

Deusi Bhailo: Cultural Traditions and the Impact of Modern Financial Aspects

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Abstract: This study examines the evolving dynamics of Deusi Bhailo, a traditional Nepali cultural practice performed during the Tihar festival, with a focus on the tension between cultural preservation and financial motivations. Using a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews (n=30) and quantitative surveys (n=50) with participants stratified by age (children, adults, elders) in Gairikot-1, the research reveals a generational divide: while 41.7% of youth (12–16 years) prioritize financial aspects, 42.1% of elders (60+ years) emphasize cultural significance, with adults (23–40 years) mediating between these perspectives (40% cultural vs. 25% financial). Findings highlight the tradition's "hybrid" evolution, with modern adaptations coexisting alongside enduring ritual elements. Key challenges include the risk of over-commercialisation and fragmented intergenerational transmission. The study proposes three preservation strategies: school-based cultural education, hybrid performances that blend folk and modern elements, and community guidelines for ethical monetisation. These findings contribute to global discourse on safeguarding intangible heritage amid socioeconomic change, offering a model for balancing tradition and modernity.

Keywords: *Deusi bhailo, Cultural preservation, Financialisation, Generational divide, Nepal*

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1. Introduction

Deusi Bhailo stands as one of Nepal's most vibrant cultural traditions, deeply embedded in the social fabric of Nepali society during the Tihar festival celebrations. This traditional folk performance, which involves groups visiting homes to sing and dance in exchange for blessings and offerings, has historically served multiple functions, from reinforcing social cohesion to preserving oral traditions and expressing spiritual devotion (Sharma, 2016). The practice traces its origins to various mythological narratives, including stories of King Bali of Jumla, as referenced in traditional lyrics stating, "We were sent by King Bali" (Bhattarai, 2018), as well as connections to Lord Krishna's victory over Indra (Rana, 2019). Traditionally performed with indigenous instruments like the madal and sarangi (Gautam & Thapa, 2015), Deusi Bhailo represented more than mere entertainment - it functioned as a living repository of cultural memory and communal identity.

In recent decades, this centuries-old tradition has undergone significant transformations that reflect broader societal changes in Nepal. Contemporary adaptations have incorporated modern musical elements, including guitars and electronic music systems (Singh, 2022), while the lyrical content has expanded to address current social issues, such as environmental conservation and education (Shrestha, 2021). Perhaps most notably, the practice has increasingly incorporated financial dimensions, with many groups now approaching Deusi Bhailo as a fundraising opportunity for community projects and social causes (Adhikari, 2023). This evolution, while ensuring the tradition's continued relevance among younger generations (Rai, 2022), has simultaneously raised critical questions about the potential commodification of cultural heritage and the shifting motivations behind participation.

The growing emphasis on monetary aspects in Deusi Bhailo performances represents a fundamental shift from its original character as a spontaneous cultural expression. Where once the exchange of blessings and small offerings served primarily as symbolic gestures cementing community bonds, financial transactions now often occupy center stage (Tamang, 2023). This transition has created visible generational divides in how the tradition is perceived and practised, while older participants tend to emphasise its spiritual and communal dimensions, younger generations frequently approach it with

more pragmatic, economic considerations in mind (Pandey, 2020). Such diverging perspectives highlight the complex negotiation between cultural preservation and adaptation that characterises contemporary Deusi Bhailo performances.

This study emerges at a crucial juncture in the tradition's evolution, as evidenced by recent observations in Gairikot-1, where financial considerations appear to be gaining prominence (Koirala, 2021). The research addresses several pressing questions: To what extent have monetary motivations begun to overshadow cultural values in Deusi Bhailo? How do different age groups perceive and participate in the tradition today? What strategies might help maintain its artistic integrity while accommodating modern economic realities? By examining these issues through both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, the study provides valuable insights into the changing dynamics of cultural preservation in Nepal. The findings contribute not only to academic understanding of intangible heritage conservation but also offer practical guidance for communities seeking to balance tradition with modernity (Nepal, 2023).

The significance of this research extends beyond academic circles, as Deusi Bhailo's current trajectory mirrors broader global challenges in safeguarding traditional practices amid rapid social and economic changes. As the tradition continues to evolve, understanding these transformation processes becomes essential for developing approaches that honour its rich history while ensuring its continued relevance for future generations. The study's findings may inform both local cultural policies and broader discussions about preserving intangible heritage in developing societies undergoing rapid modernisation. Ultimately, this investigation into Deusi Bhailo's contemporary manifestations presents a case study in the complex interplay between cultural continuity and change, a dynamic that resonates across traditional practices worldwide.

