Reviving Kirāta Myths: Symbols and Aesthetics in Birendra Rai's Poems

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Abstract

This research article digs into the captivating realm of Kirāta myths as reflected in the selected poems of Birendra Rai. The study aims to shed light on the cultural significance of Rai's poetic works, particularly in preserving and reviving the rich tapestry of Kirāta myths, while also examining the intricate interplay of symbols and aesthetics within his selected poems. Through a comprehensive analysis, this research explores mythical elements and themes in Rai's poem, unravelling the layers of symbols and their cultural meanings. Furthermore, the article investigates the aesthetics employed by Rai, revealing how his poetic craftsmanship enhances the profound essence of Kirāta myths. Analysing the connection of aesthetics with mythical contents, this research highlights Rai's exceptional contributions to preserving Kirāta cultural heritage. The article discusses the implications of such literary endeavours for the Kirāta community, especially the Cāmliṅa Rais, and beyond. This study not only serves as a testament to the enduring power of myth and poetry but also emphasises the role of literature in safeguarding and revitalising cultural traditions for generations to come.

Keywords: archetypal images, Chamling Rai folklore, Kirāta myths, Śilimummā, Torempā

Introduction

The tapestry of Kirāta myths is woven with captivating tales of gods, heroes, and cultural traditions that have thrived in the Eastern Himalayan region for centuries. Rooted in a rich and diverse cultural heritage because of the prevalence of diverse groups with different ancestors and consequently different traditions (Schlemmer, 2004, p. 130), the myths hold immense significance for the Kirāta community, reflecting their beliefs, values, and identity. The myths of the Cāmliṅa Rais, the subject of the present discussion, too, hold an enormous significance in shaping their distinct identity. However, with the passage of time and the encroachment of modernity, these ancient narratives have faced the risk of fading into obscurity, posing a critical threat to the preservation of Kirāta culture. Alongside the threats exist attempts, both individual and organised, for the preservation as well as promotion of the tradition. For the "reinvention of tradition", prompted by socioeconomic change, political empowerment and historical experiences, the oral tradition was and is being gradually "transformed into a book religion that venerates a distinct textual corpus in a distinct script" (Gaenszle, 2022, p. 205). Such cultural awakening, either by scribing religious and mythical texts or recreating them in literary texts, for reviving ancient narratives has gained greater momentum in recent years because of the artists, activists and literary enthusiasts.

Amidst this cultural landscape, the poems of Birendra Rai emerge as a beacon of hope, acting as a custodian of Kirāta mythology. Rai skillfully weaves together the mythical elements of his heritage with the artistry of poetry. His verses breathe life into forgotten myths, rekindling the embers of Kirāta folklore for contemporary audiences. The ancient tales find refuge within the depths of Rai's verses, preserving the essence of Kirāta culture and ensuring its continuity into the future.

This research article explores the profound connections between Kirāta myths, symbols, and aesthetics embedded within the works of Birendra Rai, focusing on how his poems become a channel for reviving and perpetuating these myths. The research addresses a key problem: the gradual erosion of cultural traditions and myths, and the

pressing need to preserve and revitalise them through literature. By examining two selected poems, "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī" [To the Heroine of My Song] and "Torempā" from Rai's work *Sādāṅgī phūla* [Colourless Flower], the study seeks to illuminate how Rai's poems not only capture the essence of Kirāta myths but also employ distinct artistic qualities that contribute to their cultural revival.

In light of these challenges, the research seeks to answer the following critical questions: What are the key mythical elements and themes in Birendra Rai's poems? How do the symbolic representations in his poems contribute to the significance and implications for Kirāta myths and culture? And, how do the aesthetic aspects of Rai's poetic craftsmanship enhance the portrayal and preservation of Kirāta myths? These questions guide the exploration of the cultural and artistic dimensions of Rai's works, addressing the broader problem of cultural preservation.

The study's objectives are closely aligned with these research questions. It aims to investigate the portrayal of Kirāta myths in Rai's poems, analyse the symbols and their cultural implications, and explore the aesthetic techniques Rai uses to enhance the depiction of these myths. By identifying key mythical elements, analysing symbolic representations, and examining Rai's poetic artistry, this research addresses how literature can safeguard and rejuvenate endangered cultural traditions like Kirāta myths.

