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Nepalese Diasporic Music in Canada: Representing, Reimagining, and Resonating Homeland

Subash GIRI*

Abstract
Diasporization is full of new encounters, fluidity, and ambiguities. As diasporic communities often undergo different stages of relocation, settlement, adaptation, assimilation, and accommodation, diasporization shapes a new social formation in a new socio-cultural milieu. In a state of forming a new diasporic identity, feeling the pain of separation from the homeland, and living on the margin between native and host culture, music serves as a prime arena to link to past, present, and future; trace multiple roots; and evoke history, myth, and memory of the homeland in diaspora. A musical kaleidoscope of recently formed Nepalese diasporic communities in Canada depict similar characteristics. Through musical instruments, songs, public and community performances, and group music practices, they articulate their sense of belongingness, attachment, and association to their homeland and its culture. Based on insight drawn from musical ethnography, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews, this paper delineates the role of music among

* *PhD Candidate, Ethnomusicology (Assistant Lecturer, Indian Music Ensemble), Department of Music, University of Alberta, Canada, sgiri@ualberta.ca*

Nepalese diasporic communities in Canada, focusing on three elements: representation, reimagination, and resonance of homeland.

Keywords: Music, Nepalese Diaspora, Canada, representation, reimagination, resonance

Kanada'da Nepal Diaspora Müziği: Anavatanın Temsili, Yeniden Tasarlanması ve Yankılanması

Özet

Diasporizasyon yeni karşılaşmalar, akışkanlık ve belirsizliklerle doludur. Diyasporik topluluklar genellikle farklı yer değiştirme, yerleşim, uyum, asimilasyon ve barınma aşamalarından geçerken, diasporasyon yeni bir sosyo-kültürel ortamda yeni bir sosyal oluşumu şekillendirir. Yeni bir diasporik kimlik oluşturma, anavatandan ayrılmanın acısını hissetme, yerli ve ev sahibi kültür arasındaki sınırda yaşam sırasında, müzik, geçmiş, şimdiki zaman ve gelecekle bağlantı kurmak için ana arena olarak hizmet eder ki çoklu kökler takip edildiğinde, diasporadaki anavatanın tarihini, mitini ve anısını çağrıştırır. Kanada'da yakın zamanda oluşan Nepal diaspora topluluklarının müzikal bir kaleydoskopu benzer özellikler göstermektedir. Müzik enstrümanları, şarkılar, halk ve topluluk performansları ve grup müziği uygulamaları yoluyla, aidiyet duygularını, bağlılıklarını ve anavatanlarına ve kültürlerine bağlılıklarını ifade ederler. Müzik etnografyası, katılımcı gözlemler ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden elde edilen verilere dayanan bu makale, Kanada'daki Nepal diaspora toplulukları arasında müziğin rolünü üç unsura odaklanarak tasvir etmekte: Ana vatanın temsili, yeniden tahayyülü ve rezonansı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Müzik, Nepal Diasporası, Kanada, temsil, yeniden tahayyül, rezonans

Introduction

In the last two and half centuries, a plethora of people and communities have reshaped local societies of the world due to enormous mass movements. There are countless reasons for people's movements over large distances for the purpose of creating permanent new homes, including catastrophe, violence, social insecurity, hard-pressed lives, demographic pressure, poverty, and forces of economics and politics (Brown, 2006). The mobility of music is intrinsic during these human dispersions, displacements, or dislocations, and this cultural product often plays an important role during new social formations of these dispersed people (Turino & Lea, 2004). Despite the phenomenon of migration, immigration, and diasporization that redefines the ethnicity and authenticity of the music (Rasmussen, 1992) and sometimes causes its dramatic transformation in a new socio-cultural milieu (Baily, 2005), music still serves as a prime arena to bridge between past (homeland), present, and future (hostland) (Naroditskaya, 2019); trace one's origin; and inscribe history and geography into diasporic life (Bohlman, 2002).

The quest for better living conditions and various socio-economic, socio-political, and environmental factors—encompassing armed civil conflict between 1996-2006, low employment opportunities, and natural disasters—prompted a wave of Nepalese migrants and immigrants to flee towards different destination countries. The majority of these migrants and immigrants chose the Gulf countries, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Korea due to better opportunities for low-skilled jobs and easy-to-obtain work visas. Many others migrated and immigrated to Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and North America as students, high-skilled workers, asylum seekers, and/or relatives joining those who had previously emigrated (Gellner, 2013).

