



Redefining the Society in Hip-Hop Music: A Nepali Perspective

Aarati Regmi

Department of English
Dillibazar Kanya Multiple Campus, Kathmandu, Nepal

*Corresponding Author: Aarati Regmi, Email: aarati9@gmail.com
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Abstract

Nepali Rapper Utsaha Joshi, aka Uniq poet's title song "Mero Desh Birami" and Chirag Khadka's album 5:55 title song "Samadhi and Aaago ko Jhilko" display intimate relationships between the socio-political and cultural context and the youngsters' powerful voice through music. This paper analyzes rap music as a medium and power to convey socio-cultural values, truth of conspiracy, and interests among youngsters. Both singers have portrayed the mainstream culture, faith, and patriotism, which have shaped people's minds and behaviours. Rap songs have become so popular among young people who have always been informed by specific phenomenal interests. It has touched the consciousness that shapes the relationship between humans and culture. The road to these rap songs speaks the voice of cultural roots via its elements. To add, rap singers display popular means of conveying cultural intimacy through their music and of introducing a phenomenal symbol of society. However, Nepali Hip-hop redefines a relative degree of social conspiracy rather, it promotes positivity among the youngsters as it motivates and generates energy. Yet, hip-hop generates and navigates a voice of fear, woes, dissatisfaction, disagreement, anxiety, and other sensitive anti-socio-political crimes like rape, homicide, power augmentation game, etc.

Keywords: *Rap culture, rap music, hip-hop, patriotism, mainstream music*

Introduction

Hip-hop or Rap is a culture and an art movement that was created by African Americans, Caribbean Americans, and Latino Americans in the Bronx, New York City. Its origin is still in dispute and argued whether hip hop started in the South or West Bronx. During the period of 1970s, it had regarded as a cultural movement developed among young people, especially in the marginalized zones of New York. Graffiti, Breakdancing, DJing, and rapping are the core elements of hip-hop. Recently, hip-hop has become a global youth culture, and it is indifferent arrangements throughout the world. In 1994, the first Nepali hip-hop or rap song appeared, *Meaningless Rap*, and Girish released it in 1994. The song was released because the lyrics were supposed to be meaningless rhymes. He struggled to recognize the obscure slang and jargon that those

songs used, and later the song resulted in the title *meaningless rap*. Hip-hop has always been a reflective voice of the marginalized since its origin. So, my interest is in knowing about the choices of young people, a reflection of existing images of society, and the voice of youngsters and the way rap songs address them. This study is going to be vital because it will explore the reason behind addressing the voice of young society and traditional culture among the youngsters. This paper also conveys the essence of rap music and the way it reflects its origin in the hip-hop culture of young, urban, and even the rural. At the same time, the questions trigger here: how they connect the socio-political and cultural context and issues? Has our society concisely been able to recognize the root essence of rap songs and their music and effort?

Hip-Hop Trending in Nepal

The song *Mero Desh Birami*, by Uniq Poet, conveys the voice of youngsters. The rap speaks of patriotism. The lyrics of the real rap force us to observe and analyze the prevailing situation of our nation. These young rappers are popular among the youngsters and people who choose to listen to rap songs. Their songs popularly flow in trending lists of social media like Youtube. Their songs throw the reflection of language that is used by educated and intellectual youngsters. Likewise, Utsaha Joshi and Chirag Khadka have exercised differential cultural rights in the songs, emphasizing the tradition of their attire and valorizing the Hindu culture. The use of 'OM' is presented in a profoundly spiritual way. This music also proves that music does not have any boundaries; people understand the value of music, not the boundaries and language relationship. It carries the powerful potential to address social, economic, and political issues. To add, it also acts as a voice to convey the optimistic thought and positivity among the youngsters. Likewise, it reflects the roots and truthful conspiracies of a society. "Hip-hop means the mirror of the society" (00: 01:01- 03), Joshi claims. The main idea here addresses the significant issues that are prevailing in the society. Only the news portal is not enough to discuss the truthful conspiracies of the nation. Hip-hop reflects the reality of the society. Every individual goes through a certain kind of desire, obstructions, destruction, and many others. They tend to carry a distinct variety of experiences throughout life. So, rap can be a mirror of their experience and can represent them via various forms. It can speak the voice of the victim and the marginalized, too. Therefore, the general issues of society can be acknowledged through rap music also.