To address the problematic issues raised above, the study focused on two specific poems by Birendra Rai, "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī " and "Torempā", published in his collection of poems *Sādāṅgī phūla*. These poems were carefully selected based on their thematic representation of Kirāta myths and their potential to offer insights into the interplay of symbols and aesthetics in Rai's poems. "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī" is known for its exploration of Kirāta folklore and mythical themes, while "Torempā" delves into the celestial realm, featuring spiritual beings. The selection of poems from the same collection allowed for a cohesive analysis of Rai's mythical expressions and artistic choices within a unified context.

The research adopted a comprehensive analytical framework to explore symbols and aesthetics in "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī" and "Torempā". The symbolic analysis involved meticulous examination of images, metaphors and mythical archetypes in both poems. The researcher endeavoured to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in the symbols and their connections to Kirāta myths. The study also explored the cultural significance of these symbols, reflecting the enduring heritage of the Kirāta community. Additionally, the research focused on the aesthetics of Birendra Rai's poems. This entailed analysing poetic devices, literary techniques, and stylistic choice of the poet. Elements such as images, language, rhythm, and sound patterns were scrutinised to understand how Rai's artistic craftsmanship has enhanced the portrayal and emotional impact of Kirāta myths in the selected poems.

Further, the research used Northrop Frye's theory of Archetypal Criticism as the theoretical tool, using ample insights from the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes as complementary theoretical bases. Since Rai's poems were originally written in Nepali, and no translated version has yet been published, the researcher has used the free translation method, using diacritical alphabets for the original texts.

Representation of Myths in Literature: A Literature Review

Myths have long been represented in literary works around the world. Many literary thinkers, critics, and social scientists have developed theories that can be used for studying myths in works of literature. Myths can be analysed from various perspectives, like economic, psychological, anthropological, and so on, and the definitions of myth depend on the perspective adopted. Northrop Frye (1963) has defined myth as "a story in which some of the chief characters are gods or other beings larger in power than humanity" and whose "action takes place in a world above or before ordinary time", but is very seldom "located in history" (p. 30). Myths have been intrinsic parts of human storytelling across different civilisations. The representation of myths in literature serves as a vehicle for preserving cultural heritage, exploring universal themes, and conveying profound meanings. Eminent scholars such as Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and

Northrop Frye, have shed light on the enduring allure of myths in literary works, delving into the symbolic power and transformative impact of myths on artistic expressions.

In literature, myths are often encoded through symbols, imbuing them with layers of meaning that extend beyond the surface narrative. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) has added to this discourse by examining the structural elements of myths in his seminal work "The Structural Study of Myth". He has emphasised that myths often possess recurring themes and motifs that reveal universal patterns of human thought as there are astounding similarities "between myths collected in widely different regions" (p. 429). Through a structural analysis of myths, he has demonstrated how these narratives mirror fundamental aspects of human cognition and cultural expression. He has emphasised the need to distinguish between the historical unfolding of myths and their timeless patterns. He has drawn parallels between linguistic analysis and myth interpretation, suggesting that myths are bundles of relations similar to linguistic units. His theory has provided insights into understanding the intricate nature of myths and their timeless significance.

Roland Barthes (1991) developed the discourse on the significance of symbols in his work *Mythologies*, first published in 1957. According to him, myths are cultural constructs that transform everyday objects, events, or characters into powerful symbols representing broader social and ideological beliefs. In literature, authors utilise symbols to evoke emotions, create depth, and communicate underlying themes. Barthes has elucidated the reception and interpretation of myths, highlighting their inherent duplicity as signifiers encompassing meaning and form. He has delineated three types of reading, each focusing on different aspects of the myth. The first type involves an empty signifier wherein the concept fills the myth's form, creating a literal signification. The second type emphasises a full signifier, exposing the distortion between meaning and form, resulting in a deciphering of the myth's intention. The third type centres on the inseparable unity of meaning and form, yielding an ambiguous signification. Levi-Strauss has argued that myth "transforms history into nature" (p. 128) by creating a second-order semiotic system that removes the dilemma of revealing or obscuring the concept. Through this

compromise, myth rationalises its signified via the signifier, allowing it to become naturalised and effectively consumed by the reader. Myth is thus perceived as innocent and factual rather than a semiological construct, reflecting the reader's propensity to conflate the signification with a system of facts rather than values, underscoring the intricate interplay between myth, language, and interpretation.

