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Symbiotic Agency in Swapnil Smriti's Poem 'Story of *Kabhra* Tree on Round *Chautari*'


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Abstract

This article examines how Swapnil Smriti's poem "Story of Elephant Fig Tree (*Kabhra*) on Round Platform (*Chautari*)" employs the *Kabhra-Pipal* binary to explore plant-human agency. The contrasting symbols of the *Kabhra* and *Pipal* trees reflect the socio-political, cultural, religious, and cognitive dimensions of society. The study highlights how Smriti uses these trees to initiate a resistance and a renarrativization movement. The *Kabhra* tree represents the history, culture, nature, love, communal life, faith, and seasonal markers of the Kirat community in eastern Nepal, while the *Pipal* tree symbolizes the imperialist, oppressive, and expansionist culture, religion, and politics associated with King Prithvi Narayan Shah, who prioritized territorial expansion over cultural and emotional integration. The paper demonstrates how Smriti boldly challenges marginalized identities, striving to restore the Kirat community's original ethnic identity and advocating for freedom and equity through plant narratives. It argues that the binary sparks a counter-establishment movement, fostering environmental-indigenous citizenship and planting seeds of counter-hegemonic consciousness among culturally displaced groups, particularly the Kirat. To support the claim, the analysis draws on Matthew Hall's concept of plant agency and Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of binary opposition. This research offers valuable insights for global movements seeking to revive the politico-cultural identities of ethnic communities through plant-human agency.

Keywords: binary, agency, renarrativization, representation, resistance

Symbiotic Agency in Swapnil Smriti's Poem 'Story of *Kabhra* Tree on Round *Chautari*'

This article analyzes the *Kabhra-Pipal* binary in Swapnil Smriti's poem "Story of *Kabhra* Tree on Round *Chautari*," focusing on its role in defining plant-human agency. The contrasting symbols of the *Kabhra* and *Pipal* trees highlight the socio-political, cultural, religious, and cognitive aspects of everyday life. Through these trees, Smriti emphasizes a movement of resistance and re-narration. The *Kabhra* tree represents the Kirat Community of Nepal, embodying history, culture, nature, love, community ties, faith, and seasonal rhythms. Conversely, the *Pipal* tree symbolizes the oppressive, autocratic Hindu culture, religion, and politics linked to Prithvi Narayan Shah, often hailed as a unifier but critiqued for prioritizing territorial expansion and colonization over emotional and cultural unity.

This research analyzes how plant narratives empower marginalized communities, focusing on the poet's effort to reclaim ethnic identity through freedom, equality, and environmental citizenship. Using Matthew Hall's plant agency and Saussure's binary opposition, the study presents the *Kabhra-Pipal* binary as a tool for counter-hegemonic resistance among Nepal's Kirat people. Ultimately, it argues that plant-human agency research can inspire a global movement of cultural revitalization and political reclamation.

Agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own choices, reflecting a state of empowered decision-making. As agents of their own lives, people can shape both themselves and their surroundings. Political theorist Elizabeth Wingrove observes, "Agents transform themselves and their world through the interplay of multiple ideologies, which constantly reshape both the individual and the system" (as cited in Sidonie & Watson, 2010, p. 43). Likewise, Michel de Certeau suggests, "Within restrictive systems, acts of reuse serve as interventions that create opportunities for agency" (Sidonie & Watson, 2010, pp. 29-30). Even in constrained environments, individuals can find ways to exercise agency by navigating and blending their autonomy with systemic constraints.

Similarly, in plant humanities, writers narrate their own stories alongside those of plants, creating a shared plant-human agency. Writing becomes a means of reshaping or challenging established domains (p. 46), contesting anthropocentric views of agency and recognizing plants as active participants in an interdependent relationship with humans. In the same spotlight, a writer of the ethnic community, Swapnil Smriti, highlights the narrative of plant-human agency through the *Kabhra* tree in his poem, in which the tree is telling the stories of both the Kirat people and the expansionist ruler, hinted at Prithvi Narayan Shah.

