**Nepal's *Dēudā* Folklore vis-à-vis Promotion of Social Transformation and Advocacy**

**Summary**

As a popular culture in mid and far-western part of Nepal, *Dēudā* is considered to be a representative culture and identity of these geographies. For centuries, *Dēudā* is perceived to have contributed to reinforce the existing social relations, unity and expose collective suffering as well as emotions, which at times take a form of advocacy for change. Despite being plagued with various social ill practices such as caste and gender discrimination, these societies are very deeply connected from within in relation to their cultural wholeness and *Dēudā* has been one of such agencies of social connection that contributes to blur the problematic boundaries manifest in form of the so called high and low caste, rich and poor, men and women and the leader and the lead, among others. This project is an effort to appraise how this folklore has helped build social cohesion in these socially backward, poverty-stricken, and remote societies where there could have been and are several reasons for social tensions and discord, and what additional areas remain unexplored/unused to its potential.

**Introduction**

*Dēudā* is a type of performing art from the far-western part of Nepal that depicts the folk culture and is performed through typical songs, dances, and music in dialogic songs (often in the form of question and answer). Antiphonally, it carries strong sentiments for personal, communal, and cultural integrity and solidarity. The men and women each form a group and hold hands while dancing in a circle. The song in *Dēudā* is sung without any musical instrument, but in recent times, such songs are found recorded in studios incorporating the music in them. The verse of the song alternates between question presented by male/female group and the answer by the opposite group. It is normally performed during festivals, and other community gatherings to exchange personal feelings and clarifications; to create awareness and empower people regarding their rights and responsibilities, and as a method of entertainment.

Additionally*, Dēudā* appeals for common wellbeing and promote a sense of communal harmony and urges for solidarity. For instance, the rebellion force used *Dēudā* to motivate youths to join armed conflict (1996-2006). Similarly, *Dēudā* is often used for trust-building in communities, reconciliation between disputing parties, demonstrating in political rallies and movements. Though *Dēudā* belongs to the far-western part, these days, it can be observed in Kathmandu valley and other parts as well. In *Dēudā* performances, there are no restrictions based on gender, caste, age, and other social variables.

In this context, the project aims to review *Dēudā* celebration tradition from the arts-based theoretical frameworks and its empirical evidence. This project focuses to examine the use of cultural arts-based practices for dialogue and peacebuilding at the local community level in the post-conflict setting of Nepal. In general, this project tries to assess how *Dēudā* as a cultural arts-form can be applied in peacebuilding/social cohesion and advocacy activities. This study aims to unpack questions such as how the *Dēudā* has been contributing to social cohesion through arts-based practice; how the youths/children use it as cultural arts-form, and how it can help to bridge young people with policymakers. These activities of the project will be basically aligned with goals of the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) project in Nepal.

**Objectives**

In this context, this proposal intends to engage the youths, artistic communities, local government, and academia through artistic activities, and to identify and document the ways to connect with local policymakers by using this artistic inquiry approach and engagements in one of the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) intervention countries – Nepal. The project activities will:

* Explore the dimensions of *Dēudā* culture connected with various walks of life contributing to peace and unity,
* Assess strengths and limitations between local practices and peacebuilding approaches by using arts-based approaches to promote the wellbeing of young people, particularly those from remote and marginalized groups.
* Suggest stakeholders about the ways *Dēudā* can be used to promote peacebuilding/ social cohesion initiatives
* Contribute to evaluating how the MAP intervention contributes to peace and harmony in the communities.

To undertake the research activities, we intend to use community-led research approach which will help to specify the research approach and activities to address our research questions.

**Activities and Timelines**

The project will run from December 2022 to January 2024.Following the project management plan, we will follow three stages.

1. **Preparatory Stage:** The first stage from December 2022 – February 2023 will include the coordination meetings for project set up and management, desk research and travel to Nepal (as necessary) for the inception meeting with the stakeholders. Our first milestone will be the presentation of the project to local stakeholders and connect of local participants. This will also include preparation of rosters or mapping of the practitioners, scholars, folklorists and other potential contributors.
2. **Implementation Stage:** The second stage will occur from February 2023 to November 2023 with the activities in selected two areas of Nepal. The workshop, survey and awareness/advocacy-based events will be organized during this stage. Required a set of tools for information collection will be developed and executed. A mid-term evaluation meeting to assess the project implementation and conformity to resolve any bottlenecks will be organized. The milestone of this stage will be sharing of the preliminary results from all proposed activities with the stakeholders and MAP in November 2023.
3. **Documentation and Advocacy Stage:** The final stage runs from November 2023 to January 2024 and includes analysis of the data, presentations and dissemination of the results culminating in a final report (final milestone) as well as exhibition/sharing of outputs in Nepal and the UK.

Likewise, a final stakeholders meeting will discuss the project and look ahead for innovative ideas and future research.

**Outputs/Deliverables**

* One sensitization and exploratory workshop on the role of *Dēudā* folklore among culture and folk literature researchers and practitioners

* Two awareness and advocacy events including local artists, teachers, and students – in association with local governments during the festival times.
* Social Media Posts about events/outcomes reaching out to minimum 100,000 Facebook/Twitter/YouTube users
* A Bilingual (English and Nepali) Digital and Print Photo Book featuring key activities (25 representative photos with caption) at the end of the project
* A book chapter in Arts, Culture and Conflict book to be published by Routledge
* A Journal Paper Preparation and Conference Presentations on the data collected, including responses to the research questions and analysis of issues for further investigation by future researchers
* A short video of the project and Exhibitions of Photo Book in Nepal and UK, which would include photographs at the UCA Art Galleries and Prospective Conferences including MAP.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

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| **Roles** | **Responsibilities** |
| Principal Investigator  (Prof Simon Dancey) | * Lead, supervise and guide the project and its activities * Review the relevant literature and prepare a conceptual and theoretical framework * Visit to Nepal from the UK and attend selected the events and interact with the community people. * Write up the journal paper and review all the materials to be produced * Share the knowledge in the international forums. |
| Co-Investigator/ Senior Researcher  (Dila Datt Pant | * Work with PI on conceptual and theoretical understanding of culture and peacebuilding * Guide PI on diverse paradigm of Deuda and explore its pragmatic limitations * Review the Deuda culture and changing traditional and celebrational pattern * Form a set of questionnaires for the data collection * Accompany PI when he is in Nepal throughout * Guide a local photographer and designers (to be hired) as appropriate |
| Co-investigator/ Manager  (Nar Bdr. Saud) | * Responsible for designing, planning, managing, coordinating, and reporting of all the project related activities including financial matters * Outreach and documentation |

*Note: The project will ensure the participation of women/girls, and other minorities during the implementation of project activities.*