Similarly, Northrop Frye (1963) has explored the transformative power of myths in literature through his concept of archetypal criticism. According to him, literature contains archetypal symbols and narratives derived from mythical patterns that exist in the collective unconscious of humanity. "In literature", he writes, "whatever has a shape has a mythical shape" (p. 38). These archetypes encompass recurring themes such as the hero's journey, the battle between good and evil, and the quest for self-discovery. Authors draw resources from these archetypal myths to create characters and stories that communicate with readers since "literature is informed by the pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth, and folk tale" (12). The representation of myths in literature often involves a symbiotic relationship between symbols and archetypal patterns. Authors use symbols to infuse myths with contemporary relevance, making them accessible to diverse audiences. At the same time, archetypal motifs ensure that myths retain their timeless and universal appeal.

The concept of myth, as elucidated by scholars like Frye, Lévi-Strauss, and Barthes, plays a pivotal role in understanding the depth and significance of literary works. As this paper analyses the poems of Birendra Rai and his exploration of Kirāta myths, these theories shed light on how myths, as timeless narratives infused with symbols and archetypal motifs, serve as a channel for universal themes and the exploration of human experience.

Kirāta, an indigenous community residing in Eastern Nepal, have a rich tapestry of myths that reflect their deep-rooted cultural beliefs and traditions. Kirāta mythology comprises diverse folktales, legends, and religious narratives, often transmitted orally across generations. These myths encompass diverse themes, including creation stories,

deities and spirits, heroic feats, and moral lessons. The Kirāta mythological traditions, however, vary among different clans, "making oral traditions all the more unique and valuable for the whole community" (Rai, S., 2020, p.95). Literary writers, artists, and different ethnic associations are working to create awareness and reinvent myths, traditions, and performance arts to preserve collective identity and spiritual practices.

In such a cultural and literary context, Birendra Rai has played an important role in the contribution to reinventing and reviving Kirāta cultural heritage by representing mythical themes drawing inspiration from the rich well of Kirāta traditions, especially the Cāmliṅa Rais residing in Khotang. Though his works have not been researched systematically, the available remarks, comments and reviews help a researcher as source materials to understand the depth of mythological narratives and their symbolic meanings. Bhupal Rai and Suresh Hachekali have analysed specific poems in Rai's anthology *Sādāṅgī phūla*, exploring the deep symbols of Kirāta myths within his verses. Bhupal Rai's comment on "Torempā" and Suresh Hachekali's comment on "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī" echo each other in terms of the representation of myth in the poems. While Bhupal Rai (2010) has interpreted the myth of Torempā as a quest for light, Hachekali (2010) has found, in "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī", a fusion of images, symbols and myth that vivifies racial identity. His reading of "Torempā" also has taken the same route as he finds the fundamental spirit of Kirāta cultures in the poem. Similarly, Bodhraj Paudel (2023) has recently recognised Rai's exceptional ability to weave ancient folklore into contemporary poetic expressions. He finds in him a craftmanship to weave his poetic works through indigenous images and Kirāta myths. These analyses have shed light on Rai's role as a cultural custodian, bridging the gap between the ancient past and the modern present through the transformative power of poetry.

While Rai, Hachekali and Paudel have made significant contributions to understanding Birendra Rai's role in preserving Kirāta myths, his poems are yet to be explored in terms of the representation of myths, their symbolic meanings in the light of

aesthetics within his poems. This research aims to address the gap and provides a more holistic appreciation of Birendra Rai's poetic endeavours.

Kirāta Myths in Birendra Rai's Poems

Overview of Rai's Poems

This research studies the representation of myths in Birendra Rai's two poems, "Mero Gītakī Nāyikālāī" and "Torempā". The first poem explores the themes of cultural decline, youth's obliviousness to fading traditions, and the speaker's emotional contemplation of these aspects. The speaker, dismayed by the growing indifference of the youths towards their cultures, addresses a young woman, referred to as the heroine of his song, comparing her to a storm, and offers pristine elements like dew and flowers, asking her to place them at the ancient *deurālī* (a pile of stones put by travellers commemorating their deities) so that he, like an embarrassed Shah Jahan of a gloomy planet, will live an era by looking at the withering flower. Comparing her to the singer of fusion song and Śilimummā, a mythical dancer, of the Bunchara festival, he narrates the story of her elopement walking over his "Song-Palace", telling how he had given her everything he had, every metaphor to adorn her, and had kept her in the inner abode of his chest, keeping himself in a circular cave. The offer he made in the first stanza is reiterated in the last stanza, in which, putting the open sky, *sumnimā* airs and tears of the land on his head, the speaker offers the blurred story of *huiluṅ* to the heat of the woman's fame, asking her to put it at the *dāyo*-like *deurālī* placed at the crossroad, so that he, like an idle Shah Jahan, will live an era looking at the withering flower. The poem, thus, poignantly juxtaposes the fading cultural values with the vitality of youth, and the speaker's contemplation of this dichotomy encapsulates the broader theme of preserving cultural heritage amid changing times.