While talking about the value of plants, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) suggests that plants, as our ancient teachers, demonstrate that spirituality and science can coexist

harmoniously (pp. 213–214). Antonio Perez (1985) describes maize as divine, embodying life, death, and the Trinity, with God residing in both the grain and the human spirit (p. 146, cited in Rival, 2021, p. 2). Laura Rival (2021) highlights the sacred bond between humans and maize, emphasizing how agricultural rituals sanctify their interdependence (p. 3). Rival also explores the ecological connections between maize and its environment, where rituals create networks uniting nature (sun), plants (millet, upland rice), humans, ancestors, and deities within a shared physical existence (pp. 3–4). Cereals, as “civilizational plants” and “cultural keystone species,” form the foundation of human civilization (Coe and Gaoue, 2020, cited in Rival, 2023, p. 4).

Culture and nature are deeply intertwined, with nature serving as the foundation of culture and culture acting as a steward of nature. In *Sacred Ecology*, Fikret Berkes (2018) highlights how Micronesian communities view Serianthes trees as spiritual connectors to their natural surroundings, illustrating the mutual reinforcement between plants and humans (Rival, 2023, pp.4-5). Plants are vital sources of life and wisdom for humanity. Candice A. Shoemaker (1994) emphasizes, “The green plant is the foundation of all other life. Early humans relied on botanical knowledge for survival” (Shoemaker, 1994, p.4).

McDonald and Bruce (1992) demonstrate the ecology movement has heightened public awareness of the vital connection between people and plants (as cited in Shoemaker 1994, p. 4). To ensure this relationship persists, it is essential to explore both historical and modern interactions between plants and human culture (p. 5). Shoemaker (1994) notes that plants are often central to political debates and controversies. As both a social and physical presence, plants significantly shape human behavior and reflect a botanical influence on human culture (p. 6). Similarly, Prudence and Gibson (2018) argue that humans and trees are inherently designed to nurture each other, co-creating mutual agency (p.14). Stephen Muecke notes that “cultural” and “natural” elements intertwine in ceremonies (p.37). Discussing the Goolarabooloo, an Aboriginal community in Australia, Muecke emphasizes that trees must be protected not only for their vital connection to human life but also as a legitimate “form of life” with an essential role, beyond any sacred status (p.40).

Plants and humans are deeply interconnected, each sustaining the other. Plants support both the physical and emotional well-being of humans. Monica Gagliano notes that the nurturing role of plants in human physical and emotional sustenance is undeniable (p.188). Communication between humans and plants occurs through a distinct, non-dualistic language of sound, where shamans must learn each plant species' unique song to facilitate this exchange (p.190). Plants also hold significant agency, even acting as “landlords” by

owning land. Humans can draw inspiration from plants to protect the environment. Susie Pratt observes, "Plants have consistently been active agents in your work" (Gibson & Brits, 2018, p.214). Additionally, Anderson Seona (2001) notes the symbolic power of plant names in political control and the expression of social and ethnic identities (p.32). Since the dawn of cultural history, plants have been central to human storytelling, serving as both subjects and characters in oral and written traditions across global narrative practices (Middelhoff & Arnika, 2023, p.175). Emerging disciplines like human-plant studies and cultural plant studies have highlighted "biases against plants" in Western cultures, which have led to the oversight of vegetal worlds despite their ubiquitous presence and vital importance to human and nonhuman life" (Montgomery, p. 4).

Scholarship recognizes a foundational interdependence: plants sustain human life, and humans in turn protect and sanctify them. The poem *Smriti* presents the *Kabhra* tree as both the bearer of Kirat cultural history and an object of divine worship, ensuring its preservation. This mirrors the poem's observation that Hindu society deifies the *Pipal* tree for the same purpose—forming and maintaining its identity and agency.

Theoretical Methods and Materials: Plant-Human Agency and Binary Opposition

This study is a textual analysis of Swapnil Smriti's poem 'Story of *Kabhra* Tree on Round *Chautari*'. The idea of plant agency by Matthew Hall and the concept of binary opposition by Ferdinand de Saussure have been used in this research. Research scientist Matthew Hall (2011) explores plant-human interactions systematically. He acknowledges "the need for more ethical human-nature relationships and the need to theorize the constituents of nature separately, and in the majority of places that are inhabited by people, plants dominate the natural world" (pp. 2-3). He suggests to "survey a number of plant knowledges in order to uncover the most appropriate human representation of plant life" (p. 3). Hence, Hall surveys a variety of cultural approaches to plants ("plant knowledges") because for him "cultural philosophical ideas strongly influence human interactions with the plant kingdom" (p. 4).

