different Dêudã songs illustrate this evolution: The first song, *दुला पस्यो यो साप बाहिरी फाल्यो फिन, मैले मात्रै खायाँ हौं कि भगवान्को रिन* captures a traditional sentiment in which personal plight or misfortune is seen as a matter of fate or divine debt. This sentiment reflects the older themes of acceptance of one's circumstances.

In contrast, the second song, *क्या भनी बहुतल आयो क्या भनी गणतन्त्र, राजनीतिक दलको नेता भौया पर तन्त्र*, represents a shift towards engaging with contemporary issues. It questions the accessibility and relevance of political leaders in a democratic system, reflecting a more critical and engaged stance towards societal structures and the political system. This shift marks the broadening of the thematic focus. This highlights Dêudã's role as a platform for voicing concerns and challenging the status quo, making it an effective tool for social commentary.

By linking these lyrics to the broader argument about the evolution of Dêudã culture, it is evident that this traditional form not only preserves cultural heritage but also actively engages in the discourse on social and political issues. Its adaptability allows social limitations to resonate with contemporary experiences, making a relevant and culturally grounded medium for community 'peacebuilding'. Through performance, Dêudã enables the articulation of migration, debt, and separation within a communal space, transforming individual hardship into a shared cultural narrative. The rhythmic call-and-response style serves both as entertainment and as a vehicle for social commentary, allowing grievances to be voiced without direct confrontation. From a positionality perspective, the voice in the verse reflects the standpoint of those

economically marginalised and socially displaced, highlighting how landlord debt, limited livelihoods, and reliance on foreign employment shape lived realities. This challenges dominant development and political discourses that often neglect the socio-economic dimensions of peace. In terms of peace, the lyrics underscore that stability requires more than the absence of physical violence; it also depends on restoring familial relationships, addressing economic injustice, and safeguarding cultural continuity. The finding demonstrates that Dêudã's dual capacity to uphold traditional values while addressing modern challenges positions it as a participatory medium through which communities can critique inequity, assert identity, and reimagine peace in both relational and structural terms.

Political and Economic Limitations

It can be uniquely used to help integrate reconciliation and social cohesion processes in post-conflict societies. However, the results regarding their effectiveness and sustainability have several underlying limitations. Political instability, available resources, and conflict dynamics significantly constrain the scope for effectively implementing artistic community 'peacebuilding'. In such unstable situations, the risks associated with public gatherings and the expression of dissent may deter participation in any activity. From the perspective of an art activity, it will limit its reach. Similarly, in the political context of most post-conflict areas, such as Nepal, the trend does not always remain steady, which complicates the efforts at community 'peacebuilding' to obtain sustainability and pace. Organising Dêudã festivals in areas with political instability also presents a risk that would scare off community participation and, in effect, reduce the effectiveness of such events. One of the respondents recounted,

“I always make it a point to attend Jatras—local festivals where we worship and celebrate deities. I particularly enjoy them for the opportunity to meet friends and relatives and play Dêudã with them. One day, I attended Durga Jaant, a renowned festival at a temple dedicated to a female goddess in the Dadeldhura District. The festival began well with peaceful Dêudã performances in small groups. However, tranquillity was disrupted when a group of rowdy, possibly intoxicated, youths disturbed the performances without apparent reason. I believe this occurred during a period of political settlement following a conflict. Such disturbances used to be common, but they have become rare nowadays,” (Tamata, 2023).

Integrating Dêudã culture and local festivals into community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts illustrates the potential and limitations of artistic initiatives in post-conflict settings.

While traditional cultural practices such as Dêudã can foster reconciliation and social cohesion, their effectiveness and sustainability are constrained by several factors, including political and economic instability in the region. Understanding these limitations is crucial for understanding how artistic expressions function within the broader dynamics of post-conflict recovery.

In the context of Nepal, as described by Raj Tamata (2023), attending local festivals such as Jatras, where Dêudã music is a central feature, is a source of community joy and cultural expression. However, these gatherings are not immune to the disruptions caused by lingering political tensions and the unpredictable behaviour of individuals, such as the incident involving drunken visitors at the Durga Jaant festival. Such disturbances underscore the fragile nature of peace in post-conflict settings and highlight the risks associated with organising public cultural events in politically unstable areas.

The theory of community ‘peacebuilding’ through the arts suggests that artistic practices can play a significant role in healing and rebuilding societies after conflict. However, the practical application of this theory is often complicated by the very

conditions that necessitated community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts in the first place. Political instability and economic constraints limit the resources available for such initiatives and affect community members’ safety and willingness to engage in public cultural activities. As evidenced by the disruption at the Durga Jaant festival, even when political conflicts have ostensibly settled, the remnants of unrest can still surface, potentially re-traumatising participants and reducing the overall effectiveness of the community ‘peacebuilding’ process.

This real-world evidence from Tamata’s narrative connects with the broader argument about the limitations of artistic community ‘peacebuilding’. This highlights that while art forms like Dêudã can be powerful tools for fostering community solidarity and cultural identity, their success heavily depends on the political and social environment. Instability can deter participation, limit the reach of such initiatives, and ultimately impact their potential to contribute to lasting peace and social cohesion in the long term.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for tailoring community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies that can effectively navigate the complexities of post-conflict environments. It also stresses the importance of creating safe spaces for cultural expression that consider the local context and potential risks, ensuring that efforts to promote peace through the arts are both sustainable and sensitive to the vulnerabilities of the communities they aim to serve.

Similarly, economic constraints, particularly poverty and inequality, limit the feasibility of an artistic process in community ‘peacebuilding’. Limited financial resources reduce the means to fund projects, pay artists, and provide the needed materials. Economic disparities can also breed tensions in communities, thus

complicating efforts to foster unity and reconciliation. For example, in most Nepalese communities, economic challenges make it difficult for individuals to participate in normal community ‘peacebuilding’ activities involving Dêudã, where scarce but critical resources are necessary for sustainability.

Similarly, prevailing power relations and political interests might drive or compromise artistic community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts in the long run. However, influential groups have been seen to take such artistic initiatives to substitute for their advantages or oppose them if they feel threatened by the same. Navigating this minefield of power requires strategic planning and alliance building. Effective community ‘peacebuilding’ hinges on sensitivity towards local power structures and necessitates ways of working out fairness and inclusivity to ensure broad-based support for the peacebuilding process. In the context of Dêudã, powerful local elites might manipulate such cultural events to their favour, thereby undermining the authentic and inclusive spirit of the tradition.

The outcome of most peace initiatives is greatly influenced by community involvement and perspective. During interviews in the Far-western region of Nepal, one respondent said:

“Peace cannot be brought to us from the outside. It must grow from within, nurtured by our hands and hearts. Dêudã culture, with its songs and traditions, teaches us to find strength and unity in our own unique ways. Any peace initiative that does not respect and integrate our local culture is bound to fail.”
(Trilokyanath Pathak, 2023, Dadeldhura)

This indicates that local ownership and cultural integration are paramount in community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. It stresses that the community is interested in practices and values that are congruent with their cultural standing and, using bottom-up policy practice, desires ‘peacebuilding’. This signals that sustainable peace will not

be realised if local traditions and views are not respected and incorporated as integral parts of the larger frame of peace programs.

