



ICTMD STUDY GROUP ON
MUSIC AND ALLIED ARTS OF GREATER SOUTH ASIA (MAAGSA)

Mountains in Sound and Motion:

The Himalayas and Adjacent Regions in
South Asian Expressive Practices

4TH INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

28TH JULY, 2026
KATHMANDU NEPAL

IN CONJUNCTION WITH

सोशल साइन्स बहा
SOCIAL SCIENCE BAHA





Music and Allied Arts of Greater South Asia
Study Group of the International Council for
Traditions of Music and Dance
4th Symposium, Kathmandu, Nepal
July 28, 2026

Namaste!

On behalf of ICTMD Study Group on Music and Allied Arts of Greater South Asia, we would like to offer you a warm welcome to Kathmandu. We are thrilled that you are joining us here for the 4th Symposium of MAAGSA, on the theme of “Mountains in Sound and Motion: The Himalayas and Adjacent Regions in South Asian Expressive Practices.” We are delighted to host all the participants and presenters for our one-day Symposium on July 28, 2026, and for activities in conjunction scheduled on the preceding day, July 27th and on the evening of the following day, July 29th, plus the Annual Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya, hosted by Social Science Baha and other organizations, directly following our Symposium at the Hotel Shanker from July 29-31.

We would especially like to thank Social Science Baha and Kathmandu University Department of Music for their collaboration in hosting this Symposium. We also thank the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development and the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies for help with promotion. And, we are grateful to the General Secretariat of ICTMD for their ongoing assistance and support.

We ask that all participants contribute to creating a safe space for exchange and learning, and engage respectfully and professionally with the speakers, participants, volunteers, hotel staff, and representatives of partner organizations. As stated in the ICTMD Declaration of Ethics: We respect the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings; We acknowledge a duty of care for our fellow human beings and for the world in which we live; and We agree to work with integrity. These principles underlie the work we do as members of ICTMD and form the basis of our interaction at this Symposium. Conference organizers and Hotel Shanker staff reserve the right to remove any disruptive individuals from shared spaces.

Please visit www.maagsanepal2026.com for more information.

We hope you all will enjoy the Symposium!