Hall explores the new animism in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, where plants are viewed as non-human entities with agency and will. According to Hall, the concept of personhood in plant communities within indigenous societies fosters interspecies ethics and kinship interaction patterns. He avoids idealizing these relationships, noting that recognizing plant personhood and utilizing plants are not mutually exclusive." (p.105). To demonstrate that pre-Christian societies believed plants could communicate with humans, Hall analyzes pagan poetry, myths, and songs that highlight the agency, volition, and

subjectivity of plants. "Like other living beings, plants actively live and seek to flourish. As a result of interactions with their environment, the plants are self-organized and self-created" (pp. 12–13).

Ferdinand de Saussure foregrounds the idea of binary opposition through which meaning is generated in the text. The dynamics of binary initiate meaning, identity, and agency of the things/beings. "Our knowledge about things depends on our knowledge about what is in opposition with them" (Caddon, 1999, p. 724). We can understand things only in relation to their opposition. All the structures of society, culture, and politics are based on binaries. Levi Strauss believes that "behind all cultural activities, we can find a deep structure in binary oppositions which reflect the general structure of the human mind" (Dan, 2005). Even the human mind is binary-based. Zimel considers "the binary oppositions as a solution to the oppositions in order to achieve the planned integrity" (Barmaki, 2003, pp. 724-725). Throughout the world, the unity of the mutual affairs is predominant, and this results in opposition (Whitehead, 1993, p. 725). According to Roland Barthes (1992), "the most fundamental concept for structuralism is binary opposition" (p. 725). Life itself is the union of opposites from which it gets meaning. "Life is the peace of contraries; death is the fact that arose between them" (Zamani, 2009, p. 726)

According to Saussure (1857-1913), the Swiss linguist, "meaning is generated through a system of structured differences in language" (Baker, 1982, p.15). Barthes considers that "meaning comes from some initial binary oppositions or differentiation" (as cited in Scholes, 1975, pp.100-101). "System of relations of an underlying structure" (Baker, 1982, p.15) seems indispensable. Linguistic signs in a language collectively form an interconnected system, with each sign's value derived solely from its relationships with others. (Rice & Waugh, 1996, p.10) Peter Barry (1995) argues "when words are paired as opposites, their mutually defining nature becomes even clearer" (p. 42).

Due to the focus on the formation of agency and identity through *Kabhra-Pipal* binary in the poem, the ideas of agency theory and structuralist theory of binary opposition have been simultaneously used in the research. It demonstrates that binary contributes in creation of agency in humans and also in plants.

Literature Review: Critics on Plants and 'Story of *Kabhra* Tree on Round *Chautari*'

Critical plant studies (Laist), cultural botany (Ryan, "Passive Flora"), and literary and cultural plant studies (Middelhoff; Jacobs and Kranz; Stobbe, "Plant Studies") are converging disciplines that reframe plants in narratives as active agents with agency. They challenge the view of plants as passive and silent, highlighting their creativity, expressiveness, intervention,

and role as co-authors (Middelhoff & Arnika, 2023, p.178). Donna Haraway's concept of the "Plantationocene" underscores the need for "response-able" narratives that reveal histories of conquest, resistance, recovery, and resurgence, fostering collaborative storytelling with historically situated beings for a more livable cosmopolitics (Middelhoff & Arnika, 2023, p.179). Michael Marder's "A Philosophy of Stories Plants Tell" prompts reflection on (1) the narrative of plant life, (2) stories of plant communities, and (3) individual plant stories (p.180).