Better living conditions, more affordable medical care, a safer environment, and a strong education system have made Canada a favorable targeted destination for skilled Nepalese immigrants. In the last fifteen years, a tremendous number of Nepalese—over 80% of the total 14,390 Nepalese immigrants in Canada—have immigrated to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). This immigration trend is growing significantly, and Nepalese immigrants are settling in different parts of Canada, making new homes and forming new Nepalese diasporic communities.

Music plays an indispensable role in the lives of Nepalese diasporic communities in Canada. From small house gatherings to big community events, from everyday life to special festivals or life cycle rites, music is intrinsically linked to every aspect of Nepalese diasporic life. Particularly, members of the Nepalese diaspora play the musical instruments and sing the songs from their homeland to articulate a shared sense of community and constitute a deep belongingness, association, and attachment to their inherited culture.

This article aims to examine the musical kaleidoscope among the Nepalese diasporic communities in Canada. Specifically, to discuss how the Nepalese diasporic communities across Canada employ music as a powerful tool, it delineates the music-making and musical performances of these communities centered on three elements: the representation, reimagination, and resonance of their homeland in their new homes. In this article, I have employed a combined method of participant observation, musical ethnography, and semi-structured interviews. In most of the events discussed in this article, I actively participated as a performer and performed alongside the musicians and musical groups of the Nepalese diasporic communities. In some cases, I attended solely as a participant and observed the events. The site of this study is primarily in Edmonton, Alberta. However, I also conducted fieldwork in the cities of Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Regina, in the provinces Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, respectively. I personally interacted with the musicians and community members in these areas. My finding and discussion in this article are solely based on my fieldwork conducted from October 2016 – January 2020 in these Nepalese diasporic communities.

Discourse on Diaspora

Ethnomusicological literature on diaspora is commonly centered on the representation and analysis of a diaspora's music culture and performance. Scholars often omit the discourse on the diaspora concept in their ethnomusicological writings. There is a perceptible gap in the discussion of diaspora theory in ethnomusicological scholarship. In order to bridge this gap and understand diaspora terminology—which includes expatriates, nomadic, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, migrants, and ethnic and racial minorities today—it is appropriate to review briefly some developments and ongoing debates surrounding the diaspora concept based on the works of several key social science scholars.

Diaspora is a widely used concept in academia today. Two different predominant ideologies have formed around the use of this concept. One group of scholars is worried about the popularity and proliferation of the diaspora concept in multidisciplinary studies. They argue that not all dispersed minority populations (immigrant, nomadic, exilic, expatriates, expelleed, political refugees, alien residents) can legitimately be considered diasporas and the use of diaspora to define all forms of dispersion is problematic. The basis of their argument is built on the normative definition and understanding of diaspora that suggests three core elements: a) dispersion—collective people who cross state borders because of catastrophe, forced or traumatic events; b) homeland orientation—maintain collective identity, memory, or myth and practice homeland's culture, language, and religion; and c) boundary-maintenance or

longing to return to the homeland—resistance to assimilation, maintaining relations through kin communities, cultural exchange, and political lobbying (Safran, 1991; Butler, 2001; Brubaker, 2005; Tölölyan, 2007).

In contrast, another group of scholars suggests the need for the redefinition of the term and expansion of the concept in the changing context of global dispersion. For example, Lily Cho (2007) disagrees with the distinction and declaration of diaspora that is categorized or limited by some specific criteria or boundaries; she posits that the traditional definition of diaspora is outdated, and its principles do not function anymore. According to Cho, there is no one definite group or people who fit into the definition of diaspora. Similarly, James Clifford (1994) suggests that it is very difficult to separate or maintain exclusive paradigms in defining the concept of diaspora in changing global conditions. He analyzes ideas shared by various social theorists with frameworks and models that are intended to draw a fine line between legitimate diaspora and the extended definition of diaspora. Clifford says: "whatever the working list of diasporic features, no society can be expected to qualify on all counts, throughout history. And the discourse of diaspora will necessarily be modified as it is translated and adopted" (p. 306).

Another scholar, Robin Cohen (2008), divides the diaspora into four different phases. The first phase was the Jewish dispersion followed by the Greek dispersion and expansion of the concept in 1960s and 1970s, including Africans, Armenians, Palestinians, and the Irish. The second phase in the 1980s includes expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities. In the third phase, starting in the mid-1990s, there was a division among social scientists between those who wanted to limit and those who wanted to expand the diaspora concept. The fourth phase, from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, strengthened the modified reaffirmation of the diasporic idea, including core features and core ideas. Cohen suggests that there is difficulty in defining diaspora. He argues that the prototype diasporas are defined as diaspora based on their dispersion led by catastrophe; however, there are also similar elements involved in the dispersion of other dispersed people or groups, such as general pressure of over-population, land hunger, poverty, or a generally unsympathetic political environment. He concludes that the core theoretical elements of the concept should be kept while the changes and expansions that can be more widely applied should be added.