Yet, hip-hop acts as a crucial role to convey the voice of every group and their dissatisfaction. It also urges to stop rape and other social and political crimes and says, "stop rape, not our voices" (00: 01: 04- 05). Thus, this song speaks of the truth of society, which is acting like a devil. It indicates a relatively recent phenomenon of a cruel culture. Joshi here promotes the voice of the new generation by exposing the contemporary aspects of mainstream society. With the help of hip-hop music, he has been able to show the socio-cultural value and detailed images of socio-cultural issues. Due to the political problems, many people faced questions regarding economic status, security, unemployment, and many more. Energetic and educated youngsters prefer to migrate to different foreign countries. Maximum people who stay in Nepal are not satisfied with the work of government and political leaders. So, rap songs have become an agent and a voice to convey the dissatisfaction of young people. Through rap songs, the artists are

trying to provoke the passive youngsters and generate energy for positive and influential work.

Fortunately, the rappers have got the new technology as a bun to express themselves without any resistance. Media has become a game-changer if we turn back and look at the hip-hop history. They have been able to use persuasive language to convey their dissatisfaction and perception. So, in an interview with Suraj Singh Thakuri, Uniq Poet as talked about a significant subject matter of the hip-hop songs. He condemns, "It is diverse. Every artist holds different vibes and perception, depends on how they understand the world" (00:24:28- 31). So, he analyzes that the content and lyrics depend on singers, respectively. The content of it depends upon the way one beholds the situation; as Thakuri says, "Everyone is grinding. Everyone is suffering in their own ways. They hold various dissatisfactions. So, here, it is not filtered. Rappers can self-express themselves" (00:24:55- 25:06). He asserts that people living in any society hold dissatisfactions and experiences. So, this kind of medium gives a platform to express themselves, mostly for young people. But the content of them depends upon the technique they present. Hip-hop has become popular globally, so this is another form of expressing fear, anxiety, desire, dissatisfaction, and positivity. However, Nepali hip-hop has been introduced from the U.S, but it has been progressively intertwined into the Nepali culture. It has been able to incorporate the distinct socio-economic, socio-political, and many other aspects of the society. Every individual has their respective struggle and sufferings based on their specific time, place, and situation. People carry many stories and dissatisfaction within themselves. But the problem is that everyone cannot express themselves. So, rap music plays as a mediator to represent those dissatisfactions and disagreement generally. Rap music's themes include cultural pride, money, egocentrism, existentialism, consciousness, and others. It holds themes that are much more mature. It is popular with many disaffected, disempowered, lower- and lower-middle-class people. These people are inspired and feel empowered by aspirational messages, which seem to promise hope of a better life. Its themes are altogether about violence, depression, gore, hatred, destruction, aggression, despair, grief, loneliness, loss, etc. Its genre ventures into disturbing, abstract, violent, and existentialism. The average rap listener, however, seems to be more comfortable with these subject matters and actively seeks them out.

Consequently, Joshi has talked about his Rap's contents in many of his interviews. He has openly presented his opinion regarding the stage of rap music in Nepal. In an interview with Rushila Shrestha on *Nepal Buzz*, he has expressed his hope and said, "I think hip-hop will change our society and the way we think for of course, the better. Wait and watch!" It shows his attitude of positivity and hope. Many young Nepals are indeed come to know the real social and political issues via this genre. The song is not only about music; it is about content and artful presentation. Rap songs not only problematize the circumstances, but they also pass a positive touch among the youngsters. People have regarded the rappers as an alien in our countries, but still, there is a particular group of mass who do not consider rap as a piece of music. But, the new rap *Mero Desh Birami* and *aago ko jhilkoh* have proved that rap music is a complete package of resistance and dissatisfaction. Thus, these young rappers present their enthusiasm and patience for positivity and change. They speak the word of patience, energy, hard work, and positivity.

Hip-Hop in the Mainstream Music

Forman and Anthony assert, "creative integration of social commentary, diverse musical elements, and uncompromising cultural identification—an integration that pushed the music into the mainstream and secured its future" (79). So, hip-hop works as a powerful tool for artists to convey the message and aware of contemporary social matters. It provides a detailed image of the communities. It has given a voice to the marginalized group from which the singers embrace the art form by adding their unique socio-cultural flavours. It explores the diverse music and core elements, which revive humanism. Rap music grasps unlimited creativity and society's sensitivity; every society is enriched with diverse cultures, values, and rituals. So, people living in the community hold a distinct format of cultural identification. Such cultural identification needs to convey in the mainstream society for its proper identity. Hip-hop can be taken as a powerful tool to manipulate society and power. The history of hip-hop gives an explicit reality of struggle and suffering. It has provided a detailed image of ongoing situations and issues of society. However, Joshi and Khadka's hip-hop has been able to capture the simplicity and touched the right mass through one's heart with their honesty and relatable musical energies. Their lyrical touch has been immensely commendable, along with their songs. These rap songs are relatable and tell people's stories regarding the real events over structured musical components.