The poet mainly focuses on ethnic community and their liberation through their cultural relationship with nature. Dhungel (2025) states that "the poet presents the conflict between the Kirat culture and Hindu culture through symbolic use of *Kabhra* tree and *Pipal* tree. He claims that the rise of *Pipal* tree on the *Kabhra* tree leads to the collapse of *Kabhra* tree" (p.66), the symbolic tree of the Kirat people. *Kabhra* and *Pipal* are antithetical. "The historicity and culturality of the Kirat Community living in eastern hilly region has been included in this poem" (Gurung, 2016, p. 17). In the poem the grandmother tells the dreadful story of war suppression upon Kirat community through the symbolic use of *Kabhra* and *Pipal* (p. 19). "*Kabhra* is taken as great faith in Limbu culture" (p. 23). The *Kabhra* tree has been taken not only as the symbol of faith and belief but also as the main pillar of energy for family and society (p.24). The holy book of Kirat is *Mundhum* which is related to natural religion as Kirat people respect nature and predecessors as god (Dhakal, p. 84).

This study displays how the poet uses dynamics of *Kabhra-Pipal* binary in order to show plant-human agency in the poem. The issues of culture, politics, identity and civilization of Kirat people have been researched. However, the issue of agency through binary in the poem stands as a untouched and so a researchable topic.

Textual Analysis/Discussion: Plant-Human Agency through *Kabhra-Pipal* Binary

Plants and humans share an interdependent agency: plants provide foundational life and knowledge, while humans preserve and symbolically elevate them. In *Smriti*, the *Kabhra* tree symbolizes Kirat identity and community, while the *Pipal* tree represents Hindu sacredness—a contrast hinting at historical encroachment upon the Kirat world as he "was a great obstacle in their way" (Kafle, 2008, p.141). Whatsoever, the poet struggles to reestablish the identity of the Kirat people, dismantling officially imposed identity, presenting the argument that plant-human agency is essential for the meaningful existence of each other. He claims that the indigenous people should glorify the environment as their citizenry identity and agency is formed through nature. To strengthen his argument, he projects *Kabhra* and *Pipal* trees as the binaries in the poem.

Smriti, to show the interdependence of trees and humans, creates a context in the poem that a grandmother is telling a story of “giant *Kabhra* tree” (p. 2) to her grandson while resting her load of “taro leaves for their pigs” (p. 3) on the *Chautari*. The Kirat people rest under the *Kabhra* tree to reenergize themselves and alleviate fatigue. He glorifies the grandness of the tree as it stands as a source of strength in their lives. He narrates:

Three long, long ropes couldn't encircle its trunk
 No mad raging storm could shake it
 Neither could floods or landslides take it with them:
 that giant, that *Kabhra* tree –
 It was the *mainam* of the village life, they say

It was the *murumsitlang* of the power of the settlements. (Self trans., 5-10)

The *Kabhra* tree is so big and strong that it can't be encircled by the ropes; neither can it be shaken by mad raging storm. It cannot even be taken by the floods or landslides. He means to say that the tree stands for the culture and civilization of Kirat community which are stronger. The belittled ethnic culture and civilization have been glorified through the medium of the tree in the poem. For him, *Kabhra* tree, symbolically their culture, is the pillar of their community where he uses the term *murumsitlang*. Moreover, the word *mainam*, which means a yearly *pooja* in their culture, also projects that their origin and culture are sources of heat and warmth for them. Their identity comes from the pillar of faith in their own culture. Smriti glorifies the *Kabhra* tree, associating it with Kirat culture and civilization. Therefore, this tree, symbolizing nature, stands as a pillar of Kirat identity. He writes: “At its crown, like a bridge suspended between sky and ground/the moon would rise;/Under its shadows the farmhands measured the days/When it shed its leaves, it was *Udhauli*/When it grew new leaves, it was *Ubhauri*/They say – the ancient civilization of the locals/was all in the heart of that *Kabhra* tree!” (Self trans., 11-16). The Kirat people celebrate *Udhauri* and *Ubhauri* festivals as per falling and rising of the leaves of *Kabhra* tree. So, this tree is *murumsitlang* of this ethnic community. In addition, the tree stands as the political and cultural ideology of Kirats. As all the people celebrate different festivals under a tree with the communal feeling, the tree represents primitive communism. Smriti utters: “The tangle of that *Kabhra's* roots was fragrant with the scent of an ancient communism/And the tops of that *Kabhra* was the Shangri-La empire of singing cranes!” (Self trans., 25-26). He metaphorically compares the Kirat poets as singing cranes and the top of the tree as their empire. It means the tree provides them with the atmosphere of liberation and of singing a song of liberation.