Integrating local artistic processes into the larger frameworks of community ‘peacebuilding’ calls for the actual dynamics of working together on the ground between grassroots and elite actors. Royster (2015) stipulates the need for local and national stakeholders’ objectives and methodologies to align for congruent community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies. More often than not, however, there are misalignments, which may cause conflicts and misunderstandings that derail the community ‘peacebuilding’ process. This complex interaction calls for establishing excellent communication and collaboration mechanisms to bridge the gap between grassroots initiatives and elite processes.

Arts-based interventions hold great promise for community ‘peacebuilding’, although their potential is often under-recognised and under-supported by major development agencies. Hunter and Page (2014) argue that conventional evaluation approaches are of limited utility in capturing how artistic processes are involved in or even influence community ‘peacebuilding’. Therefore, the full potential and worth of such interventions cannot be realised. It is essential to create more suitable evaluation methods that reflect the emergent and transformative nature of artistic practices for their wider acceptance and support (Hunter and Page, 2014). In particular, better-tailored evaluation methods can capture the impact of Dêudã on community cohesion and reconciliation.

The second is the strategic balancing of local and international partnerships. Localised community ‘peacebuilding’ can be enhanced through international partnerships, but this should also be carefully designed. Hayman (2013) argues that international

support should not overshadow local capacities. Effective partnerships require collaboration in conflict analysis, strategy development, and regional leadership.

Poorly managed partnerships can be counterproductive to local initiatives.

Furthermore, they still have the potential to erode community credibility so much that a sense of balance and respect ought to prevail in the process (Hayman, 2013). For instance, in the case of Dêudã, international support should complement, rather than dominate, local efforts to preserve cultural integrity in practice.

Several practical challenges are involved in implementing local artistic processes in community ‘peacebuilding’. Autesserre (2017), by way of illustration, delves more into logistical challenges, resource constraints, and the requisite skills for facilitators concerning local dynamics and principles of community ‘peacebuilding’. These practical hindrances can impede the successful implementation of artistic interventions, requiring intense planning and resource allocation to overcome them. In the case of Dêudã-based community ‘peacebuilding’, such logistical issues would have to be tackled to create room for culturally facilitated regular events with meaning, as discussed above.

What matters about the artistic process for community ‘peacebuilding’ is how it brings out the emotional and psychological factors of conflict. Röders and Pauls (2023) further posit the effectiveness of transformations in dealing with the trauma experienced and re-instilling social trust through creative and embodied community ‘peacebuilding’ methods. These processes have unique healing potential in ways that traditional community ‘peacebuilding’ steps often ignore; their place needs to be realised and accepted within mainstream community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks (Röders and Pauls, 2023). Dêudã’s rich elements of music and performance can be

instrumental in offering communities affected by conflict an outlet for therapeutic relief.

In summary, integrating local artistic processes into community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks presents numerous limitations that must be addressed to enhance their efficacy and sustainability. Understanding the complexity of local dynamics, improving evaluation methods, balancing local and international partnerships, and incorporating cultural sensitivity are crucial steps towards realising the full potential of artistic interventions in community ‘peacebuilding’. Addressing these limitations requires a multidisciplinary approach that combines insights from anthropology, political science, and peace studies to develop more inclusive and effective community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies. The Dêudã culture of Nepal, with its deep cultural roots and community significance, can play a transformative role in this process, provided that these challenges are effectively addressed.

Structural and Institutional Limitations

A key limitation in the field of community peacebuilding is the limited recognition of cultural knowledge within institutional agendas. In Nepal, government bodies often prioritise economic growth and political stability over cultural initiatives, resulting in inadequate funding and resources for artistic peacebuilding projects. This undermines the sustainability and scalability of such efforts, a challenge mirrored in many post-conflict contexts. International interventions can also overlook local traditions; as Tschirgi (2011) notes, standardised peacebuilding frameworks risk ignoring the cultural and historical roots of community cohesion. In Far-western Nepal, practices such as Dêudã are deeply embedded in religious festivals, social events, and

collective labour, creating vital public spaces for mending relationships and sustaining communal harmony.

The Dêudã Triangle Model helps clarify why these omissions matter. By examining the interplay of performance, positionality, and peace, it becomes clear that Dêudã's cultural significance extends beyond entertainment: it enables dialogue, fosters shared identity, and symbolically repairs social fractures. For example, the song “*डोटीहोई पर्गलो आन्या मालिका माइकन, फूर्ति मात्र देखाउदा छन् जाड रक्सी खाइकन*” promotes unity and resilience, while “*उत्पीण्डित जात क्षेत्र, भिन्न सबै मिली, एकताले बन्छ नेपाल, हुन्छ झमलभली*” calls for solidarity across caste divides. These lyrical performances exemplify how cultural expression can act as both a medium for and a message of inclusion.

However, the DTM also reveals the limitations of cultural traditions when positionality is constrained. Gender and caste hierarchies can limit participation and dilute the peacebuilding potential of performance. Women's growing involvement in Dêudã has challenged patriarchal norms, yet their voices are still undervalued, as reflected in the testimony: “*We were starting to join in, but it is still seen as a man's domain.*” Similarly, resistance to women responding to men in performance exposes how entrenched norms can undermine inclusivity. These examples highlight how the outcomes of performance depend on who participates and under what conditions, a central insight of the DTM.

Structural and institutional barriers extend beyond cultural practice. As Kingston (2012) warns, donor-led participatory governance efforts may inadvertently reinforce elite control. In Nepal, local elites have co-opted some community initiatives,

restricting access and weakening grassroots agency. Without mechanisms to ensure inclusivity, even culturally rooted practices risk reproducing existing inequalities. Guthrey's (2019) emphasis on the micro-level benefits and risks of peacebuilding resonates here: while Dêudã can support both physical and psychological welfare, its benefits are uneven when access is restricted.

The Dêudã Triangle Model offers a diagnostic lens for addressing these challenges. At the performance level, it underscores the need to preserve the cultural forms that carry collective memory and foster dialogue. At the positionality level, it points to the structural and social reforms necessary to ensure equitable participation. At the peace level, it clarifies that sustainable cohesion depends on the inclusivity and fairness of participation, not simply the existence of cultural expression. Applying this model can help design peacebuilding strategies that integrate local cultural practices while addressing the institutional and social constraints that limit their transformative potential.

Challenges/Limitations and Ways to Overcome

Arts-based community 'peacebuilding' faces several significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. One of the primary challenges is ensuring sustainability, as these initiatives often depend on inconsistent and limited external funding and resources. Therefore, effective cultural policy frameworks that incorporate civil society actions are essential to support and sustain these cultural practices (Ware et al., 2021; Culture and Sustainability in Situations of Conflict, 2023).