Sincerely,

Anna Stirr, MAAGSA Co-Chair

Richard Wolf, MAAGSA Co-Chair

Natalie Sarrazin, MAAGSA Secretary

Rajan Shrestha and Dinesh Raj Upadhyay, Local Arrangements Committee

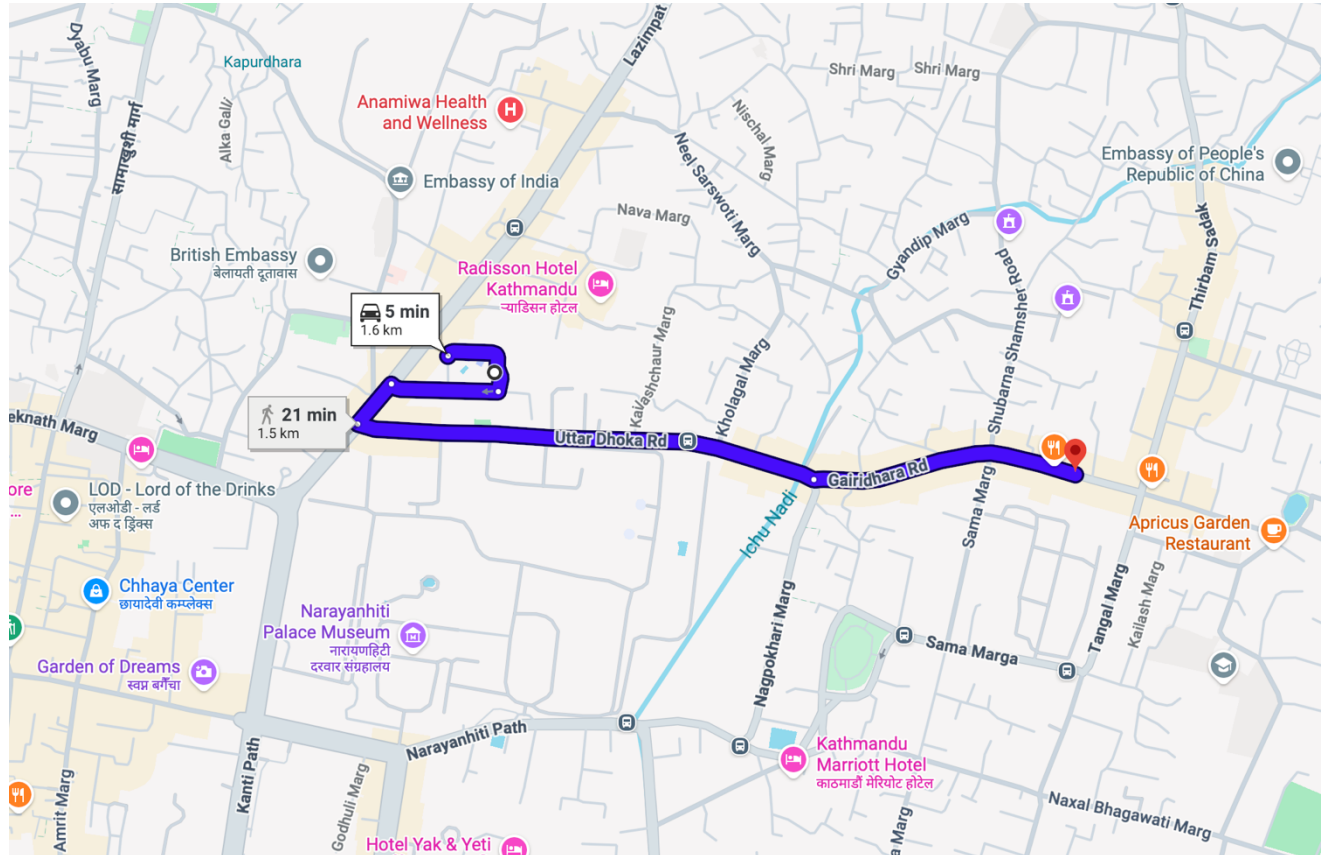
Social Science Baha and Kathmandu University Department of Music, Partner Organizations

Hotel Shanker and Surroundings Map (Google Maps)

<https://www.shankerhotel.com.np/location-map-kathmandu-hotels>

Snapshot: Hotel Shanker to Tukche Restaurant in Gairidhara, with driving and walking time estimates

Please note there is another Tukche in Lazimpat; this is not the one! Our dinner is in Gairidhara!



Schedule

Schedule

6:30 Hotel Shanker Breakfast begins (FYI for those staying at the Hotel Shanker)

7:30 Volunteers arrive & prepare registration

8:00

Registration opens (ongoing)

8:30 Opening

Dhime Baja Performance

Welcome speeches and logistics announcements:

9:00 Session 1 (20 minutes each with 20 min for questions at the end of the session)

9:00 Mountain on Screen: Visual Semiotics and Cultural Narration in South Asian Bengali Cinema
Aurthy Noboneeta, Mili Akter

9:20 The Gowu of Western Tibet and the Balandzikom of Badakhshan: Cousin Lutes in the Highlands of Central Eurasia?
Katherine Freeze Wolf

9:40 Shifting Distinctions in Northwestern Nepal: The Dolpo Dranyen and Mugum Ghoun
Hilary Brady Morris

10:00 Questions

10:30 tea break

10:50 Session 2

10:50 Mind-Body Jerking: Interconnecting the Intricacies of Stick Dances of Malabar and Hindu Kush-Himalaya.
Dr. Mohamed Haseeb

11:10 Stigma, Stage, and Survival: The Fate of Male Dance in Contemporary Tajikistan
Chorshanbe Goibnazarov

11:30 Musical Expression of Tamang People of Dolakha
Nirmala Ghising

11:50 BhalaBhali Project: Creatively Documenting Songs and Language in Far West Nepal
Dinesh Raj Upadhyaya

12:10 Questions

12:20 Business Meeting (agenda includes information about ICTMD and MAAGSA, opportunities, etc.; all are welcome)