"Torempā", similarly, pays homage to the courage and legacy of the titular figure, Torempā, with a blend of historical reverence and mythical images. The poem starts with a salute to Torempā's courage, calling it the only riddle that can be compared to the

fluttering flames of the ancient *dāyo*, the silk handkerchief of Raiṁdhippā, and the nature dance of 'Tayamā'. Underlining the depth of Torempā's courage, the poem highlights the mythical narrative of Torempā's attempt to eat the sun that, although incomplete, represents a victory over insurmountable challenges and welfare to a social custom. The poem contrasts the audacity of Torempā with the modern, anonymous individuals of the present who have surrendered to the passage of time, highlighting the lasting impact of Torempā's primitive name in history. The poem ends with an emphasis on Torempā's image as a daring hunter of the wild age, invoking his remarkable archery skills and his legendary presence in the oral narratives of the *Mundhoom*. Through its fusion of historical, mythical, and cultural elements, the poem commemorates Torempā's extraordinary courage and enduring legacy.

Mythical Elements, Symbols and Themes

Both "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī " and "Torempā" draw inspiration from Kirāta myths, folklore and culture, incorporating elements that hold cultural and symbolic significance for the Kirātas. One prominent cultural element in "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī " is the reference to *māne*, which stands for a stone-made stupa constructed in the name of the deceased. The speaker, calling himself a *mane*, presents the addressee, a young woman, as a vibrant force of nature, resembling a storm, and gifts her a drop of pure dew or a graceful aura of flowers, asking her to offer them to the ancient *deurālī*. While these gifts symbolise the essence of purity and beauty associated with the Kirāta culture and their deep connection with nature, the *māne* stands as the antithesis of the gifts, underlying the Kirāta culture that is being ignored by the young generation represented by the young woman in the poem. Besides, *māne* in Birendra Rai's poem stands for, at least, two other significations: cultural and mythical. While the first implies admixture of cultures among the Himalayan people, indicating, as Dor Bahadur Bista puts, the influence on the Rais of the "Lamaistic form of Buddhism of the Himalayan people living immediately north of them" (1980, p. 41), since the construction of *mānes* is a part of the Tamang culture, the second implies the celestial existence of the deceased ones and reverence to them, since

*māne*s contain the relics of the deceased ones and their names, signifying "continual acts of giving beyond the hearth for the benefit of the entire village" (Fricke, 1990, p. 139).

Similarly, *deurālī* holds a cultural, mythical and symbolic significance to the Kirātas, as it is a pile of stones put by travellers on the side of a pathway for a long time commemorating their deities. It stands for not a single deity of a single clan of a single village, but a community of deities that symbolises cultural tolerance among the Himalayan people. Rai's poem has intensified the symbolic signification of the *deurālī* by placing it at the crossroads, connecting different generations of people of different clans and cultures. However, the connection is being lost, and the poet indicates this situation by reference to the storm of youth, the young woman, that contrasts the *māne,* the speaker, who is immediately compared to historical Shah Jahn, the maker of the Taj Mahal, but embarrassed, as he is condemned to live watching the withering flower, symbolically the waning culture of the Kirātas, at the ancient *deurālī*.

The mention of *hākpāre*, a folk melody popular among the Kirātas, Bunchara, a folk ritual in which the Kirātas worship their land and deceased ancestors, and the cunning Śilimummā, the legendary dancer who knew all the beats of dance, enrich the poem's cultural and mythical themes. These references elevate the poem's narrative to a mythological realm, connecting the speaker's narratives to the ancient traditions and cultural celebrations of the Kirātas. Rai has presented two contrasting personae, the singer of the fusion song and Śilimummā, as representing one another, intensifying the theme of the indifference of the youngsters towards the now waning ancestral culture and their growing attraction to the modern culture, represented by the fusion song. The theme is further intensified by the narration of the heroine of his songs, the singer of the fusion song or the mythical dancer, who eloped away walking over his "*Gītako Mahala*" ["Song-Palace"], an audio recording of Rai's songs, that juxtaposes Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal, justifying the reference to the embarrassed Shah Jahan, the historical Muslim emperor of the Mughal Empire in the first stanza, and foreshadowing the idle Shah Jahan mentioned in the last stanza.