Moreover, peacebuilders frequently encounter cultural and social barriers when implementing art-based interventions. Resistance from local communities, who may

either undervalue the role of the arts in community ‘peacebuilding’ or be influenced by prevailing social norms that discourage participation, poses a significant obstacle. Overcoming these barriers necessitates substantial community engagement and education to foster understanding and acceptance (Theatre Arts in Peace Education, 2022).

In conflict zones, security risks and political instability pose substantial challenges. Both peacebuilders and participants in arts-based programs may face threats to their safety due to ongoing violence or political repression, which can hinder the consistent and effective execution of community ‘peacebuilding’ activities (Artesanos de Pas, 2023). Another significant challenge is measuring the impact and effectiveness of arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives. Unlike traditional community ‘peacebuilding’ methods, the outcomes of arts-based approaches are often more qualitative and challenging to quantify. This difficulty in measurement complicates efforts to demonstrate their value and secure continued support (Ware et al., 2021).

Implementing effective arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’ requires specialised training and capacity building, which are not always readily available to those in need. Peacebuilders need proficiency in artistic methods and community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies to effectively utilise the arts as tools for conflict resolution and social transformation (Theatre Arts in Peace Education, 2022). Addressing these challenges is crucial for the advancement and success of arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives.

In contrast, this research also underscored several challenges associated with caste, gender, commercialization, and governmental influence. Although Déudã culture provides a platform for marginalized communities, caste-based discrimination

continues to impede genuine empowerment. Talented individuals from lower castes frequently encounter exclusion and prejudice, which, in certain instances, restricts their full participation. For instance, one participant observed, “Even though we participate in Dêudã, our voices are often drowned out by dominant caste groups. The discrimination is subtle but ever-present.” This illustrates that, despite Dêudã’s potential to challenge social norms, it remains affected by deeply entrenched societal inequalities.

Although the Constitution of Nepal guarantees that Dalits should not be considered inferior based on origin, caste, or ethnicity and that social discrimination based on caste or untouchability should not be justified or condoned, Dêudã culture addresses the issue that Dalits are still not allowed to attend the wedding processions and funerals of the so-called upper castes, nor are the upper castes willing to participate in those of Dalits.

Dêudã song is a powerful tool for expressing the grievances and challenges of marginalised communities. It draws attention to ongoing social injustices and fosters dialogue on caste-based discrimination. Dêudã culture significantly promotes peace and social harmony by highlighting these issues through music and art. Arts like Dêudã culture have the potential to bridge divides, encouraging empathy and understanding among different communities and paving the way for a more inclusive and peaceful society. Through its evocative storytelling, Dêudã culture inspires reflection and action towards achieving equality and justice, thereby demonstrating the transformative power of art in the pursuit of peace.

Similarly, economic factors often overshadow the Dêudã’s cultural significance. Today, the financial aspect of Dêudã can overshadow its original purpose of

emotional expression and community bonding. One interviewee highlighted, “Dêudã has become more about money than connecting. It is sad to see something so pure become commercialised.” The commercialisation of Dêudã raises concerns about the authenticity and integrity of the practice, suggesting that economic pressures can distort cultural traditions and practices.

Most importantly, there is evidence of internal discrimination within the Dalit community. While they voice their opposition to discrimination by higher castes, they often practice discrimination within their community. One Dalit participant admitted, “We speak out against the discrimination we face, but we also have our own biases and divisions within our community.” This internal division further complicates the role of Dêudã in fostering social cohesion and peace, highlighting the complexity of social hierarchies even within marginalised groups.

Although some government support exists for preserving Dêudã, local communities largely sustain these practices. More targeted efforts and funding are needed to protect it; as one community leader stated, “We do what we can, but we need more support from the government. They talk about preserving culture, but where are the resources for us?” Cultural preservation is generally neglected, with resources often inaccessible to those in rural areas, indicating a gap between policy and practice.

A comprehensive approach is imperative to effectively address the challenges and limitations of local community ‘peacebuilding’ through the arts and culture, mainly focusing on the Dêudã tradition in Nepal. The following recommendations may offer a strategic framework to enhance the efficacy and sustainability of artistic community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives:

Policymakers should formulate strategic frameworks that integrate the Dêudã tradition into official community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts in Nepal, as it has never been considered from this perspective. This necessitates the allocation of resources, provision of institutional support, and creation of a conducive environment for Dêudã cultural initiatives. Such frameworks must acknowledge the unique role that Dêudã songs and performances can play in fostering social cohesion and healing in post-conflict contexts. By incorporating Dêudã culture into national community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies, the government can ensure that these initiatives receive the necessary support and recognition for their effectiveness and sustainability in the long run. There are already collaborations between local governments, artists, youth clubs, and the non-governmental sector. For instance, the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project in the Kanchanpur District has collaborated with schools to introduce and support the integration of Dêudã arts into the curriculum and extracurricular activities, demonstrating how these cultural practices can be institutionalised and sustained (MAP, 2023).

Capacity-building programs are essential for equipping local Dêudã artists and peacebuilders with the requisite skills and knowledge. Training in conflict resolution, community engagement, and project management can enhance the effectiveness of the Dêudã cultural initiatives and ensure their sustainability. These programs should cultivate local expertise and leadership, enabling communities to assume ownership of community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. For example, training Dêudã artists can allow them to use their art to address social issues, promote peace and preserve cultural heritage.

Enhancing community engagement and participation is vital for the legitimacy and impact of Dêudã's cultural community 'peacebuilding' activities in the long run. Strategies that promote inclusive participation, build trust, and address cultural sensitivities are crucial for creating meaningful and sustainable change. Initiatives should be designed to be inclusive, allowing diverse community members to participate and contribute to the project. Involving local communities in planning and implementing Dêudã cultural projects can ensure that these initiatives are culturally relevant and widely accepted. Engaging communities in Dêudã cultural activities can help address regional disparities and promote national unity in Nepal.

Developing sustainable models for Dêudã culture's community 'peacebuilding' initiatives is crucial for their long-term success in the region. This includes securing funding, building local capacity, and creating resilient structures that can adapt and grow over time. Emphasising sustainability ensures that these initiatives benefit communities beyond the initial project period. Forming partnerships with local businesses and international organisations can provide the financial and logistical support required to sustain Dêudã cultural projects. Promoting local ownership and leadership in these initiatives can help ensure their longevity and relevance.

It is essential to recognise that community 'peacebuilding' is not a one-time effort but an ongoing process that requires continuous attention and adaptation to changing circumstances. While initial successes may establish a foundation for peace, sustaining and nurturing these efforts over time is essential to address emerging challenges and evolving social dynamics. Therefore, even as specific goals are achieved, the work of community 'peacebuilding' must evolve to ensure that communities remain resilient and that conflicts do not re-emerge.

By addressing these recommendations, policymakers, practitioners, and communities can effectively overcome the limitations of local community ‘peacebuilding’ through the Dêudã tradition. Integrating Dêudã cultural practices into community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies, building local capacity, fostering community engagement, and developing sustainable practices can enhance the effectiveness and impact of these initiatives, ultimately contributing to more resilient and peaceful societies.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the limitations of local artistic processes when creatively integrated into a community ‘peacebuilding’ framework. Structural and institutional constraints, social and cultural barriers, practical and logistical challenges, and political and economic limitations pose significant obstacles to the effectiveness of artistic community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives.