After drawing the purpose of Joshi, I have selected two rap songs of Khadka. His songs explore the value of humanism and the truth of life. His content and lyrics touch the spirituality of humankind. In another sense, it can be assumed that his rap songs do not let the youngsters feel pessimistic; it speaks up about life and death, though. He uses the sacred sound 'Om' to reflect the essence of himself. Moritz expresses his understanding of hip-hop music and claims, "universal truths to individual existences" (22). It emphasizes how hip-hop speaks about the universal reality, where our life and death are attached. Spirituality is the main essence of living a living, and life is like a flame of fire. Universal truth and human life are interconnected and move naturally. Every being is dependent upon the global phenomenon, and it is essential to realize it. Life is all about living and suffering. The truth depends upon the karma that we hold. So, he proclaims its perception that navigates the individual existence. Knowing oneself is a crucial format for recognizing energy. Spirituality brings heart, mind, and body together and allows us to work in a balanced way. It throws the positive vibes and moves. Positive vibes are essential factors of growth and development. So, Khadka draws attention and provokes us to have a positive and energetic vibe for self-growth and development. His songs reflect the essence of faith and trust in one-self.

Likewise, another rap song *Samadhi* reflects the truth of life. Every suffering and struggle count, but life does not wait for anything. Life itself is essential and needs to learn from every little experience. Khadka intones, "Life is a Puzzle" (00:02:51-52). He asserts that the universe is absolute truth, and we must suffer. But it also adds that peace lies within us and chants two words of peace "Om Shanti" (00:04:02-05). Every negativity and positivity lie within us; it also depends on the way we navigate it. Remaining positive and staying focused plays a crucial role in mending the life and work. The content of this song also adds every work matter and pays off either positively or negatively, according to karma. The positive vibes area must in the process of experiencing our life. Every essence of life is counted, and we have to learn more and

more. A peaceful mind and a relaxed body are essential. 'Om Shanti' provokes for peace or an invocation to God. It is chanted three times to a peaceful mind and body. So, Khadka here represents the value and essence of having a clean mind and physical body.

The same rap songs in this paper reflect concrete images of the contemporary Nepali young public and the society they live in. Hip-hop has both louder and softer voices, but such voice holds the agent of change; it shouts out the sound of optimism. Moreover, it can be understood as a power of speech too. So, Mark Harris examines,

It has become a powerful tool for artists to speak to and about their communities, in a way that is more direct and instantaneous than other modes of expression. It has typically given a voice to the disenfranchised of the world, who embrace the art form, while adding to it their own unique cultural flavours. (Harris)

Thus, rap music has become an influential voice to convey the message regarding their society explicitly. It has also added value to Nepali Music and is modeled in a new form of music with cultural additives. It has become a powerful tool to speak out the fact. Culture and values are exercised via this music. So, we can assume that it has provoked every age group and conveyed the importance and essence of culture and rituals. However, it has gradually and successfully woven into the Nepali culture. It has also projected the dichotomy of contemporary culture and issues back to the young. Various flavours of music have been a driving desire to explore deep inside life's structural phenomena.

Yama Buddha, Uniq Poet, Chirag Khadka, Mc Flo, VTEN, Professor TrixYodda, Mahesh Dong, Keysun, Zeroo, KTM Souljah, and Viber Samuel are artists who have provided several notable tracks with a concrete image and actual notch. These artists have been counted as the finest in Nepal. This music worked as a driving desire to see Nep-hop gain international recognition. It has typically provided a voice to the marginalized group from which the singers embrace the art form by adding it to their unique socio-cultural flavors. Supporting the opinion of Motley and Henderson, they assert, "hip-hop gives a voice to the otherwise voiceless." The Hip-hop genre lets every voice to come to the center. It expresses the essence of life and society. It also has become a source of national pride and identity. The rap songs are all about regular people and using music as a service to the nation; these rappers inspire the youth and represent the country worldwide. Contemporary issues of Nepali society carry different struggles and situations. Many young people undergo the problems of unemployment, rape, corruption, and many other social problems. These problems are somehow created by the fault lines and misuse of political and social power. As a consequence, many youngsters got frustrated and went to a foreign land as migrant workers. So, rap songs have sketched out these issues and protested in a musical voice. It has worked as an agency voice to provoke the youngsters. They have represented the voice of young people. So, rap has become a powerful tool for artists to speak out and give a concrete image of the communities.