Scholarship on Music and Diaspora in Ethnomusicology

Diaspora is an unsettled term and there is an ongoing debate on its definition in social sciences. Once the term was expanded and proliferated into diverse disciplines after the 1970s, ethnomusicologists began broadly

employing this concept in their work after the 1990s. Today, there is a wide range of research in ethnomusicological literature on the music culture and performance of expatriates, expellees, refugees, alien residents, migrants, immigrants, oversears communities, and ethnic and racial minorities—which are collectively called diaspora.

An early 90s ethnographic study from Anne Rasmussen (1992) examines the sound and music played in Middle Eastern nightclubs in the United States by Arab-American diaspora musicians during the 1960s and 1970s. Her work discusses how the phenomenon of migration redefines the ethnicity and authenticity of the music, and how the redefined and fused music may take on a new identity. In the same year, Charles Keil's, Angeliki V. Keil's, and Dick Blau's (1992) book examines the interplay between music and identity in the Polka dance music scene of Polish-Americans in Buffalo and Chicago. In a survey on the use of the diaspora term, ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin (2012) points to James Clifford's 1994 "Diasporas" article as the turning point in diasporic music and cultural studies in ethnomusicological scholarship. In the same year as Slobin's survey, the journal "Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies" devoted an issue to diasporic and transnational music, which includes work from diverse scholars on the music of Haitian, Chinese, Cuban, Macedonian, and Punjabi diasporic communities (Tölölyan, 1994).

After 2000, there was an increase in the notable number of works on diasporic music in ethnomusicological scholarship. For example, an ethnographic work from Keila Diehl (2002) presents a rigorous examination of music in the life of a Tibetan diasporic community in North India. In the same year, in his introductory book on world music, Philip V. Bohlman (2002) discusses world music as a place for the expression of common history, a negotiation with outside culture, and an articulation of a sense of place for placeless diasporas, focusing on the cases of African, Jewish, and South Asian diaspora communities. An edited volume by Thomas Turino and James Lea (2004) discusses the role of the arts and artistic practices in the creation and maintenance of a diaspora's social identities of and the effects of diasporic experiences on these art practices.

Several other works by John Baily (2005) on the Afghan American community in Fremont, California examines the impact of migration on native music and culture in a completely new cultural milieu. Likewise, Tina K. Ramnarine's (2007) work presents the music of the Caribbean diaspora, examining the role of music and various issues like hybridity, marginalization, and otherness. Also, Jennifer C. Post's (2007) work documents the music of the Kazakhs diaspora community, who were dispersed from their homeland as seasonal migrants and settled in western Mongolia in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In some recent works, Carol Silverman's (2012) book examines the issues of adaptability, cultural hybridity, and transnationality in Romani communities in the United States and Southeastern Europe, focusing on their music. Marcia Ostashewski (2014) presents Ukrainian diasporic music and dance performance and the display of Ukrainian culture, heritage, and identity in Canada. In a similar manner, Sylvia Angelique Alajaji's (2015) book presents music of the Armenian diaspora and examines the use of music by Armenians to narrate their diasporic identity. An edited volume by Inna Naroditskaya (2019) compiles eleven essays by diverse scholars across the fields of ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, and area studies that present the wedding music of various diasporic communities in the United States. This list could go on, as a tremendous amount of ethnomusicological work has been and continues to be carried out in a recent decades, and ethnomusicology is making a substantial contribution to diaspora discourse.

Nepalese Diasporic Communities in Canada

The emergence of Nepalese diasporic communities in Canada is a recent phenomenon. Despite the fact that the immigration history of the Nepalese in Canada goes back to the 1980s, the data from Statistics Canada shows only 1,920 Nepalese immigrants in Canada until 2005. The population of Nepalese immigrants increased significantly (81.37% - 11,710) after 2006 and reached 14,390 in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016). Since the immigration data is five years out of date, it is possible that the total population has since grown considerably, based on the growth in recent decades; Canada is welcoming new immigrants and Nepalese are finding it a popular destination for making their new homes.

Nepalese immigrants have made their settlement across Canada by diverging into eleven different provinces and territories. These areas are Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories. The majority of Nepalese immigrants (7,605) live in Ontario, whereas Alberta (3,915) and British Columbia (1,035) have the second and third largest population sizes across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Again, this data only provides an estimation because these numbers have changed dramatically during the past five years.