1:00 Lunch

2:00 Session 3

2:00 Music and Social Work in Urban Nepal
Dikshant Uprety

2:20 Deuda across Nepal-India Border: Communicative Memory in Transcultural Fandom
Bhupesh Joshi

2:40 Music Education in Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities
Prof. Dr. Dhrubesh Chandra Regmi

3:00 questions

3:15 Tea Break

3:40 Films

3:40 Short film and presentation: *Salaijo, A Thousand Years*
Mohan Thapa

4:00 Feature Film: *Two Poets and a River*
Richard Wolf

6:00 discussion

6:15 Closing, distribute certificates

7:05 Snacks/cocktails at Tukche in **GAIRIDHARA**, followed by dinner there. This is a 5-minute drive/ride or a 20 minute walk from the hotel.

Please note that while there is another restaurant called Tukche in Lazimpat near the Hotel Shanker, our reservation is at the Tukche in Gairidhara.

Activities in Conjunction

Visit to [Project Sarangi](#)

- Sign up on July 28th, 15 spots max
- 12:00 Noon July 29, Project Sarangi Office, Arun Thapa Chowk, Jhamsikhel

Guru Purnima Full Moon Concert at [Kirateshwor Sangeet Ashram](#), Kirateshwor Mahadev Temple, Pashupatinath

- 4pm onwards, July 29th.

Abstracts

(in alphabetical order by presenting author's surname)

Musical Expression of Tamang People of Dolakha Nirmala Ghising

This study examines the role of music as a medium of emotional expression, cultural continuity, and identity formation among the Tamang community of Sailung Rural Municipality, Dolakha District, Nepal. Grounded in the understanding that Tamang musical traditions—such as Tamang Selo, Tamba oral narratives, ritual songs, and the locally conceptualized notion of Hrolyang—are not merely artistic forms, the research highlights their integral role in everyday social life, spirituality, and collective memory. The primary objective of the study is to explore how Tamang music expresses emotions including joy, sorrow, happiness, and grief, while simultaneously sustaining ethnic identity and cultural resilience. Specifically, the study analyzes the symbolic meanings embedded in musical forms and instruments, examines the role of music in life-cycle rituals from birth to death, and assesses the influence of modernization, migration, and digital media on traditional practices.

The research adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach within an interpretivist framework to understand musical practices from the lived experiences of community members. Fieldwork was conducted in selected Tamang settlements of Sailung. Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation in both everyday and ritual contexts, audio-visual documentation, and reflexive field notes. Fifteen purposively selected participants—including musicians, ritual specialists, elders, women, and youth—shared their narratives and perspectives. Secondary sources from anthropological and ethnomusicological literature supported contextual analysis. Data were analyzed thematically, with triangulation ensuring credibility and depth.

The findings reveal that Tamang music functions as a shared emotional language embedded in all phases of social life. It accompanies major life-cycle events such as birth rituals, marriage ceremonies, Lhosar celebrations, and funeral rites, serving as a spiritual medium, social integrator, and emotional outlet. While modernization poses challenges, younger generations actively use digital platforms to reinterpret and promote Tamang music, negotiating continuity and innovation. Overall, the study concludes that Tamang music is a vital cultural institution that sustains emotional life, social cohesion, and indigenous identity in changing socio-cultural contexts.

Stigma, Stage, and Survival: The Fate of Male Dance in Contemporary Tajikistan Chorshanbe Goibnazarov

This paper focuses on male dance in Tajikistan, particularly in the Badakhshan region, where male dance is relatively well preserved and continues to be actively practiced compared to other regions of the country. Male dance in Tajikistan has deep historical roots and was once an important part of the country's musical and cultural life. Historical sources indicate that various forms of male dance, including war and heroic dances, were well-developed, and that separate traditions for men and women existed in earlier periods. Archival materials and Soviet-era films also demonstrate the strength and expressiveness of male dance, especially through codified gestures and stylized hand movements (Nurjonov, 2004). However, in contemporary Tajik society, male dance is often viewed negatively. Statistical data from professional ensembles in the Khatlon region indicate a dramatic gender imbalance and a steady decline in male participation (Makhkamov, 2023). Many male dancers report facing public criticism, gossip, and

social pressure, which has led to a decrease in male participation in professional ensembles. In some regions, only a few male dancers remain, and cultural officials have expressed concern that male dance traditions are gradually disappearing. Male dance is sometimes wrongly associated with immoral practices such as bachabazi, a practice that dates back to Medieval Central Asia (Baldauf, 1988), which further strengthens negative attitudes and stigmatizes male performers.