In addition, the poet glorifies the tree as all-in-all for the Kirat people. Its branches point towards *Phaktanglung*, and the roots turn towards *Chotlung*. “The biggest branch pointing to *Phaktanglung Himal*” (Self trans., 17-18), “the thickest root turning towards *Chotlung*” (Self trans., 19). In the Limbu community, *Phaktanglung Himal* refers to *Kumbhakarna Himal*, which is taken as a symbol of faith and civilization there. *Chotlung* is a sacred site that stands as a large stone. It means that the branches and roots stand for their freedom and upliftment as well as their depth of life. The young lovers celebrate their love under the *Kabhra* tree, listening to the song of the cranes as well as *Chybrung*. *Chyabrun* refers to both song and dance in their community. “Matching step to lockstep, adorned in *chyabrun*” (Self trans., 21), “Greatest celebrations of love, under the *Kabhra* tree!” (Self trans., 23). The tree is the tower of the faith of the Kirat community. Here, the poet, glorifying Kirat culture through the *Kabhra* tree, tries to show interdependence between plants and humans.

Moreover, the poet presents the binary between the Kirat culture and the Hindu culture through the symbolic use of the *Kabhra* tree and the *Pipal* tree. He claims that the rise of the *Pipal* tree on the *Kabhra* tree leads to the collapse of the *Kabhra* tree. He writes: “The *Pipal* bore its roots into the *Kabhra*/And to the *Kabhra* came a slow death /The *Pipal* grew bigger and bigger/Until one day –/The *Kabhra* became just a hollow heart and flaky bark/Within it, the *Pipal* stood with the uncontainable vitality of youth” (pp. 42-47). It means that the encroachment of Kirat culture by Hindu culture has destroyed the original culture of the Kirat community. “A nightmare – a thunderbolt splitting the *Kabhra* tree!” (Self trans., 32), “the three-leaf sapling of a *Pipal*, springing from wild-cat turd...” (Self trans., 34). He claims that when the *Kabhra* tree fell down, slowly and gradually everything from the Kirat community fell down, leading to the birth of misery in the village. The poet claims:

Listen, now – Once the old *Kabhra* fell, they say –
 The heads of young men and women also fell
 The children became lifeless, like well-stitched dolls
 The Mūndhūm *dharma* of the wise old fell –
 The hearts fell and the country fell
 Misery alone found birth in the village
 Hunger and thirst alone found new incarnations
 Once the *Pipal* trampled the *Kabhra* under it, they say –
 They say that is when the culture of oppression and exploitation began. (Self trans., 48-56)

Together with the fall of *Kabhra* tree, the heads of young generations, *Mundhum* Dharma, the hearts of the people, and their nation fell down, and their life became lifeless just like that of a doll. With the rise of the *Pipal* tree, hunger, thirst, misery, and bad luck emerged in new forms. It means that the tree stands as the source of life for them. When the *Pipal* tree trampled the *Kabhra* tree, the culture of oppression and exploitation began. The poet hints at Prithvi Narayan Shah's hegemonic territorial expansion and forcible geographic unification of the country, which ultimately destroys the culture, civilization, and identity of the Kirat people. The rise of the *Pipal* tree symbolizes the rise of Shah's structure and Hindu culture. So, Hindu religious persons glorify this tree as a sacred tree of faith and respect, and so it is a god. They protect the tree as it is a good source of oxygen, a means of life. Thus, this binary in the poem contributes in formation of plant-human agency.

