

Dialogic Songs for Intercultural Dialog? Toward 'Post-Multiculturalism' in Post-Conflict Nepal

CAN A DIALOGIC SONG TRADITION PROMOTE BETTER RELATIONS BETWEEN GROUPS?

After centuries of inequality among Nepal's many caste and ethnic groups, and a decade of civil war, Nepal aims to become more socially inclusive.

DEFINING 'BETTER'

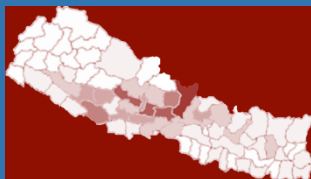
Political parties, civil society groups, NGOs, individuals, have varied goals of intercultural engagement, from 'tolerance' and 'respect for difference' to facilitating discussion of difficult issues.

Is there a way to move beyond 'melting pot' vs. 'salad bowl' to a 'post-multicultural' paradigm that acknowledges intercultural negotiations, interaction across difference, and cultural change?

METHODS

This research draws on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Nepal in 2006-2008. Demographic data are from a survey of 368 (out of about 550) dohori restaurant performers in Kathmandu in 2007.

Performers' Home Districts



Most performers hail from the central hills, which have long been associated with the dominant concept of Nepali nationhood.



DOHORI SONG

VILLAGE TRADITIONS

Dohori songs comprise of improvised couplets, sung as conversational duets. Based in indigenous ethnic groups' practices, they have been adopted by other groups as well, and are one way for youth of different backgrounds to meet, flirt, and form relationships through song.

NATIONAL COMPETITIONS

PURIFICATION

State-run competitions in the 1980s focused on national unity, discouraging eroticism and mention of caste, and establishing central-hills musical style as standard in the music industry. Now privately run, they continue to attract aspiring singers of diverse backgrounds, but adhere to the same rules emphasizing unity.

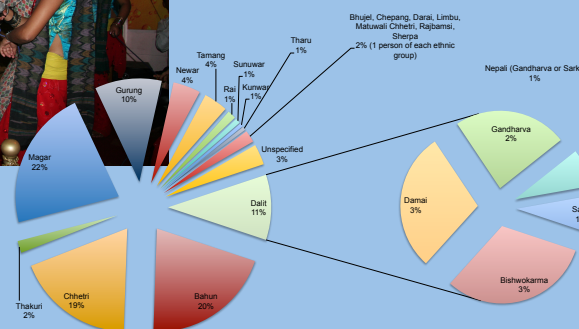


DOHORI RESTAURANTS COSMOPOLITAN 'COUNTRY'

Love songs predominate in restaurants' nightclub atmosphere, influenced by competitions, tunes taken from the recording industry. Rural nostalgia is the main mood. As in village settings for dohori singing, inter-caste relationships are common between performers, and performers and patrons.



Kathmandu Dohori Restaurant Performers: Caste/Ethnicity



RECORD INDUSTRY

The folk and dohori recording industry has become a highly diverse professional community, made up of migrants from rural areas. Most songs recorded are love songs, but political songs and songs on social issues like education and Dalit rights can also be found. Central-hills musical styles dominate.

CONCLUSIONS

Dohori's whole field of cultural production, rather than just words or musical structure, facilitates intercultural interaction. But musical style sets limits on its reach, favoring the central hills region. Those who want to use dohori for intercultural dialog should pay attention to its historical use in promoting a central-hills-dominated unity, which does not resonate with the whole nation. Tensions between this nationalising history and dohori's association with marginalised groups fuel creativity in music and in lives, with love relationships as mediums for social transformation. This fosters neither a 'melting pot' nor 'salad bowl', but rather a space for negotiating values, and figuring out how to live together, professionally and intimately.

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