Understanding these limitations is crucial for developing strategies that address them and enhance the potential of artistic processes in community ‘peacebuilding’. Further research is needed to explore innovative solutions and best practices, and practitioners must prioritise inclusivity, sustainability, and community engagement. This chapter emphasises the importance of integrating the arts into comprehensive community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks and highlights the need for strategic policy interventions, capacity building, community engagement, and sustainable practices.

Despite these challenges, local artistic processes have significant potential for community ‘peacebuilding’. By recognising and addressing their limitations, we can harness the power of art to promote reconciliation, healing, and social cohesion in post-conflict communities. This chapter provides a foundation for future research and

practice, emphasising the importance of integrating the arts into comprehensive community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks.

In the context of Nepal’s community ‘peacebuilding’ process, interviews highlight significant themes regarding limitations due to social and cultural dynamics. One key aspect is resource access and inclusivity, particularly in marginalised communities. For instance, from a rural background, Bohara (2023) emphasises the importance of inclusive participation during socio-political unrest, illustrating how socio-economic status and personal experiences, such as witnessing gender-based violence, shape individual motivations and agency in cultural protest movements. This narrative underscores the complex intersection of identity, trauma, and economic hardship in political activism.

Further complicating this scenario are the entrenched caste hierarchies in regions like Sudur Paschim, which continue to limit social mobility and reinforce discrimination against marginalised groups, such as Dalits. Despite constitutional prohibitions against practices such as untouchability, these societal norms persist, impeding access to resources and opportunities for the lower castes. The interviews reveal resistance and resilience among these communities, mainly through cultural expressions such as the Maoist insurgency, which temporarily challenged traditional hierarchies.

Dêudã is another focal point illustrating the interplay between sociocultural structures and community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. Despite its role in cultural transmission and community bonding, significant resource constraints hinder the preservation and promotion of this tradition in the village. The government’s sporadic support and the limited inclusivity of marginalised groups, especially in cultural platforms, reflect the ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable participation.

The analysis reveals that the socio-political context, deeply influenced by historical caste dynamics and current political movements, significantly shapes the role of cultural practices such as Dêudã in the community 'peacebuilding' process. The evolution from overt to covert forms of discrimination highlights the need for nuanced approaches to address these sociocultural challenges, promote inclusivity, targeted education, and economic opportunities, and engage meaningfully with grassroots initiatives. As Nepal navigates its complex socio-political landscape, understanding these dynamics is crucial for preserving cultural heritage while promoting social justice and inclusivity in the community 'peacebuilding' process.

The final chapter of this thesis provides a comprehensive conclusion to the research. It summarises the key findings and discusses their implications within the broader context of the field. Additionally, the chapter offers recommendations based on the research's outcomes and proposes directions for future research to further explore the role of Dêudã culture in community 'peacebuilding' and its potential applications in similar contexts. Importantly, this chapter also considers the limitations of the research methods and findings, acknowledging the constraints and challenges encountered during the research. This critical reflection is essential for providing a balanced understanding of the research and effectively guiding future enquiries.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION – REFLECTIONS ON DÉUDĀ CULTURE’S ROLE IN COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING

Introduction

This research explored the intersection of arts, culture, and community ‘peacebuilding’. It focuses on the unique role of Dêudā culture in Nepal and examines how local artistic traditions can foster social cohesion and rebuild relationships after conflicts. This contribution adds to the growing body of literature recognising the power of culture in post-conflict societies. By comprehensively analysing the dual role of Dêudā culture in both perpetuating conflict and promoting peace, this research enhances our understanding of the intricate relationship between cultural practices and community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. Importantly, the research highlighted post-conflict shifts in gender relations and caste-based social dynamics within Dêudā performances. These shifts underscored the role of indigenous cultural practices not only in fostering reconciliation but also in advancing peace with justice by challenging entrenched hierarchies and widening participation in community life.

Rooted in the theoretical frameworks established by peace scholars such as Johan Galtung (1969), Cynthia Cohen (2003), and John Paul Lederach (2005), this research addresses gaps within community ‘peacebuilding’ literature, particularly concerning the integration of local traditions into formal peace processes. While scholars such as Shank and Schirch (2008) contend that the arts are underutilised in community ‘peacebuilding’, this thesis argues that local traditions, such as Dêudā culture, can enhance and complicate these efforts.

This research has three objectives: first, to document the socio-cultural changes that occurred in Nepal’s Far-western region post-conflict; second, to evaluate the

contribution of Dêudã culture to community ‘peacebuilding’; and third, to explore how arts-based initiatives can be integrated into educational and policy frameworks to support long-term peace efforts. Through a literature review, qualitative interviews, and participatory observation, this research explored the cultural transformations that occurred in the aftermath of the Maoist conflict.

Synthesis of Key Findings

This research demonstrated that Dêudã culture fulfils a multi-dimensional role in community ‘peacebuilding’. It fosters communication, emotional connection, and social harmony by bringing together diverse community members through shared cultural expressions. Its inherently dialogic structure – characterised by improvisational, back-and-forth singing and storytelling – promotes empathy and mutual understanding. This supports with Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), Galtung’s Peace Theory (1969), and Lederach’s (1997) concept of “conflict transformation” through dialogue, all of which emphasise the arts as powerful vehicles for emotional healing in divided contexts and post-conflict societies.

Further, the research also revealed the potential for Dêudã culture to contribute to social tensions, particularly when political actors co-opt it or when performances are dominated by specific groups, reinforcing preexisting social hierarchies. This research highlighted a broader challenge in community ‘peacebuilding’. While cultural practices can be instrumental in reconciliation, they are not inherently neutral and may reflect the power dynamics of the communities in which they are practiced (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008).

Several respondents highlighted that while Dêudã culture is celebrated for its communal value, it can also stir underlying tensions. Devi Parki, a participant, shared:

“Each time I attend a Dêudã performance, it prompts me to reflect deeply, keeps me connected with the participants long after the event, and shapes my thoughts in practical ways relevant to everyday life. In many ways, I see our community mirrored through these interactions.” However, there are instances in which Dêudã culture exacerbates local tensions. Another interviewee, Raj Tamata, noted, *“Dêudã sometimes evokes memories of unresolved disputes, particularly those linked to caste and regional inequalities.”* This example illustrates the double-edged nature of cultural traditions in post-conflict settings, highlighting the need to examine their community ‘peacebuilding’ potential within their socio-political contexts.

A particularly striking dimension of these findings concerned the transformation of gender and caste dynamics within Dêudã. Women, once largely relegated to passive or supporting roles, increasingly stepped into the circle as active participants and leaders, voicing experiences and perspectives that had been historically marginalised. Similarly, members of traditionally excluded caste groups gained greater visibility within the performance space, disrupting inherited hierarchies of participation. These embodied acts of inclusion fostered solidarity and mutual recognition, demonstrating that Dêudã could operate as a site of relational change as well as cultural expression. In Galtung’s terms, this represented a movement toward positive peace, addressing not only the cessation of violence but also the deeper pursuit of equity and justice in post-war Nepal.