Equally, he counters the agency by and of *Pipal* tree and tries to establish agency by and of *Kabhra* tree in his poem. He shows anger and hatred towards the history of the *Pipal* tree as it initiated the history of envy, grudge, hatred, rage, and war, destroying the history of *Kabhra*, i.e., the history of love, equality, peace, celebration, and liberation. The poet wants to make the people of the Kirat community aware of this fact so that they become conscious and raise their voice for their identity and agency. He expresses:

That is when it all started – they say, Grandson –
 The history of envy and grudge...
 When in the *Kabhra* tree started the history of the *Pipal*
 Hatred was born in the people
 Rage was born
 War was born (Self trans., 60-65)

The ritual of human sacrifice, offering blood and burning fire in the peaceful society began with the birth of *Pipal* tree and death of *Kabhra* tree. He means the original Kirat rituals were sacrificed at the altar of Hindu culture. So, the poet expresses his desire to awaken Kirat people toward the conflicting fact. The rise of the *Pipal* tree upon the *Kabhra* tree hints at the strengthening of the agency of the ruling class and the community people, dismantling the agency of the Kirat community. Therefore, the poet, magnifying the *Kabhra* tree and demonizing the *Pipal* tree, attempts to rebuild the agency of the indigenous people.

The poet, through the *Kabhra-Pipal* binary, struggles to excavate the untold and hidden story of the Kirat people and to expose the glorified but false history of the rulers of that time. Prithvi Narayan Shah hanged the Kirat leaders and freedom fighters on the *Pipal* tree. He reminds us that the Kirat fathers and the pregnant mothers were brutally murdered thrashing

on the rock by the then autocratic rulers. He indicates that the death of the *Kabhra* tree is the death of the agency of the Kirat people. He mentions:

Grandson! That is the very branch
 From where your great-grandfather was hanged and lanced
 That is the shiny rock where
 Your great-grandmother, then with child –
 Was picked and thrashed, picked and thrashed
 Until her belly tore open ... (Self trans., 81-85)

The grandmother is telling a story to her grandson under the *Kabhra* tree, sitting on the *Chautari*. She narrates that his great-grandfather was hanged and lanced on the branch of the *Pipal* tree; his great-grandmother was picked and thrashed on a shiny rock until her belly tore open. Here, the poet wants to expose Prithvi Narayan Shah's cruel attempt to establish his monolithic agency, destroying communal agency.

Plants can be used as a weapon to create human agency. For Matthew Hall, "plant enables the presence and continued existence of human beings" (p. 3). The Hindu unitary state structure launches the discourse of the *Pipal* tree as a heavenly chaste tree in order to create agency. In the poem, the grandmother narrates: "Grandson, on that *Chautari*/ so many despots out for conquest/ have stopped to rest/ They tied their horses to *Pipal* roots/ and whistled their deathly calls..." (pp. 76-80). The autocratic rulers of that time whistled their deathly calls from the *Pipal* tree. This tree provided them with the strength and courage to wage war against the Kirat state. The agency of conquest emerges from the root of the *Pipal* tree. The tree has become the most appropriate tool for the establishment and continuity of Shah's politics of expansion and domination.

Creating the atmosphere of storytelling by grandmother to grandson about the *Kabhra* and *Pipal* trees, Smriti depicts the trees themselves as storytellers in a symbolic form. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) writes that "plants are our oldest teachers" (p. 213). Specifically, in the poem, the *Kabhra* tree teaches so many things to the Kirat young generations; it has a long story to tell. "The story is longer than the Tamor river, says grandmother to her grandson (p. 72). It tells the story of love, faith, communal life, culture, harmony, season, nature, agriculture, and the Kirat people's relationship with nature. However, the *Pipal* tree tells the story of war, oppression, rage, murder, enmity, and chaos expanded by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

Monica Gagliano claims "plants and humans communicate with different languages" (p. 190). The plants are humans and vice versa. The grandson listens to the story of the *Kabhra* tree so intuitively that he gets lost in the story. So does the grandmother, as a

storyteller. "We - grandmother and grandson -are lost in the world of tales" (p. 38). They are sitting under the *Pipal* tree, looking at it and going back to the existence of the *Kabhra* tree. When they dive into the memory of the *Kabhra* tree, they get lost, and they feel that they themselves have become the *Kabhra* tree. "Have I turned into a *Kabhra* tree while listening to a story about it?" (p. 39). It shows that persons can become trees and trees can become persons, in ways that mutually shape each other's agency and identity.