The settlement pattern of the Nepalese diasporic communities in these areas have similar characteristics. Most of these communities have chosen based on factors such as: neighbor communities who have a similar culture and religion; relatives; religious institutions; access to South Asian stores; and close proximity to Nepalese community organizations while settling new homes. I observed these patterns during my fieldwork visits and several other

visits during my music performances. I visited Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Alberta—Alberta being where I spent most of my time observing the Nepalese diasporic communities.

The Nepalese language, an official national language and lingua franca of Nepal, is the most common language spoken among the Nepalese diasporic communities. Although Nepalese immigrants in Canada are from different castes, ethnicities, and parts of Nepal, Hinduism is practiced by the majority of the population. Nepalese language, religion, and national cultural festivals serve as a basis to display the Nepalese diasporic communities' collective identity.

Representating Homeland

It was August 4, 2018, the first of three days of the Heritage Festival in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. After eight months of arduous preparation, the Nepalese diasporic community was eagerly ready to showcase their homeland's cultural heritage to the Edmonton Heritage Festival. In a brief snapshot, this annual festival is held over the three days of the August long weekend in William Hawrelak Park in Edmonton. The festival has been showcasing diverse cultures of different communities of Alberta since 1976 (Edmonton Heritage Festival, 2020). Each community gets a pavilion to display their cultural heritage through music, dance, arts and crafts, and food.

I arrived at the Nepal pavilion in the early morning around 8:00 am. As a cultural coordinator for that year's event, my role was to coordinate the music and dance performances of the Nepalese diaspora community in the festival for three days (August 4 – 6), which had been prepared by the community members under my guidance for the previous eight months. I set up the stage with the help of some community members and organized the music system. This took me almost three hours, and the stage and music system were ready for the performers by 11:00 am. By then, most of the music and dance performers had already arrived. The cultural showcase for the first day was planned to start at 12:20 pm. The performers used the remaining time to prepare themselves with costumes and makeup. Finally, the clock hit 12:20 pm and five female performers went on the stage and showcased a traditional dance, '*Maruni,*' of the Gurung and Magar ethnic groups of Nepal. This was followed by four other traditional dance performances: *Tamang Selo, Tappa, Dhime,* and *Sangini* of the Tamang, Tharu, Magar, Thakuri, and Newar ethnic groups of Nepal, respectively. Specific traditional music accompanied in all of the dance performances.

As the day proceed, the William Hawrelak Park area echoed with soundscapes of over hundreds of other community pavilions. Despite the hot day of August, a crowd of thousands of festival visitors filled the park area.

The Nepalese diasporic community pavilion was also receiving significant attention for its music and dance performances, food, and art and crafts. After these five performances, the next performing groups took twenty minutes of transitioning break. Later, the showcase continued until 7:00 pm in the evening with several music and dance demonstrations.

On the second day, August 5, the main attraction was the traditional instrumental music ensemble, called Panchae Baja, of the Damai caste group of Nepal. The ensemble consisted of traditional wind instruments *sahanai, narsinga,* and *karnal;* drum instruments *damaha, dholaki,* and *tyamko;* and cymbals instruments *jhyali* or *jhyamta.* A group of 10 musicians played traditional instrumental music for almost an hour. The other attractions of the day were the showcases of dance performances of different ethnic and caste groups—Limbu and Gurung of Nepal. The second day's performance concluded in the evening at 7:00 pm.

During the last day of the Heritage Festival, August 6, the performances followed the same schedule and showcased many other cultural performances—Rai, Sherpa, Kirat, Brahmin, Chettri, and Bhojpuri—which had not been presented in the first two days. Across these three days, the Nepalese diasporic community showcased 40 different group performances of 20 ethnic cultures of Nepal, involving 160 participants from the age of 6 to 80. Although the majority of the performances were from the Edmonton diasporic community, there are some performers who came from Lethbridge and Calgary to represent the Nepalese diasporic communities of Lethbridge and Calgary.