To fully understand the role of Dêudã culture in community ‘peacebuilding’, it is essential to contextualise these tensions within Nepal’s broader cultural and historical context. Before concluding that Dêudã has both unifying and divisive potential, this research undertook a comprehensive analysis of Nepal’s arts and culture, which are

deeply intertwined with the nation's social and political evolution. From the unification period under Prithvi Narayan Shah to the present day, the country's rich cultural diversity – comprising various ethnicities, languages, and traditions – has shaped the socio-political dynamics that inform the community 'peacebuilding' process. Chapter 2 laid the foundation for understanding Dêudã's dual role by exploring how this traditional form of music, dance, and storytelling reflects communal life and memory in Far-western Nepal. The adaptability of Dêudã during periods of social upheaval further illustrates how deeply embedded cultural practices can evolve to support peace and, at times, perpetuate underlying social tensions in post conflict settings.

Similarly, the literature review (Chapter 3) established a strong theoretical link between the arts, culture, and community 'peacebuilding'. This underscores that the arts, including music, dance, and literature, can play a vital role in fostering dialogue, enhancing mutual understanding, and promoting reconciliation in post-conflict societies. The archetypal circle formation in the Dêudã dance and dialogic singing format enables individuals from diverse social groups to engage in communal expression, fostering understanding and empathy, which are essential for community 'peacebuilding'. This associates with broader scholarly findings that cultural expressions are powerful tools for healing divided communities and promoting reconciliation.

This research employed a case research approach that concentrated on the Dêudã culture in Nepal's Far-western region. The methodological framework, outlined in Chapter 4, included qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to gain insights into the role of Dêudã in

community ‘peacebuilding’. Ethical considerations were prioritised, particularly when addressing sensitive post-conflict issues. The research ensured the confidentiality of the participants and treated them with respect, as many had been directly affected by the Maoist conflict. This ethical approach fostered genuine community engagement and clarified the potential contribution of Dêudã to community ‘peacebuilding’.

The case research approach was crucial for understanding the specific dynamics of Dêudã culture in community ‘peacebuilding’. By focusing on a localised cultural practice, this research provided deep insights into how Dêudã survived the conflict and adapted to become a community ‘peacebuilding’ tool. The participatory nature of Dêudã enabled it to transcend the limitations of formal peace negotiations, engaging people at the grassroots level. This localised approach offered a detailed understanding of how cultural practices can complement formal community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks, adding a layer of social cohesion that top-down approaches often lack.

Chapter 5 discussed how armed conflict significantly disrupted cultural practices in the far western region. Traditional events, such as festivals and marriage ceremonies, were halted or adapted because of security concerns. The fear of violence and displacement has led to a decline in communal activities vital for maintaining social bonds. However, these disruptions also resulted in transformations, with cultural practices like Dêudã being regarded as more than just entertainment. They evolved into vehicles for fostering social cohesion and preserving cultural identity in the face of adversity. The adaptation of Dêudã during the conflict demonstrates the resilience of artistic traditions and their potential evolution in response to social challenges in the post-war period.

These findings indicate the need for broader discussions on how conflict impacts cultural practices globally. Similar to the cultural shifts observed in conflict-affected areas such as Rwanda and Bosnia, Nepal's experience demonstrates that cultural practices often adapt to preserve identity and community spirit during conflicts. This research enhances our understanding of how traditional cultural expressions, such as Dêudã, can act as both a source of resilience and a tool for community 'peacebuilding' in post-conflict environments. This emphasises that artistic practices are not static but evolve to meet the needs of communities during crises, providing an essential coping mechanism and a basis for rebuilding social cohesion.

Post-conflict, Dêudã culture transformed into a tool for social cohesion and community 'peacebuilding' (Chapter 6). The re-emergence of Dêudã performances after the conflict symbolised a return to normalcy and a reconnection with cultural roots. It also provided a platform for dialogue, allowing community members to express grievances and share stories of loss, survival, and hope. The participatory nature of Dêudã—its dialogic format of question and answer—mirrored the community 'peacebuilding' process, fostering communication and mutual understanding among participants. This adaptation illustrates how traditional practices can evolve to address new social realities, aiding in the restoration of the social fabric of post-conflict communities.

Despite Dêudã's success as a grassroots community 'peacebuilding' tool, barriers exist to fully integrating such local cultural practices into formal community 'peacebuilding' frameworks (see Chapter 7). These barriers include political and institutional limitations; wherein formal peace processes often prioritise political negotiations over cultural and social reconciliation. Furthermore, the lack of

recognition and support for cultural practices within official community 'peacebuilding' policies can limit the potential of traditions such as Dêudã to contribute meaningfully to long-term peace. Economic and social inequalities also present challenges, as marginalised communities may lack the resources to sustain such cultural practices without external support.

Theoretical Contributions to Peacebuilding

Grounded in Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, this research demonstrates that Dêudã functions as a participatory cultural practice that empowers marginalised voices, fosters emotional healing, and strengthens social cohesion. These findings contribute to peacebuilding scholarship by challenging the common assumption that cultural traditions are inherently constructive. Instead, this research shows that such practices are context-dependent and ambivalent, with the capacity both to bridge divides and to reinforce social hierarchies.

This dual potential was most evident in relation to caste and gender. When inclusively practised, Dêudã embodied Lederach's (2005) notion of moral imagination, enabling participants to reconfigure entrenched social boundaries. Women's engagement and the involvement of marginalised caste groups reflected Boal's vision of the "spectator," where passive spectators become active agents of change. However, instances of exclusion within performances revealed the risk of dominant groups co-opting cultural practices, thus reproducing structural inequality under the guise of tradition.

In advancing the scholarship on cultural peacebuilding, the research also draws on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. Dêudã served as a form of symbolic and social capital through which communities – particularly those historically marginalised – negotiated identity and agency in a changing post-conflict landscape.

Participants often expressed a strong desire to preserve Dêudã not only for cultural continuity but also as a platform for voice, recognition, and representation.

To consolidate these insights, this thesis has introduced the Dêudã Triangle Model – a case-specific analytical framework capturing the interplay of performance, positionality, and peace. Within the model:

- *Performance* refers to embodied practices such as song, dance, and ritual;
- *Positionality* encompasses how gender, caste, and other identities shape access and voice;
- *Peace* reflects the relational outcomes that emerge through inclusion or exclusion in cultural participation.

This model underscores that the peacebuilding potential of Dêudã lies not merely in the act of performance, but in who participates, how, and under what conditions. This Model stands as the thesis's central conceptual contribution. It offers a grounded, flexible framework for analysing the relational and performative dimensions of peace in culturally embedded contexts. While its immediate relevance is grounded in Far-western Nepal, the model has the potential to inform analyses in other post-conflict settings where cultural performance plays a significant social role.