Findings

Smriti renarrativizes the story of *Kabhra-Pipal* binary in order to dismantle the anthropocentric ideology of the then King Prithvi Narayan Shah promoted through the discourse of the *Pipal* tree as a sacred heavenly tree, and to reestablish agency of both plants and humans glorifying *Kabhra* tree as the symbol of Kirat culture, communality, civilization, faith, religion, identity, energy, love and path-shower. Associating *Chyabrung*, *Chotlung*, *Phaktanglung*, *Ubhauli*, *Udhauli*, *Mainam*, and *Murumsitlang*, the symbols of Kirat culture and civilization, with the *Kabhra* tree, a symbol of both nature and culture, the poet challenges the agency of the rulers and tries to recreate the agency of the Kirat People. It has been found that plants and humans communicate and affect one another through their interdependence. The grandmother recounts the story of the *Kabhra* tree to her grandmother, seated on a round Chautari, arguing that the tree is a source of their identity and harmony, which is destroyed when the *Kabhra* tree collapses and the *Pipal* tree rises on its site. While telling and listening to the story of a tree, they feel that they themselves become the *Kabhra* tree, which shows the interrelationship between humans and plants. Therefore, the poet claims, the indigenous people revitalize their own local indigenous environment for their identity as real citizens of their place.

The binary opposition creates meaning, value, and agency in the text. The binary of *Kabhra* and *Pipal*, two trees of two different communities, antithetically generate the strength of the text, initiating the ability not only of the humans but also of the plants. The poet, through the use of *Kabhra-Pipal* binary, subverts the notion that *Pipal* is a sacred superior tree, whereas *Kabhra* is a simple passive tree. In doing so, he advances the spirit of resistance among the Kirat people, deifying the *Kabhra* and defying the *Pipal*. Whatever, both trees stand strongly for the people, either for the common people or the rulers. Therefore, plants and humans are inseparably connected with each other. It is the environmental awareness and consciousness of people that they are interconnected with one another for their meaningful existence, which contributes to the formation of environmental citizenship.

Conclusion

Summing up, Smriti, through 'Story of *Kabhra* Tree on Round *Chautari*', decenters not only anthropocentric human superiority over trees as passive agents but also the expansionist policy and practice of the singular state by Prithvi Narayan Shah using the discourse of the *Pipal* tree as a sacred Edenic tree of faith and religiosity. Though the poem hints at Hindu rulers' focus on plants for the formation and continuity of human agency, the poet recenters on the *Kabhra* tree, deifying it as the tree of faith, culture, love, respect, harmony, collective feeling, and reenergization of the Kirat community. For that, he defies the supremacy of the *Pipal* tree, presenting it as the discursive tool of the expansionist rulers. Highlighting the interconnection between *Kabhra* tree and Kirat lives, the poet, in the poem, brings both plant-human and *Kabhra-Pipal* binary together in order to create joint agency and identity of plants and humans. Through symbolic use of the trees, Smriti tries to contribute to raising counter-hegemonic consciousness within the indigenous marginalized Kirat people for their liberation from the clutch of an autocratic singular state structure based on hierarchy. Therefore, he presents the binary as a suitable medium to expose hypocrisies of state system of Prithvi Narayan Shah and revealing the untold and unheard stories, forcefully silenced, of the Kirat community depicting the *Kabhra* tree as a story-teller, which he uses to counter the *Pipal* tree, even though the grandmother tells the story to her grandson sitting under the tree on the *chautari*.

Smriti highlights the poet's role in advancing the politico-cultural identity and agency of Nepal's Kirat-Limbu people. By employing local dialect, settings, cultural practices, and oral storytelling, the poet works to restore Kirat identity through processes of agentifying, deagentifying, and reagentifying both plants and humans. Although focused on Kirat culture, this research has broader historical relevance: it explores universal plant-human agency—expressed through the *Kabhra-Pipal* binary—that strengthens global ecological interconnectedness and promotes Indigenous environmental citizenship. The study may also inform equity-based education, community development, and environmental policies centered on interdependence.

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