Figure 1: *Members of the Nepalese diasporic community of Edmonton, Alberta performing Nepalese traditional instrumental ensemble Panchae Baja on the second day of Edmonton Heritage Festival 2018. Photograph by author, August 5, 2018.*

Figure 2: *Members of the Nepalese diasporic community of Calgary, Alberta before performing Kelang (Dhol) dance music of the Limbu ethnic group of Nepal on the second day of Edmonton Heritage Festival 2018. Photograph by author, August 5, 2018.*

Figure 3: *Members of the Nepalese diasporic community of Lethbridge, Alberta performing Kauda dance of the Gurung and Magar ethnic groups of Nepal on the second day of Edmonton Heritage Festival 2018. Photograph by author, August 5, 2018.*

In an introduction of an edited volume titled "Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities", Thomas Turino (2004) writes:

> Artistic practices have a special place in the realization and presentation of identity because they are usually framed as heightened forms of representation for public perception, practice, and effects. Once externalized through public artistic forms, the meanings subjectively produced become part of the environment that dialectically shape the emergent models of the self. (p. 10)

Turino describes that arts—photography, film, painting, music, dance, literature, and architecture—contributes to the formation and maintainance of identity in diasporic communities. Like Turino, many other scholars have taken the approach to examine music or cultural expressions of diasporic communities from the perspective of articulation of identity. In discussing the role of music among diasporas, Bohlman writes, "[i]f music survives as a trace of the homeland, it also provides a means of negotiating with the outside cultures in the diasporic environment" (Bohlman 2002, p. 116). He describes music as a tool to negotiate diasporic identity in a different cultural miliue. For example, Alajaji (2015) recounts how the Armenian diaspora used their music after the 1915 genocide to negotiate their identity. In some cases, like the Kazakhs in Western Mongolia, Post (2007) recounts the use of musical expression as a form of resistance to maintain diasporic identity. In similar festival scenes in Auckland and Willington, New Zealand, Johnson recounts the significant role of the homeland's traditional music, dance, and food in displaying and representing a pan-South Asian identity in New Zealand's multicultural settings (Johnson, 2007).

The cultural demonstration of the Nepalese diasporic community in the Edmonton Heritage Festival is not much different than the idea of identity discussed by the scholars cited above. Perhaps the musical performances of the participants are not inspired by ideas like negotiation or resistance, as portrayed in the cases outlined by Bohlman, Alajaji and Post. However, the eight months of tireless preparation of the cultural items and the vigorous performances during the three hot sunny days of August on the open stage—performed to represent their homeland's cultural heritage to a diverse audience in a multicultural setting—depict their belongingness, attachment, and association to their homeland. Not just the Nepalese diasporic communities of Edmonton, Calgary, or Lethbridge, but a pan-Nepalese diasporic community in Canada uses music as one of the essential aspects of representing their homeland.

Reimagining Homeland

I was fortunate that I received a very warm welcome from one of the families of the Nepalese diasporic community when I arrived in Edmonton on

August 29, 2016. I was treated to a week of exceptional hospitality from that family until I found a place to stay. A few months after I moved and settled in a new place, I met an elderly community member, Dr. Ai Bahadur Gurung, in November 2016 during my fieldwork. Gurung has been well-known in the community for over a decade for his leadership role and volunteer work. He is also known for his cultural advocacy and his initiatives to encourage the Nepalese community of Edmonton to practice their native music and culture. He is an engineer by profession, but he likes to play the Nepalese bamboo flute in his spare time. He introduced me to two other community musicians: Bishnu Gnawali—another Nepalese bamboo flute player—and Umanath Gaire—a Nepalese cylindric hand drum *(madal)* player. While I was conducting a group interview, Gurung brought up the idea of performing in an upcoming community festival of the Gurung, Tamang, Lama, and Sherpa ethnic groups called *Lhosar.* After a few rehearsals, we presented an hour and a half cultural show, performing several Nepalese language traditional songs and instrumentals on December 31, 2016 at the Duggan Community Hall, South Edmonton.

On the evening of September 24, 2017, the Nepalese diasporic community celebrated their two national festivals called *Dashain* and *Tihar,* usually celebrated at the end of September and late October in Nepal. *Dashain* is also called "Durga Puja", which lasts for fifteen days. During these fifteen days of celebration, on *Ghatasthapana,* the first day, Nepalese people establish a clay or metal pot called kalash (sacred water vessel) in a prayer room and cover it with cow dung *(gobar)* on which they sow barley seeds. Between the first and seventh days, people go to temples, worship gods and goddess, and clean their houses. On Phulpati, the seventh day, people bring flowers, banana stalk/leaves, sugar cane, and fruits into their houses (considered as auspicious). On the eighth and ninth days, *Maha Astami* and *Navami,* Nepalese specifically worship the Hindu goddess Durga by visiting temples. They also sacrifice animals and worship weapons, vehicles, and machinery pieces as a part of traditional ritual. On the tenth, the main day of this festival, they take out the young sapling of barley seeds called Jamara, planted on the very first day of the festival. Nepalese put *Tika* (mixture of rice, yogurt and vermillion powder) on their forehead and *Jamara* from their elders as a sign of blessings in the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon; they then go to their relatives, friends and exchange greetings and *Tika* until the fifteenth day (Burbank & Elias, 2014). Following Dashain, Tihar is celebrated for five days in late October, worshiping gods and animals—Yama Duta*, crows, dogs, cows, Laxmi**, and sisters—and lighting up candles and other lights in

* *Messenger of Death in Hindu mythology.*
** *Goddess of wealth in Hindu mythology*

their houses. Tihar is also considered the most dazzling among all Nepalese festivals. It is called the festival of lights (Zuchora-Walske, 2009).