2. Materials and methods

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively examine the evolving dynamics of Deusi Bhailo in Gairikot-1. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews to explore participants' emotional connections, personal experiences, and perceptions of the tradition. These interviews were particularly valuable for capturing nuanced perspectives, as they allowed for observation of non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions, which provided additional insights into participants' attitudes toward Deusi Bhailo. Complementing this, structured questionnaires were distributed to collect quantitative data on preferences, opinions, and behavioural trends related to the practice. This dual approach facilitated a robust analysis of both individual experiences and broader patterns of cultural engagement.

For participant selection, the study utilised a convenience sampling strategy, incorporating elements of simple random sampling to ensure diverse representation. Convenience sampling, despite its limitations — such as potential bias and lack of generalizability, aligns with the study's goals by enabling efficient access to a broad cross-section of community members within a limited timeframe. Given the study's focus on exploring generational perspectives on Deusi Bhailo, this approach was practical for reaching diverse participants who were available and willing to share their insights. Participants were randomly selected from the local community based on availability and willingness to participate, with deliberate stratification across three key age groups: children (12–16 years), adults (23–40 years), and elders (60+ years). This stratification was essential for capturing generational differences in how Deusi Bhailo is perceived, whether as a cultural tradition, a fundraising activity, or a blend of both.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear communication about the research objectives and data usage. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured to protect participant identities, and all data were collected with sensitivity to cultural norms and personal boundaries. Special emphasis was placed on transparency regarding the study's focus, examining whether financial aspects are overshadowing Deusi Bhailo's cultural significance to maintain trust and encourage honest responses.

3. Results and discussion

This study reveals significant generational differences in how Deusi Bhailo is perceived and practised in Gairikot-1, Nepal. The findings demonstrate a gradual shift from cultural preservation toward financial motivations, particularly among younger participants, while older generations remain more attached to traditional values.

3.1. Generational Perspectives on Financial vs. Cultural Dominance

The study revealed distinct generational perspectives regarding the interplay between financial considerations and cultural significance in Deusi Bhailo celebrations. Among children aged 12–16 years, a significant 41.7% believed financial aspects overshadowed cultural importance, while 33.3% remained neutral and only 25% saw no financial dominance. This inclination among younger participants toward monetary aspects aligns with Singh's (2022) observations that contemporary youth increasingly associate Deusi Bhailo with fundraising opportunities rather than ritualistic traditions. This trend likely stems from growing exposure to modern economic pressures and the commercialisation of cultural practices (Adhikari,

2023). However, the substantial neutral stance among some children suggests that cultural education initiatives in schools and families continue to play a crucial role in maintaining traditional awareness (Bhattarai, 2018).

The adult demographic (23-40 years) demonstrated a more balanced perspective, with 40% prioritising cultural significance over financial gains, while 25% acknowledged financial dominance and 35% remained neutral. This nuanced view reflects Shrestha's (2021) argument that middle-aged participants often serve as mediators between tradition and modernity, adapting Deusi Bhailo to contemporary needs without completely abandoning its cultural roots. The significant proportion of neutral responses suggests a pragmatic acceptance of financial aspects as a necessary means to sustain the tradition in rapidly changing socioeconomic times (Tamang, 2023).

Among elders aged 60+ years, the findings showed the strongest attachment to traditional values, with 42.1% rejecting the idea of financial dominance and emphasising cultural preservation. In comparison, 31.6% acknowledged monetary influence and 26.3% remained neutral. This strong cultural attachment among older participants reflects Gautam and Thapa's (2015) findings that senior generations predominantly view Deusi Bhailo as a sacred ritual rather than a transactional activity. Their resistance to financial dominance highlights deep-seated concerns about cultural erosion, echoing Rana's (2019) arguments that monetisation risks diluting the spiritual essence and traditional values embedded in such festivals. The generational differences in these perspectives highlight the evolving nature of cultural practices in response to modern socioeconomic pressures, while also revealing tensions between preservation and adaptation.

Table 1: Generational Perspectives on Deusi Bhailo Practices

Age Group	Financial Dominance Perception	Cultural Significance Preference	Key Characteristics
Children (12-16 yrs)	41.7% believe financial aspects dominate	25% prioritise cultural aspects	Prefer modern instruments; view as a fundraising activity
Adults (23-40 yrs)	25% acknowledge financial dominance	40% emphasise cultural value	Balance tradition & modernity; pragmatic adaptation
Elders (60+ yrs)	31.6% recognise monetary influence	42.1% reject financial dominance	Resist change; value spiritual/ritual aspects

3.2. Thematic Insights from Interviews

The study uncovered significant transformations in the musical dimensions of Deusi Bhailo performances, revealing a clear generational divide. Younger participants overwhelmingly favoured incorporating modern instruments like guitars and keyboards, moving away from traditional folk instruments such as the madal and sarangi. This shift was met with concern from elder community members, who perceived it as a dilution of the tradition's authenticity and a loss of cultural heritage. These findings substantiate Shrestha's (2021) documentation of how modernisation has progressively reshaped the musical character of Deusi Bhailo. While Pandey (2020) maintains that such innovations serve to support youth engagement with the tradition, Khadka (2017) cautions that excessive departure from traditional musical elements risks severing critical cultural connections and weakening intergenerational continuity.