History in the Making

Regarding the hip-hop history, Scott argues, "The systematic ignorance that the hip-hop community has come to expect from the mainstream is symptomatic of the U.S. white bourgeoisie's domination of the social whole through white racial oppression" (150). In fact, in the white society, the hip-hop community was emerged due to racial

oppression. Hip-hop was used to raise a voice against oppression and protest. On-demand for equal treatment, similarly, to come to the mainstream society, they started taking the help of this genre. Likewise, the generation of rappers has now been empowered by the internet. People have started knowing the fact-based content of our state. They have begun downloading instrumental tracks of their favorite rap songs. Many new rappers and their content have gain loads of support from audiences. They are being supported for speaking up the truth. Audiences have gotten them as who understands their dissatisfaction toward power, politics, and other means. They have remarked not only the social issues but also the mainstream powerful political opportunist and their procedure. It has made every youngster concern about the prevailing problems of the state.

Consequently, rap music has been growing with its strong vibes and contents. It has worked as a powerful voice to protest and express dissatisfaction with the socio-political subject matter. So, it is now reaching new heights with proper tenure. It is also a transition phase for Nepali music as it has been able to point out and protest every minute socio-political disorder. Nepali hip-hop has successfully projected the dichotomy of contemporary culture and issues back to the young. Various flavors of music have been a driving desire to explore deep inside life's structural phenomena. Joshi and Khadka's dominant display of concrete images represents the ideology of rural and urban society.

Life is real and has loads of puzzles, but it must have the strength to combat it. Death is absolute truth, and peace should be followed; this is what these rappers are conveying. So, rap music can act as an agent on the part of mainstream culture and deliver the socio-political insight even with optimistic essence. But the society has not been concisely able to recognize their music and effort. They need a proper medium and promotion. This is true that we need to promote Nepali rap music with appropriate usage in our language, not the language of ignorance. Nepali rap needs inducement—the public political need to stop harassing them and forcing them not to speak the truth. Rappers can use democratic rights to convey the conspiracy realm of the society with the blend of entertaining language usage. It has indeed been commercialized and holds vulgar essence. Here I emphasize that they need appropriate musical education and develop a strong capacity to have a healthy argument over societal criticism. Exceptionally, society should be sensitive before having general judgment over any songs. To concern, audiences should boost the spirit of these rappers. However, music understands all sensory systems; hence, it spreads and provokes love and peace all over the societal issues.

Many scholars believe that hip-hop needs to follow and adapt to advanced global changes in a systematic order. The societal matrix of power tries to guide and relocate even the music, but these rappers have denied it to follow and provoke youngsters via their music. Thus, I have quite a different opinion regarding it. The hip-hop music holds ideologies and methodology to bring the issues from the ground level regarding the socio-political issues. We live in a world where every individual carries both good and bad experiences and struggle; everyone's rights and ideology are respected and preserved sequentially. Sometimes, socio-political power and activity would be a challenging procedure to force them to become something else. It is indispensable to open ourselves and understand that today's sense of music is not only within a classical, folk, jazz, pop,

and another framework. Ongoing modern phenomenal actions make music out of life experiences, struggle, emotions, politics, and many other living marvels. So, here, we need to acknowledge the underlying meaning of hip-hop music, which incorporates the existentialist sense. Therefore, Nepali hip-hop music should be provided space, respecting their way of rhyming speech. We need to detoxicate ourselves from the matrix of generalization and over intrude unreasonably. Hence, we need to grow optimistic perception step by step; changes collectively can generate positive values.

Conclusion

To sum up, this paper evidences that rap songs' contents hold the enduring and current state of the socio-political and socio-cultural subject matter. It proves and discloses people's values and choices, which get transformed with the change of time. They should be given space to prove themselves. I have presented this paper intending to reflect upon the rap singers who display popular means of conveying cultural intimacy and socio-political issues and introducing a phenomenal symbol of society. So, this study depicts the choices of young people, a reflection of concrete images of society, and the voice of youngsters, and the way rap songs address their problems. Artists in Nepal have taken rap music to another level. Likewise, it stretches the meaning; good intentions are a must and should not carry any obstructions in being hopeful.

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