This paper examines current debates about the “extinction” and “feminization” of Tajik male dance. It discusses the legacy of Ghaffor Valamatzoda, a key figure in Tajik dance who developed stage versions of male dances. While some critics argue that his choreographic style mixed male and female elements, this paper interprets his work within the broader context of Soviet cultural reforms and artistic modernization. By highlighting Badakhshan as an example, the study argues that Tajik male dance is not extinct but is transforming in response to changing social, moral, and economic conditions.

Mind-Body Jerking: Interconnecting the Intricacies of Stick Dances of Malabar and Hindu Kush-Himalaya.

Dr. Mohamed Haseeb N

Mappila Kolkali (stick dance) is a group performance art form with sticks, practiced mainly by the Mappila community. Mappila stick dance is a mixture of music, movement, physical strength, and emotional stability. More resemblance to the martial art kalaripayattu. The first part begins with Mappilappattu with a simple body movement known as ‘marinjadi minkkali’ and ends with an intricate step ‘ozichil mutt’. The pattern of body movements varied in accordance with the rhythm of Mappila songs and oral commands (vayitari). There are two body movements, the first one is slow, known as Chayal, and the second is a fast movement called Murukkam. Generally, the band consists of twelve members and is divided into two groups to form an inner circle (agam) and an outer circle (puram). To demarcate the inner and outer circle, the band wears different colors of costumes and a belt, either in green or black. This is an attempt to understand the intricacies and similarities between stick dances performed in the coastal belt of Malabar and stick dances prevalent in different areas of the Hindu Kush Himalaya. This paper analyses the missing link between sea and mountain in the light of connected body movement, oral command, and dressing styles within the Indian Ocean and Himalayan framework. This paper also looks into the tradition and changes that happened in stick dance by analyzing its different steps, styles, and costumes, which were recorded by Dutch ethnomusicologist Arnold Adriaan Bake in 1938 from across South India and the Hindu Kush Himalaya. Through this musical lens, connecting different historical phases in the light of Bake recordings of 1938 and a restudy conducted by Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy and Amy Catlin Jairazbhoy in 1991, I hope my paper provides wider dimensions into Ethnomusicology and Ethnochoreology.

Deuda across Nepal-India Border: Communicative Memory in Transcultural Fandom

Bhupesh Joshi

This paper explores what can be gained by examining *deudā* culture through the lens of Chin and Morimoto’s “trans-cultural fandom.” I argue that such a fandom coalesces around the *deudā* genre among communities living around the Nepal-India border in Sudurpaschim and Uttarakhand, facilitated by similar lyrics popularized by singers, digital media, diaspora networks, and online fans. This fandom bridges places and cultures by emotional attachments rather than cultural specificities. *Deudā*, a folk tradition from the western hills, has undergone a sharp transition from directly oral to digital transcreation

and transmission via social media, and is popular among the Nepali-speaking diaspora. This study analyzes fifteen YouTube songs of popular *ḍeudā* recording artists from 2020, all recent hits exceeding 10 lakh views, chosen for algorithmic visibility and enduring appeal. After a close reading and thematic coding of hundreds viewer comments, I identify diasporic and borderland indicators, i.e., Hindi-English code-switching and reference to India, Gulf, and US migration, to get a sense of participants' geographic dispersion. Pinpointing lyrics in video comments, I also look for traces of intergenerational links to previous *ḍeudā* practices through communicative memory (in Assmann's sense), alongside transcultural fan practices like remixes and collective reinventions. I assert that *ḍeudā* fandom embodies non-competitive, non-commercial cultural hybridity across physical and digital realms, which unites those who lack cultural proximity through participatory digital culture. Diaspora youth reconnect with their tradition, merging generational and cultural divides that reflect continuity rather than loss. This study demonstrates how interactions within this fandom evoke belonging, nostalgia, and cultural pride across dispersed communities and promote *ḍeudā*'s revitalization in the context of South Asian digital heritage. Keywords: *Ḍeudā* songs, communicative memory, transcultural fandom, borderland mobility, remix culture, diaspora youth