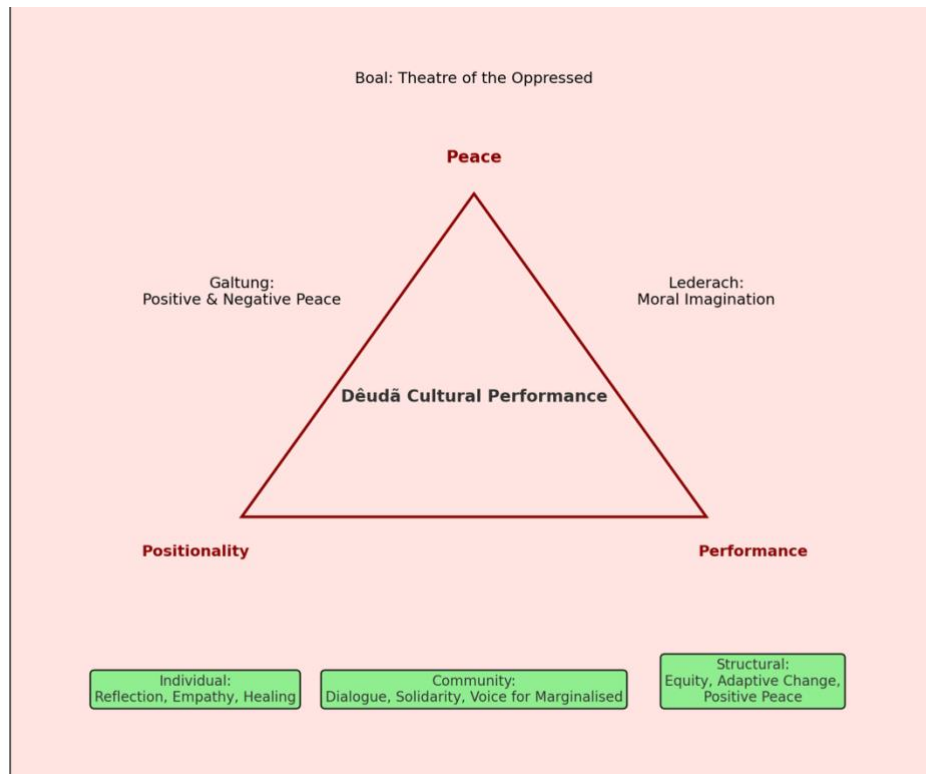


Figure 15 – Dêudā Triangle Model

Although not fully developed in this thesis, a possible extension of this work is the concept of Performative Relational Peacebuilding (PRP). Informed by the Dêudā Triangle Model and rooted in the ideas of Boal, Galtung, and Lederach, PRP points toward a broader framework that connects case-specific cultural practices to global discussions on participatory peace, moral imagination, and positive peace.

Finally, these insights carry practical implications. By illuminating how Dêudā can challenge exclusion and foster inclusion – particularly around gender and caste – the model affirms the need for peacebuilding policies that support the active participation of marginalised groups in cultural traditions. Such recognition can help ensure that local cultural practices become effective and equitable contributors to peace with justice.

Practical Contributions to Policy and Practice

This research offers valuable insights for policymakers and community ‘peacebuilding’ practitioners. When integrated into community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives, the Dêudã culture has the potential to foster social cohesion and dialogue. However, for these efforts to be sustainable, they must be supported by formal frameworks that recognise the importance of cultural traditions in community ‘peacebuilding’. This research identifies several barriers to effectively integrating arts-based initiatives into formal peace processes, including insufficient governmental support, a lack of policy frameworks, and inadequate financial resources.

This research recommends fostering partnerships among local artists, community leaders, and governmental institutions to address these challenges. By creating platforms for cultural expression within community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks, governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can help ensure that traditions like Dêudã are preserved and actively contribute to community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. This also aligns with broader calls in the literature for more culturally informed community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Additionally, this research advocates incorporating arts-based community ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives into educational curricula in Nepal. By teaching young people about the community ‘peacebuilding’ potential of their cultural heritage, these initiatives can ensure the sustainability of traditions like Dêudã while also promoting a culture of peace among future generations.

To ensure these outcomes are sustainable, special emphasis must be placed on inclusivity. Supporting the active participation of women and members of marginalised caste groups in Dêudã performances is not only a matter of cultural

preservation but a crucial strategy for embedding equity within peacebuilding.

Recognising and institutionalising this inclusivity would align local practices with broader efforts to achieve peace with justice.

Limitations of the Research

While this research provides detailed case study of the Dêudã culture, it is vital to acknowledge its limitations. One of the primary constraints is the geographical and cultural specificity of this research. As this research focused on the far western region of Nepal, its findings may not be readily generalisable to other areas or cultural contexts. Moreover, the qualitative methods employed – primarily interviews and participant observations – yield rich, context-specific data but do not provide the quantitative evidence needed to assess the broader impact of Dêudã culture on community ‘peacebuilding’ across Nepal or other post-conflict regions societies.

Additionally, the small sample size and potential participant biases—who may have been inclined to present their culture positively —restrict the degree to which these findings can be generalised to other communities. Furthermore, the evidence base for this research is mostly anecdotal and sourced from ‘interested’ parties, such as community members directly involved in Dêudã culture. The findings do not definitively illustrate that Dêudã functions as an effective community ‘peacebuilding’ mechanism. These limitations highlight the necessity for future research to adopt mixed methods approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative data to offer a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the role of such cultural traditions in community ‘peacebuilding’.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should build on these findings and explore the role of similar cultural practices in other conflict-affected regions. For instance, comparative case studies of the Dêudã culture in Nepal and analogous traditions in Rwanda, Colombia, and Bosnia could provide valuable insights into how local traditions contribute to social cohesion and community ‘peacebuilding’ in diverse contexts. Additionally, these comparative studies could highlight the universal challenges of integrating cultural practices into formal community ‘peacebuilding’ frameworks, offering policymakers better understanding of the conditions under which such initiatives succeed or fail.

Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the long-term sustainability of cultural interventions such as Dêudã. While the immediate impacts of cultural practices on social cohesion are evident, whether these impacts endure over time is uncertain. By tracking communities that have engaged in Dêudã performances over several years, researchers can gain insights into how these practices evolve and adapt to changing social, political, and economic contexts.

Furthermore, future studies should examine the role of digital technology in transforming cultural traditions. As Nepal becomes increasingly connected to the global digital economy, it is vital to understand how traditional practices such as the Dêudã culture can be archived, shared, and taught through digital platforms. This is particularly significant for younger generations, who may be more familiar with digital technologies than with their cultural heritage.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, several policy recommendations are proposed.

First, community ‘peacebuilding’ practitioners and policymakers should formally recognise the significance of local traditions in fostering social cohesion—an aspect that has yet to be accorded proper recognition. By establishing platforms for cultural expressions to be integrated into national community ‘peacebuilding’ strategies, governments can help ensure the preservation and utilisation of local traditions in community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts.