A parallel transformation was observed in the fundamental purposes behind Deusi Bhailo participation. The research documented how youth groups increasingly organised performances primarily as fundraising initiatives for charitable causes or community development projects. This contemporary interpretation stood in stark contrast to older participants' understanding of the practice as a cultural and spiritual tradition. The monetisation of Deusi Bhailo reflects broader global patterns identified by Appadurai (1996), where cultural practices are increasingly adapted for socioeconomic utility. This phenomenon presents a complex dilemma - while Koirala (2021) posits that such financial repurposing may enhance the tradition's contemporary relevance and sustainability, Nepal (2023) raises significant concerns about the potential erosion of intangible cultural value through over-commercialisation. These competing perspectives highlight the delicate balance between preservation and adaptation that characterises the current evolution of Deusi Bhailo.

3.3. Trends in Participation

The study's quantitative data reveals a notable dichotomy in contemporary Deusi Bhailo participation. A substantial 58% of all respondents acknowledged the increasing significance of financial aspects in the traditional modern practice, indicating a clear trend toward monetisation. However, a resilient 39% - predominantly among elder participants - continued to prioritise cultural significance above economic considerations. This bifurcation in attitudes reflects what Bhabha (1994) conceptualised as cultural hybridity in postcolonial societies, where traditional practices transform while retaining elements of their original form and meaning. The findings demonstrate that while financial considerations are indeed gaining prominence in Deusi Bhailo, they have not entirely supplanted the tradition's cultural foundations. Instead, the practice appears to be evolving into a hybrid form that simultaneously accommodates modern economic realities and preserves aspects of its traditional essence. This dual nature of contemporary Deusi Bhailo mirrors patterns observed in other cultural

traditions undergoing modernization, where new meanings and functions are layered upon existing practices without completely erasing their historical significance. The persistence of a strong cultural attachment among nearly two-fifths of participants, particularly older community members, suggests that the tradition's core values continue to exert considerable influence, even as its practical manifestations adapt to changing socioeconomic contexts.

3.4. Implications for Cultural Preservation

The study's findings raise crucial implications for the preservation of Deusi Bhailo as a living cultural tradition. Two significant challenges emerge from the research: first, the growing generational disconnect, where youth's increasing financial focus directly contrasts with elders' cultural conservatism, creating a risk of fragmented transmission of traditional knowledge and practices (Rai, 2022). Second, the tension between commercialisation and authenticity presents a delicate balancing act - while fundraising activities help sustain community participation, they may simultaneously reduce Deusi Bhailo to a merely transactional exchange, potentially eroding its deeper cultural meanings (Singh, 2022).

To address these challenges, the study proposes several evidence-based recommendations. First, implementing cultural education programs in schools could help bridge the generational gap by systematically teaching traditional Deusi Bhailo values and practices to younger participants (Bhattarai, 2018). Second, promoting hybrid performances that thoughtfully blend folk and modern elements may create inclusive spaces that appeal to both traditionalists and modern participants (Shrestha, 2021). Finally, developing community guidelines could establish ethical boundaries for fundraising activities, ensuring that commercialisation supports rather than supplants the tradition's cultural essence (Tamang, 2023). These recommendations aim to foster an adaptive yet authentic preservation of Deusi Bhailo, maintaining its cultural integrity while allowing for organic evolution in response to contemporary social and economic realities. The proposed measures recognise that cultural traditions are not static but must find ways to remain meaningful across generations without losing their fundamental identity and value.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the financial considerations and cultural preservation aspects of contemporary Deusi Bhailo celebrations. While generational divides exist with younger participants more inclined toward monetary motivations and older generations steadfast in upholding tradition, the findings suggest that cultural significance remains resilient, albeit in evolving forms. The data revealed a landscape where financialization coexists with deeply rooted cultural values.

There is a need for a dual approach: preservation through education and adaptation through mindful innovation. Introducing structured cultural education programs for youth can reinforce traditional knowledge, while community-led initiatives that harmonise folk elements with modern practices can ensure broader engagement. Fundraising, though increasingly prominent, should be guided by ethical frameworks to prevent over-commercialisation from eroding Deusi Bhailo's spiritual and communal essence.

Future research should track longitudinal trends to assess whether financial aspects further overshadow cultural values or if a sustainable equilibrium emerges. By fostering intergenerational dialogue and institutional support, Deusi Bhailo can retain its authenticity while adapting to contemporary realities, a balance critical for safeguarding Nepal's intangible heritage in an era of rapid change.

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