Himalaya: The Landscape as Lyric **Naresh Kumar**

The Himalayas, apart from being a geographical formation, are also representative of a central cultural and symbolic motif in the Indian subcontinent, particularly within the context of India's literary and cinematic traditions. This paper argues that their ecopoetic and cultural presence shapes representations across Sanskrit drama, nationalist Hindi-Urdu poetry and Hindi film songs, revealing in the process how these incredible mountain ranges function as a dynamic site for negotiating nature, nation, and identity in Indian creative expression.

Through close textual analysis of Hindi-Urdu poems and film lyrics, this paper demonstrates how the Himalayas emerge as a crucial metaphor for Indian national identity. Nationalist poetry animates the snow-capped ranges as Mother India's crown, while the mountains also stand as guardians of India's boundaries and sources of life for the plains. The study specifically analyses how these metaphors—crown, guardian, and life-giver—have been mobilized in response to historical events, particularly post-war contexts of the Indian sub-continent, and argues that their recurring presence underpins evolving ecological and cultural narratives of nationhood.

The depiction of the Himalayas as sages—meditative and timeless—affirms their symbolic resonance across artistic forms. This paper contends that, through poetry and cinema, the Himalayas continually shape and are shaped by discourses of nationalism, nature, and spirituality. By bridging literary and film studies, an attempt has been made in this paper to sharpen our understanding of the mountains' centrality to India's cultural imagination and the extent to which natural landscapes influence national narratives.

Mountain on Screen: Visual Semiotics and Cultural Narration in South Asian Bengali Cinema **Aurthy Noboneeta, Mili Akter**

This study delves into the portrayal of Himalayas and adjacent highland landscapes in South Asian Bengali cinema as spaces characterized by movement and sound. Rather than treating mountains as scenic backdrops, the paper applies visual semiotics to examine how these vertical landscapes operate as a

dynamic and meaningful site which convey cultural stories, spiritual desire and political tensions. The study focuses on the selected Bengali cinemas named Kanchenjunga, Gangtokey Gondogol, Kathmandu, and Dolna from West Bengal and Bangladesh. Grounded in the flat, river-shaped worldview of the Bengal delta, the analysis shows how these lowlanders experience a deep psychological and sensory shift when they encounter the towering, frontier-like mountains.

This study employs qualitative methodology combining visual semiotics with acoustic ecology to decode the mountain text. By looking at the seminal works from both West Bengal and Bangladesh, the research investigates three primary thematic arcs: the Romanticized Retreat- mountain as a colonial and post-colonial space for bourgeois introspection and emotional resolution, the Bordered Peak- the semiotics of the frontier, where the Himalayas signify geopolitical boundaries and the ‘othering’ of hill communities, and the Sonic Sublime- how the auditory elements of the mountain life contribute to a multisensory cinematic experience.

The findings suggest that in Bengali cinema, mountains are not only mere picturesque settings but also the narrative agents that enhance visual aesthetics, guide character development, and reflect cultural discourse. The analysis reveals, these cinematic heights often serve as a canvas for confronting the pressures of globalization, tourism, and the rigidities of state cartographies, while also dialoguing with Himalayan and adjacent expressive practices in the region.

Shifting Distinctions in Northwestern Nepal: The Dolpo Dranyen and Mugum Ghoun **Hilary Brady Morris**

The Dolpo and Mugum peoples are both Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups that hail from neighboring Dolpa and Mugu Districts (Karnali Province) in northwestern Nepal; each group plays a musically similar but morphologically distinct form of Himalayan lute. The Dolpo dranyen has notably been documented by European-American scholars in the mid-to-late twentieth century (e.g., Snellgrove and Richardson; Jest), while the Mugum ghoun has not. Both lute variants are used to accompany song and dance, especially circle dances similar to the Tibetan gorshey.