The Nepalese diasporic community put together these two festivals and celebrated them as one. The center of attention for the gathering was a musical program prepared by local artists and an invited guest artist. These events (*Lhosar* and *Dashain* and *Tihar*) were organized by the Nepalese diasporic community organization called the Nepalese Canadian Society of Edmonton (NECASE). The organization was established in 1999 by a few Nepalese immigrants. In the past two decades, this organization has become the key community center to connect togther community members and newcomers residing in the Edmonton area. When the massive influx of Nepalese immigrants in Edmonton occurred over the past decades, several other community organizations, language schools, and clubs emerged. Today, there are six organizations, including two Nepalese heritage language school. In 2017, I voluntarily taught Nepalese traditional music to the students in one of the Nepalese heritage language school, called Gurukul Nepal, for a month and a half—January 14 to February 28. These organizations regularly organize community events, focusing on local and national festivals and occasions. There are three major community events: Nepali *Nava Varsha* or *Naya Varsha*[*]; *Haritalika Teej;* and *Dashain* and *Tihar.* Music always plays a central role in these events to gather 200 to 500 Nepalese immigrants under a single roof.

In one musical event I attended in 2019, I witnessed the Hindu women's *Teej* festival celebration of the Nepalese diasporic community. *Teej* is one of the biggest festivals celebrated by Hindu women in Nepal, normally occuring somewhere between mid-August and mid-September. In this particular three-day fest, in Nepal, women go to their parental home; meet parents, sisters, and childhood friends; eat delicious food and sweets; take twenty-four hours of rigid fast; and worship a deity for longevity and good health for their husbands and family. The most attractive part of *Teej* festival for Hindu women is public singing and dancing. Nepalese women gather in a temple, primarily a Shiva temple, and other public spheres and express their joy through music and dance performances.

It was a Sunday evening on August 25, 2019. The clock hit 5:00 pm and the quiet hall at St. John's Cultural Centre, Edmonton, Alberta started to get crowded from the arrival of Nepalese diasporic Hindu women. It did not take long for the hall to fill with women wearing beautiful red attire,

** Nepali Nava Varsha or Naya Varsha is the Nepalese new year celebrated by Nepalese nationals. Nepal follows its own calendar system called Bikram Sambat (Birkam Era) which is 56.7 years ahead of the solar Gregorian calendar. Bikram Sambat uses lunar months starting from mid-April to mid-March. Nepalese new year is an official public holiday in Nepal.*

their finest gold jewelry, and traditional make-up. According to the organizer, there were 299 Hindu women gathered from across the Edmonton area. Soon, the hall echoed with the singing, clapping, and dancing of the diasporic Hindu women. The crowd took the noise to another level when the invited guest artist from Nepal—Pashupati Sharma, a popular folk singer—appeared on the stage around 7:00 pm. He performed his popular *Teej* and *dohori* (dialogic, conversational sung poetry) repertoires and continued perform to the crowd for almost three hours. The Nepalese diasporic Hindu women joined him with tireless clap and dance.

Figure 4: *Nepalese Hindu diasporic women of Edmonton dancing during the Teej celebration event at St. John's Cultural Centre, Edmonton, Alberta 2019. Photograph by author, August 25, 2019.*

From my own participatory observation during my performance in *Lhosar* and my two other ethnographic observations of *Dashain* and *Tihar*, and *Teej* celebration, I found that the Nepalese diasporic community's music performances provided a platform to recreate their homeland's festivals in Edmonton despite their distant from their home country. In discussing the reimagination of homeland in the context of the Nepalese diasporic community's festival celebration, Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" is very relevant. While defining imagined communities in his

book, Benedict Anderson (2006) writes, "[imagined community] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). In many ways, the formation of a diasporic community in Edmonton for Nepalese immigrants is similar to Anderson's described imagined community. Arriving from different parts of Nepal, many Nepalese immigrants of Edmonton have never seen nor met each other. They define and imagine themselves as a part of the Nepaelse diasporic community in Edmonton and across Canada. Specifically, during festivals like those I attended, they gather in a space where they do not know each other and reimagine the homeland's festival celebration together with the other participants.

Ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes (1997) offers great insight into social performance and sense of place. His idea of place and social performance is reflected in the Nepalese diasporic music performances in festival celebrations. Stokes says:

> The musical event, from collective dances to the act of putting a cassette or CD into a machine, evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity. The places constructed through music involve the notion of difference and social boundary. (p. 3)

As Stokes remarks, a musical event is not merely a social event. It has the power to evoke memories and inform a sense of place. A musical evening like the *Lhosar, Dashain, Tihar,* or *Teej* celebrations in Edmonton convey a special meaning of sense of place—reimagination of homeland—for the Nepalese diasporic memebers, and music plays a powerful tool to inform this reimagination. Regardless of caste, ethnicity, religion, and geographical region, Nepalese diasporic community members gather to celebrate a festival. This collective consciousness of Nepaliness is twofold: one, the creation of a new diasporic community (imagined community in Anderson's (2006) words); and two, the recreation of the homeland (sense of place in Stokes's (1997) words). Music often plays an essential part in this process of creation and recreation. Further, the Nepalese diasporic organizations and heritage language schools established in Edmonton and other parts Canada are key to building this consciousness and generating a sense of collectivity. These community organizations use music as an important vehicle, either in festival celebrations or in teaching new generations at language schools, to recreate their homeland. Despite diaspora members being distant and away from

realtime festival celebrations, as in the case of the Nepalese diasporic community, music serves as a node to unite fellow members of the community to reimagine their homeland.

Resonating Homeland

Besides the major community events, Nepalese immigrants also get together in small groups during weekends, small festivals, and life cycle rites. In all these meetings, the homeland's music plays a central role in the life of Nepalese immigrants. On many occasions, I have been invited to join Nepalese diasporic family gatherings in Edmonton, Calgary, and Winnipeg. In the last four and half years of my interactions with these diasporic communities, one thing I noticed they never missed in these socializings was their homeland's music. A local musician or group of musicians (mostly untrained but have enough skill to entertain people) were always present in those socializings, and sang and played Nepalese folk and traditional songs and instruments.

Sometimes, Nepalese diasporic communities also gather at the provincial and regional level. I attended one such event, a large gathering at *Western Canada Regional Nepali Sports and Cultural Events (WCRNSCE)* held from July 1-3, 2017 in Regina, Saskatchewan. In that event, Nepalese diasporic community members of the Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan provinces gathered. The evening of July 1 was specifically devoted to a cultural showcase. The theatre hall of the University of Regina echoed with the voices of diasporic communities' members from the cities of those four provinces. The participants were embellished with their caste, ethnic, and national attires. In a fully packed theatre hall, performers from those provinces presented diverse traditional musical and dance performances from their homeland continuously for over two hours. The audience never missed any moment to appreciate each performance with whistles and applaud. When there was a chance, they even ran into a space available below the main stage and articulated their joy through dance movements.

Figure 5: *Members of the Nepalese diasporic community of Regina, Saskatchewan performing Nepalese instrumental music in the opening ceremony of the 8th Western Canada Regional Nepali Sports and Cultural Event (WCRNSCE) 2017. Photograph by 8th WCRNCSE, Regina Facebook page, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/8thWcrnsceRegina/photos/a.135737956431 1690/1357394197643560.*

Some diasporic musical groups have emerged in the past few years and have been actively making music in Canada. For example, in December 2020, I met sitarist Ranjana Sainju in a virtual musical program organized by the Nepalese Language and Heritage Centre (NLCC), Winnipeg, who is a member of Himalayan Vibes, a musical group based in Toronto. According to Sainju, the group was established in 2016. Currently, it has ten Nepalese diasporic musicians and is actively practicing Nepalese folk and traditional music in Toronto. In Edmonton, Alberta—the main site of my research for this paper—there are two local traditional musical groups who have been actively making music in the last few years. The first group is called *Sangeet Majheri,* which was established in August 2016 with a few trained and amateur local musicians. Occupationally, they work in different professions than music, but pre-pandemic they used to gather together during their free time and play Nepalese music. According to one of their members, Rajendra Subedi, the group formally started a monthly musical meeting every last Saturday of the month in September 2016. Later, they received community attention and

started to perform in residential settings where community members could gather and listen to them. It did not take long for them to be established among the immigrant community in Edmonton and across Alberta (Rajendra Subedi, personal interview, December 22, 2019).