Second, peace education curricula should encompass local cultural practices, ensuring that younger generations grasp the community ‘peacebuilding’ potential of their heritage and culture. This is particularly important in post-conflict societies, where artistic traditions are crucial for rebuilding social ties. Finally, this research advocates for enhanced financial and logistical support for cultural practitioners involved in community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts. Without such support, the long-term sustainability of arts-based initiatives is uncertain. Governments and NGOs can help ensure that traditions like the Dêudã culture continue contributing to a community ‘peacebuilding’ future by allocating resources to local artists, cultural practitioners and organisations.

Final Reflections and Conclusion

This research demonstrates that cultural practices such as the Dêudã culture have been critical in post-conflict community ‘peacebuilding’. Although these practices can foster communication, social cohesion, and emotional healing, they are not without challenges. As this research has shown, the community ‘peacebuilding’ potential of

Dêudã is context-dependent, and efforts to integrate it into formal frameworks must consider the specific socio-political realities of the communities involved.

The broader significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the role of culture and the arts in community ‘peacebuilding’. By highlighting the opportunities and challenges of integrating cultural practices into peace processes, this PhD research provides academic insights for scholars, policymakers and practitioners. It advocates for a more holistic approach to community ‘peacebuilding’ that recognises the importance of local traditions and ensures their incorporation into formal community ‘peacebuilding’ efforts in the region.

This research opens up new avenues for future investigations into the intersection of the arts, culture, and community ‘peacebuilding’. By foregrounding the transformations in gender relations and caste dynamics within Dêudã, this research demonstrates that cultural practices can serve as critical arenas for negotiating justice as well as harmony. These shifts point to the potential of indigenous traditions not only to rebuild relationships but to challenge entrenched social hierarchies, thus aligning peacebuilding with principles of equity and inclusion. As the global community continues to confront the challenges of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, the insights offered by this research provide a foundation for further exploration of the role of cultural heritage in fostering long-term peace.

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Annexes

Annex – 1: Sample Field Questionnaires

Populations:

Following the above key questions, 20-30 in-depth interviews will be conducted with people who are familiar with or associated with arts and cultural histories, especially Déudã folklore. Respondents will be identified based on their background and associations with a question. Discussion with a respondent will be based on a particular question, not all questions. I also attend some of the live Déudã events during my visit.

Guiding specific questionnaires for key question no. 1:

Demographic Information of respondents

- Age
- Gender
- Caste/ethnicity and/or cultural background
- Association/occupation

Objective 1: To document the changes that occurred in the cultural aspects of the far western region of Nepal after the armed conflict, such as opportunities in livelihood, the mode of celebration of festivals, and awareness.

Cultural Changes:

1. In your opinion, have cultural aspects in the Far-western region of Nepal changed over the past two decades due to the armed conflict? (Yes/No). If yes, could you please describe some specific cultural changes you have observed or experienced during and after the armed conflict?
2. Which cultural practices, traditions, or customs do you think have been most affected by armed conflict in this region? How have local people's attitudes and behaviours towards these cultural practices changed as a result of the armed conflict? Please provide examples of this.

Mode of celebration and expression:

3. Has the Deuda folklore evolved or changed in response to armed conflict? Please share your observations with us.
4. In what ways have Deuda artists incorporated themes related to the armed conflict or other pertinent issues of the region into their signing?

Generational Perspectives

5. Do you perceive any differences in how different age groups within the community have responded to the changes in cultural aspects caused by the armed conflict?
6. How have younger generations been influenced by the cultural changes brought about by armed conflict compared to older generations?

Awareness and Adaptation:

7. Are efforts being made to preserve traditional cultural practices in the face of changing circumstances due to armed conflict? If yes, please describe these efforts.
8. Have there been instances where people have adapted or modified their cultural practices to cope with the challenges posed by armed conflict?

Future Outlook:

9. In your opinion, how might the cultural aspects in the Far-western region of Nepal continue to evolve in the aftermath of the armed conflict?
10. What role do you believe cultural heritage and traditions such as Deuda can play in the process of rebuilding and healing after armed conflict?

These questionnaire items can serve as a starting point for collecting valuable information about how the armed conflict has impacted cultural patterns in the Far-western region of Nepal. They aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences within the community.

Guiding specific questionnaires for key question no. 2:

Objective 2: The role of the arts in the development of research and how they are incorporated into the processes.

Déudã Cultural Awareness

1. Have you been exposed to or participated in any Déudã folklore practices or events? If yes, please provide details of your experience.
2. How would you describe your understanding of the values, beliefs, and practices associated with Déudã folklore?

Community Engagement:

3. In your opinion, does Déudã folklore promote a sense of community and belonging? (Yes/No). If so, could you provide examples of how Déudã folklore fosters community engagement or connectivity?

Peacebuilding and Transformation:

4. Do you believe that Déudã folklore elements have contributed to building a culture of peace in your community? (Yes/No). If yes, please describe specific instances or practices within Déudã folklore that you feel have positively influenced peacebuilding.
5. Do you believe that Déudã folklore has helped bridge any social or cultural divides within your community? Please explain.

Application:

6. Are there individuals or groups within your community who actively promote and engage in Déudã folklore activities for community-building or peacebuilding? If yes, could you provide some examples? If not, how can this be achieved?

Future Prospects:

7. Do you foresee any challenges or opportunities in further integrating Déudã folklore practices to strengthen community bonds and peacebuilding efforts?

These questionnaire items aim to explore how Déudā folklore plays a role, if at all, in transforming peace cultures into communities and fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. The questions covered various aspects of cultural engagement, community dynamics, and peacebuilding efforts.

Guiding specific questionnaire for key question no. 3: (These questions will primarily remain in consideration while reviewing secondary resources. However, I will attempt to interview with some academic or development experts to obtain their experiences working in Nepal)

Objective – 3: Utility of local arts and culture in sustaining peace

1. How does the use of local folklore, such as deuda, contribute to the transmission of cultural knowledge, storytelling, and traditional practices related to peace within the community?
2. Are there any barriers or factors that affect community members' willingness or ability to actively engage in these activities?
3. Are there challenges or opportunities in integrating local folklore with other disciplines to enhance sustainable peacebuilding outcomes?
4. Have local folklores evolved or adapted over time to address changing community needs and dynamics? Please provide examples of innovative adaptations.
5. What strategies are in place to continuously innovate and refine the use of local arts in peacebuilding activities?

These supporting questions aim to explore the limitations and challenges associated with integrating local arts-based tools into the framework of sustainable peacebuilding. They touch on various aspects, including effectiveness, cultural sensitivity, resource availability, long-term impact, collaboration, and adaptability.