Morphologically, the ghoun is not only quite distinct from other lutes found throughout the Himalaya, but also internally quite stable in its identity. Analyzing multiple ghoun iterations has revealed that variation is minimal and largely aesthetic, rather than structural. In contrast, the Dolpo dranyen exhibits a greater degree of internal structural variation—in other words, there are multiple forms it can take while still being considered a Dolpo dranyen. These forms often demonstrate morphological affinities with other Himalayan lutes, especially the Tibetan dranyen, Kharak gowo, Ladakhi/Changthang kopong, and even the Nepalese tungna. This interchangeability of parts further extends to the whole: when multiple Dolpo dranyen are played together, it is not uncommon to see at least one musician using a Tibetan dranyen instead.

In short, in these two neighboring districts, the Mugum ghoun is internally consistent across multiple iterations and externally distinct from other forms of Himalayan lutes, while the Dolpo dranyen is both internally and externally variable and interchangeable. Yet both meet the seven primary criteria that constitute Himalayan lutes as an instrument family that I have proposed elsewhere (Morris 2024, 2026). This paper illustrates and analyzes the ghoun’s and dranyen’s morphologies, and explores possible explanations for why the former has remained hyper-local, while the latter readily embodies translocal lineages.

Music Education in Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities

Prof. Dr. Dhruv Chandra Regmi

Music has been a fundamental mode of human creative expression since the earliest periods of civilization. In contemporary society, it is recognized as a significant social and cultural art form that transcends linguistic, religious, and racial boundaries. Beyond its aesthetic value, music serves multiple purposes and contributes to the overall development of individuals and nations. As a broad and rapidly expanding global industry, it generates diverse professional opportunities for millions of people worldwide. Moreover, music plays a vital role in nurturing moral, intellectual, and cultural values. Countries that institutionalize music education within schools, colleges, and universities ultimately benefit from its long-term cultural and economic contributions.

An organized and systematic music education system is essential for both individual growth and national development. Nations that have established structured music education frameworks create sustainable opportunities for a wide range of music-related professionals. Recognizing its significance, many countries have integrated music into their formal education systems. In Nepal, however, apart from a few notable initiatives, successive governments have made limited efforts to establish and promote a broad-based, organized, and institutionalized system of music education. It was only after 1951 that structured music education began to take root in the country. The establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1958 marked a significant milestone in this process. Nevertheless, even after nearly seven decades, music education has not been widely expanded across other campuses and institutions nationwide.

This paper provides a brief historical overview of formal music education in Nepal and examines its current status, challenges, and future opportunities. The analysis is based on a review of existing literature, interviews, and survey data.

Resonant Mountains: Indigenous Sonic Healing and the Himalayan Imagination in South Asian Contemplative Practices

Shubho O Saha

This paper asks: how do indigenous sound-based healing practices in South Asia reflect and reinterpret the spiritual imagination of the Himalayan region? Across South Asian cultures, the Himalayas are not only a geographical landscape but also a symbolic space associated with meditation, ascetic discipline, and spiritual awakening. These ideas circulate widely through Hindu and Buddhist traditions and continue to shape sonic practices across the region.

The study focuses on a little-documented healing community in Volagoinj, Sylhet, Bangladesh. Members of this group travel within their local communities to conduct ritual healing sessions centered on chanting, rhythmic music, and collective movement. During these gatherings, practitioners recite verses from Hindu devotional and Himalayan spiritual texts alongside local healing traditions such as Veda, Mansa-Mongola recitations and Aum vocal practices. They create layered sonic environments through humming, controlled breathing, and musical instruments including drums, khonjoni, kartal, ankle bells, etc. Participants describe the resulting vibration as a force that restores internal balance and supports recovery from various physical and emotional conditions.