Figure 6: *Members of the Nepalese diasporic musical group Sangeet Majheri performing in a community event at Central Lions Recreation Center, Edmonton, Alberta 2018. Photograph by author, December 29, 2018.*

Similarly, the second musical group is called *Nepali Bhajan Kirtan Samuha,* which was formed in 2018. In a pre-pandemic interview with Krishna Adhikari, one of the group's members, he discussed how the group started with nine dedicated families, and each family hosts a two-hour musical evening from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. every last Saturday or Sunday of the month. The group performs traditional bhajan, which are based on traditional texts, melodies, and rhythms that have been orally transmitted through the generations in Nepal. The group spent its first-year performances in 2018 within the nine families, and in the second year they reached out to the community with public performances. By January 2020, the group was receiving regular invitations from individual community members and community organizations to perform traditional bhajan and kirtan in religious festivals, life cycle festivals/rites, and other calendrical rites (Krishna Adhikari, personal interview, January 9, 2020).

Figure 7: *Members of the Nepalese diasporic musical group Nepali Bhajan Kirtan Samuha of Edmonton practicing in a residence in 2018. Photograph by Nepali Bhajan Kirtan Group Edmonton, 2021. Used by permission.*

Out of curiosity, in one interview I asked Krishna why he is so actively involved in his musical group. He replied:

> ... In the process of migration, the only intangible things humans can take are their culture, cultural practices, traditional norms, and values, which are not heavy to carry. Wherever you go, it will come inseparably with you. I do not think it is an easily detachable thing. It doesn't matter where you live. It comes out spontaneously when you really feel your culture and cultural practices. The music we are practicing here is our cultural practice that we learned orally from our ancestors. ... When we perform, people automatically come on the stage and start to dance. Many of our audiences tell us that the music we play takes them back to their village. (Krishna Adhikari, personal interview, January 9, 2020)

Krishna feels that the music their group makes helps Nepalese diasporic audiences evocate their past lives that they spent in Nepal. According to him, the sound of the music he practices connects him with his culture—the only thing he brought when he left Nepal—and this will be the only thing that will help him to continue the rest of his life in his new home in Canada without detaching him completely and irreparably from his homeland.

Bohlman suggests musical instruments and ensembles are powerful

practices used to evoke the past memories that diaspora members share with their ancestors. Drawing upon the examples of African-American Xylophone-type instrument, Chinese silk-and-bamboo orchestra, Javanese gamelan, and Indian sitar and tabla, he posits, "musical instruments often serve as some of the most palpable traces of origin in the diaspora" (Bohlman 2002, p. 116).

In every small or large gathering, every local, provincial, or regional event, and every music-making formal group, members of the Nepalese diasporic communities of Canada play instruments brought from their homeland and sing traditional and folk melodies. The soundscape created by those instruments and melodies not only appeal to every participant, but they bring forth a series of emotions and memories of childhood, place of origin, heritage, history, and so forth. In her ethnographic observation of diasporic weddings in the United States, Naroditskaya writes, "[m]usic is portable and thus easily brought by an immigrant from home to the host country. Instruments connect with distant homelands... Songs evoke precious childhood memories" (Naroditskaya 2019, p. 3). In a similar manner, music has become indispensable to Nepalese diasporic life and an arena in which to resonate their homeland memories.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined the music of Nepalese diasporic communities in Canada. I analysed the public and community music performances of Nepalese diasporic members in local and regional events, community functions, and public festivals. I discussed these musical performances based on three elements: representation, reimagination, and resonance of the homeland and its culture.

First, artistic expressions display meanings of subjectivity. Realization and presentation of artistic forms helps to frame a public perception (Turino, 2004). The cultural demonstrations—specifically musical forms in the public heritage festival—served as a channel to exhibit collective identity of the Nepalese diasporic community. Importantly, the public heritage festival provided a platform for the community to articulate their sense of belongingness and represent their homeland in a multicultural diasporic setting. Second, music functions as a "social glue" to connect diasporic communities (Solomon, 2015). This connection helps to unite even unfamiliar individuals of a nation or (imagined) community in a thread of communion (Anderson, 2006). In the context of the Nepalese diasporic community, music played an important role to link and assemble members (even unfamilier memebers) of the community in a communion and functioned as a powerful force to recreate an image of homeland. Third and last, music acts as a powerful force to evoke past memories and trace roots to individual's/group's origin (Bohlman,

2002). Through soundscapes of musical instruments and traditional and folk melodies in residental settings, commuity events, or group music-makings, Nepalease diasporic members resonate homeland by eliciting its memories.

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