Annex – 2: Example of Consent Form

University for the Creative Arts

Research Ethics Committee

Consent Form

Project title:

Data Controller: Student Name Nar Bdr Saud, PhD Researcher, University for the Creative Arts

Supervisors: Prof. Jonathan Harris and Prof. Sunil Gupta
Collaborators: (if applicable)

Participant Name:

Participant Location:

- I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in the study on 'Localising Peacebuilding through the Arts and Culture: An Analysis of Dendā Folklore in Nepal' research project.
- I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the investigators of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.
- I agree to comply with any instruction given to me during the study and to co-operate fully with the investigators.
- I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice and all records of my participation will be destroyed.
- I acknowledge that in consideration for completing the study I shall not receive any reimbursement, payment or rewards.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of volunteer (BLOCK CAPITALS) **DAN BAHADUR BHANDARI**

Signed **9th oct 2023**

Date

Name of witness (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signed

Date

Name of researcher/person taking consent (BLOCK CAPITALS) **KHADAK AYER**

Signed **9th oct. 2023**

Date

1

Annex – 3: Sample Observation Notes

Case -1: Contextual Information:

- **Event Name:** Déudā Dance Performance during the Gaura Festival
- **Location:** Amargadhi -1, Rai, Dadeldhura, Nepal
- **Date:** 14 August 2024
- **Participants:** Approximately 50 men and women, ranging from young adults to elders

Performance Description:

- **Setting:** The performance takes place outdoors in what appears to be a community gathering space. The stage is circular, with performers arranged in circles.
- **Music:** Traditional Nepali folk music with drums (madal) and khaichadi. The music has a repetitive and rhythmic beat that sets the pace for the dance.
- **Movements:** The dance involves synchronised steps, with participants moving clockwise in a circle. Hand movements were minimal but coordinated, emphasising the unity of the group.
- **Costumes:** Women wear brightly coloured saris with silver ornaments, while men wear no typical one. The costumes are traditional, highlighting the event's cultural significance.
- **Interaction:** Performers occasionally exchanged smiles and words, indicating a communal and informal atmosphere. Audience members, seated around the circle, appear engaged, with some clapping to the rhythm.

Cultural Significance:

- **Symbols and Rituals:** The circular formation is significant, symbolising unity and equality. The dance's repetitive nature reflects the communal reinforcement of cultural traditions.
- **Audience Engagement:** The audience is primarily composed of community members, suggesting that this performance is not just entertainment but a vital part of community life and identity.

Personal Reflections:

- **Emotional Impact:** The Rhythmic movements and a communal atmosphere create a sense of inclusion and connection, even as a distant observer.
- **Cultural Insights:** The performance highlights the importance of communal participation in preserving the cultural heritage. It also reflects the community's egalitarian values, where everyone is welcome to participate.
- **Questions:** What is the specific meaning of each song? What are the roles within the dance (for example, who leads?) determined?

Case – 2: Context:

Observed Déudā Khel performed by *Gadgarkha* group (originally from Dadeldhura's Garkhas, now in Nawadurga Rural Municipality) during Gaura Festival. Festival honors goddess Gaura (Shiva's consort), with Déudā as a central communal activity.

Participant-Observation Approach:

- Engaged as active participant after initial hesitation. Local familiarity eased immersion, though prior dance experience was limited.
- Noted fluid boundaries between performers/audience; community encouraged inclusion (e.g., circle expanded to incorporate newcomers).

Key Observations:**1. Social Cohesion:**

- Participants spanned ages/genders (youth, elders, women, men). Collective energy built through synchronized singing/dancing.
- Elder members guided rhythms/movements, reinforcing respect for traditional authority.

2. Performative Unity:

- Aligns with Schechner's (2002) theory: performance shapes social reality. Choral singing and group movements reinforced shared identity.
- Turner's *communitas* evident—hierarchies temporarily suspended, yet elder leadership subtly maintained.

3. Cultural Continuity:

- Dance acted as 'social glue,' reconnecting dispersed community members (e.g., Gadgarkha migrants in Kailali).
- Participants reported emotional relief and renewed communal bonds.

Reflections:

Déudā transcends entertainment—it's a *social practice* that:

- Preserves heritage amid migration/displacement.
- Mediates peace via collective joy and shared ritual.
- Balances equality (*communitas*) with respect for elders.

Theoretical Links:

- Schechner (2002): Performance as reality-making.
- Turner (1969): Ritual and *communitas*.

Limitations:

- Single-event observation; longitudinal data needed to assess lasting impacts.

Annex – 4: Research Participants/Interviews

Name	Background	Address/District	Gender	Caste/Ethnicity	Age Category
Dr. Deepak P Bhatta	Scholar/Politician	Kanchanpur/Kathmandu	Male	Brahmin	50+
Mrs. Urmila Saud	Deudiya (Lead artist)	Achham/Kathmandu	Female	Chhetri	30–40
Mrs. Durga Saud	Déudā enthusiast and youth		Female	Chhetri	20–30
Ms. Sarmila Saud			Female	Chhetri	20–30
Prof. Jivendra Deo Giri	Academic/Folklorist	Jumla/Kathmandu	Male	Brahmin	60+
Mahesh Auji	Professional Deuda Singer	Baitadi	Male	Dalit	40–50
Mr. Ram Bahadur Rawal	Journalist/Deuda Researcher	Doti/Kathmandu	Male	Chhetri	36–45
Mr. Maya Prakash Bhatta	Cultural expert/Politician	Kailali	Male	Brahmin	50–60
Mr. Prakash Bhatta	Entrepreneur/Cultural Expert	Kailali	Male	Brahmin	50–60
Mrs. Mamta Dhami	Deudiya	Bajhang	Female	Tharu/Chhetri	20–35
Tulsi Bist	Deudiya (Ex-Maoist member)	Darchula	Female	Chhetri	20–35
Lok Bahadur Thapa	Deudiya/Dohari Singer/Musician	Bajura	Male	Chhetri	46–55
Mahesh Pariyar	Deudiya		Male	Dalit (Pariyar)	20–35
Kaushilla Ayer	Deuda performer	Kanchanpur	Female	Chhetri	20–35
Dikra Badi	Professional Deuda singer	Kanchanpur	Female	Badi	36–55

Rejina Badi	Deuda singer (daughter)	Kanchanpur	Female	Badi	20–45
Pandit Laxmikant Joshi	Historian and Priest	Bajura/Kanchanpur	Male	Brahmin	56+
Kabi Raj Joshi	Teacher/Deuda scholar	Doti/Kanchanpur	Male	Brahmin	30-40
Ram Bdr Ayer	Elderly local	Dadeldhura	Male	Chhetri	56+
Raj Bdr Parki	Dalit leader & former Maoist	Dadeldhura	Male	Dalit (Parki)	36–55
Dan Bahadur Bhandari	Entrepreneur	Dadeldhura	Male	Chhetri	36–55
Trilokya Nath Pathak	Retired Head Teacher/Cultural Enthusiast	Dadeldhura	Male	Brahmin	56+
Chakra Mal	Ex-combatant and Maoist Leader	Baitadi	Male	Chhetri	45–55
Tulsi Bohara	Ex-combatant	Dadeldhura	Male	Chhetri	36–40
Surendra Bohara	Ex-combatant	Doti	Male	Chhetri	40-50
Kamala Madai	Deuda enthusiast	Dadeldhura	Male	Chhetri	30 -40