These practices are transmitted through family lineages and community apprenticeship, representing a form of indigenous sonic knowledge that continues to operate outside institutional medicine and formal musical systems. Concepts such as resonance, vibration, and chakra alignment shape how practitioners understand the relationship between sound, body, and spiritual energy.

Methodologically, this research combines ethnographic observation, interviews with practitioners, and reflexive practice-based inquiry informed by my own background in meditation, chi-

movement, and vocal resonance practice. The paper argues that such healing traditions represent an important expressive practice where music functions simultaneously as ritual, therapy, and spiritual discipline, demonstrating how Himalayan cosmological ideas continue to resonate through community-based sound practices across South Asia.

Dancing the Mountains: Chham as Sacred Motion and Himalayan Cosmology in Himachal Pradesh

Raj Kumar Singh

Chham is the masked ritual dance tradition of Himalayan Buddhist communities, occupies a central place in the sacred expressive practices of high-altitude regions of Himachal Pradesh. Drawing on published scholarship, archival documentation, and audiovisual recordings, this paper examines how Chham articulates cosmological narratives through movement, sound, and visual symbolism, transforming monastic spaces into ritual landscapes animated by deities, protectors, and mythic histories. Through an analysis of choreographic structures, masked iconography, and rhythmic accompaniment as represented in secondary sources, the paper explores Chham as a form of cosmology in motion. Mountains and borderland geographies emerge not merely as settings but as active conceptual frameworks within which ritual authority, protection, and moral order are performed. Particular attention is given to how sacred movement and sound index relationships between monastic institutions, local communities, and the powerful non-human agents associated with the Himalayan terrain. The paper further situates Chham within wider trans-Himalayan networks of ritual circulation, tracing how dance repertoires, narratives, and aesthetic conventions connect Himachal Pradesh to broader Buddhist cultural zones across the Hindu Kush–Himalaya. By balancing the hyper-local grounding of Chham in specific monastic contexts with its transregional genealogies, this study highlights the role of sacred dance in shaping shared Himalayan imaginaries. Aligned with the symposium theme Mountains in Sound and Motion, this presentation argues that Chham, as documented in textual and visual sources, offers a compelling case for understanding how mountainous borderlands are continuously produced and reimaged through expressive practice.

Keywords: Chham, Buddhism, Himachal Pradesh, Ritual performance, Mountain cosmology, Sound and movement

"Salaijo, A Thousand Years" (Film)

Mohan Thapa

This paper explores the socio-ecological foundations and contemporary revitalization of Magar cultural expression in Nepal's Gandaki River basin, focusing on the traditional song–dance form "Salaijo". The Gandaki River system, originating from Damodar Kunda and the Dhaulagiri Himalaya, has long served as a corridor for settlement, mobility, and exchange from the high Himalayas to the lowlands. Within this landscape, Magar livelihoods historically combined herding, hunting and gathering, and later settled agriculture, alongside seasonal travel for salt and trade. These practices fostered a close human–environment relationship that shaped cultural forms and collective identities.

"Salaijo" emerged in this context as a communal medium for expressing memory, emotion, and social experience. Traditionally performed without modern instruments and grounded in vocal and participatory rhythms, "Salaijo" conveyed stories of labor, migration, hardship, and joy. The paper examines how "Salaijo" functions as intangible biocultural heritage, linking ecological adaptation with expressive culture.

Extending beyond documentation, this study incorporates practice-based research through the author's own contemporary Salaijo composition, "Salaijo, a thousand years" published on YouTube and other digital platforms. This creative work experiments with modern musical elements and new lyrics while remaining rooted in Salaijo's thematic core. As such, it illustrates how digital platforms and artistic innovation can support cultural transmission and visibility.

The paper argues that "Salaijo" is not a static tradition but a living, adaptive system. Changes in music, dress, and media reflect broader socio-economic transformations, yet the genre continues to carry Magar values and historical consciousness. By bridging ethnographic insight and creative practice, the study contributes to discussions on Indigenous knowledge, intangible heritage, and cultural resilience in Himalayan societies.

BhalaBhali Project: Creatively Documenting Songs and Language in Far Western Nepal

Dinesh Raj Upadhyay

This project aims to map the women singers and document, preserve, and promote traditional songs performed by them in the hilly Far West of Nepal through visual filmmaking and publishing them through virtual tour technique using Panoee platform. This project will produce a series of performance and artist profile videos featuring more than 30 women singers from seven districts of Far West Nepal: Darchula, Baitadi, Doti, Dadeldhura, Bajhang, Bajura, and Achham. These songs include Dhuskā, Thādī Bhākā, Phāg, Chābhāī Re Chābhāī, Māñgal, and other local forms which are on the verge of extinction, surviving mainly among the eldest generation of women, so urgent documentation is essential. The Māñgal tradition is nearly lost, with only a few elderly women able to sing it in some villages, none in others, and no transfer of knowledge to the younger generation.

Music and Social Work in Urban Nepal

Dikshant Uprety

This paper delves into the everyday politics of what it means for musicians to contribute one's labor as social work (known as Samajik Kaam or Samaj Sewa or even Paropakari Kaam in Nepali) in contemporary Kathmandu. Nepalese understand social work as voluntary labor contributed to the good of others and the wider society. Based on ethnographic data collected among Kathmandu's middle- and upper-class rock, blues, hip hop and fusion musicians, this paper argues that these musicians provide their labor voluntarily to many social causes and initiatives in the city and wider Nepal. I contend that development imaginaries and local values of social work have merged to produce individuals who willingly provide their labor freely with the hopes to "develop" Nepali society. I will discuss how and why musicians are interested in performing in these social change projects which can range from performing in environmental events to playing in bars and restaurants to raise funds for their friends' world music festival.

The Gowo of Western Tibet and the Balandzikom of Badakhshan: Cousin Lutes in the Highlands of Central Eurasia?

Katherine Freeze Wolf

A half-century ago ethnomusicologist Marc Slobin, in his study of music in northern Afghanistan, theorized a "series of high mountain lute types in a special musical region at 'the roof of the world.'" That families of closely related instruments should appear across lands linked for millennia through trade and conquest is not surprising, but comparisons tend to yield a paradox: that which seems similar from a distance can be, upon closer examination, profoundly different. In this paper I examine two plucked lutes,

the Himalayan gowo of Western Tibet (Ngari) and the Pamiri balandzikom of Tajik and Afghan Badakhshan. Sharing many of the same physical characteristics, they nevertheless belong to distinct local traditions with very divergent trajectories. My accounts of each instrument draw on long-term apprenticeships with two accomplished practitioners—the widely acknowledged last master of the gowo Sherap Dorje (c.1960-2019) in Ladakh (India) and the master instrument builder and player of the balandzikom Shauqmamad Pulodov (b. 1958) in Tajikistan. I describe how each musician has understood his instrument’s religious significations, performance techniques, and song ecologies, and I trace how, through their creative interventions, both instruments gained new musical scope and entered new spheres of circulation. I argue that the instruments’ respective transitions from obscurity to increased popularity suggest a model of cross-cultural musical diffusion whereby those attributes of an instrument that take root as essential and exclusive for maintaining a tradition become its most durable. The balandzikom’s unique re-entrant tuning has preserved it as the exclusive conveyer of an idiosyncratic sound associated with a specialized and ritually vital local genre of sung poetry, while the gowo, with its more common rising-fourth tuning and considerable variability in form, has been reborn on other Himalayan lutes as a singular, emblematic playing style, even as cultural institutions strive to standardize its organological identity.

Two Poets and a River (Film)

Richard Wolf

Using the Oxus river as a topos, this film explores themes of love and loss through the lives and musical poetry of the two most prominent and innovative Wakhi musicians in Central and South Asia, Qurbonso in Tajikistan and Daulatsho in Afghanistan. In the 19th century their Wakhan homeland became a buffer zone between Czarist Russia and the British Empire and the river Oxus became a border. The condition of being separated by a river grounds the poets’ discussions of love and loss in their own lives as well as in their musical arts. Richard Wolf shot the film over 2.5 years (2012-2020).