Additionally, Sumnimā, the primordial Kirāta mother, finds mention in the poem, further entwining the narrative with divine elements and sacred beliefs. However, Rai uses *sumnimā* as an adjective to describe airs, indicating the primordial purity, which the speaker puts over his head, and gifts the young woman the blurred story of *huiluṅ* to be offered to the *dāyo*-like *deuralī*. The reference to *huiluṅ*, the main mud and stone stove of the Kirātas, and its blurred story adds depth to the poem's mythical, folkloristic and cultural essence. While the *huiluṅ*'s association with worship on the full moon day of the month of Baishakh reinforces the poem's connection to religious rituals and spiritual reverence, its blurred story supports the theme of waning culture and the growing indifference to it. Similarly, the ancient *deuralī* mentioned in the first stanza has been mentioned again in the last stanza, but with a simile, *dāyo*-like, to emphasise how the *deuralī*, a pile of stone erected publicly over a hundred years, has been reduced to the *dāyo*, a three-stoned stove kept in the private kitchen of the Chāmliṅ Rais, suggesting the central theme of the poem.

"Torempā", too, interweaves several mythical elements and themes from Kirāta culture reflecting the poet's deep connection with his cultural heritage. One of the main mythical elements in the poem is the reference to the titular persona Torempā who represents both Nāmakāccā and Mānateke or Mānaṭiṅge. Nāmakāccā is a mythical figure known for attempting to construct a ladder of riches to reach and eat the sun, symbolising a daring pursuit of the unattainable, an ambition to go beyond the Man, to achieve the celestial power. Mānateke, on the other hand, is a legendary man associated with indulgence in alcohol, reflecting aspects of primitive Kirāta culture. Both of them, in Rai's poem, have been united in Torempā, reflecting the primordial force and the existing culture of the Kirātas. By invoking Torempā, the poem captures the essence of courage and the determination to transcend limitations, drawing from these mythological archetypes.

The myth of Nāmakāccā attempting to eat the sun has broader significance from the perspective of Lévi-Strauss, who, it has been discussed above, believes myths to have

similar grammar, as he finds similarities between the myths collected from different regions. *Śrīmadvālmīkīya Rāmāyaṇa* (2013) serves a similar story of Hanumāna, the monkey god, attempting to eat the sun (Uttara Kāṇḍa 35:24) and, in a Polynesian myth, Maui one of the principal deities, ascends to the sun's resting place to tame the sun (Scherrer, p. 31-32). All such myths, though slightly different in the level of parole, have similar underlying structures, and themes of unyielding vitality and courage.

The mention of the ancient *dāyo*, which is mentioned in "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī " as well, adds a sacred ritualistic dimension to the poem. The *dāyo* is central to Kirāta traditions and rituals, representing the heart of their homes and culture. By incorporating this element, the poem showcases the deep-rooted connection of the Kirātas with their ancient customs and practices. Additionally, the references to Raim̐dhippā, one of the legendary ancestors of the Cāmliṅa Rais, and Tayāmā, a mythical persona believed to grow cotton and weave clothes in the primordial time, evoke an artistic fusion of the historical and mythical landscape of Kirāta folklore. These names hold cultural significance as they embody the roots and heritage of the Kirāta community. Furthermore, the poem touches upon the *Mundhum*, the main body of Kirāta theology, urging that the protagonist, as a daring hunter and archer, is found all over it. This implies the symbolic presence of Mānaṭeke in the stories and teachings of the *Mundhum* as an epitome of freedom and courage which play an integral role in shaping the cultural beliefs and values of the Kirāta.

Aesthetics in Birendra Rai's Poems

Both "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī" and "Torempā" exhibit a mastery of poetic devices and techniques, enhancing the emotional impact and literary richness of the poem. One of the prominent poetic devices used by Rai in both poems is image. Throughout "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī", vivid and evocative images are presented, transporting the reader to the realm of the Kirāta culture and myths. The images used in the poem can be classified into two, those standing for the old generation dismayed by the growing indifference to the waning culture, and those standing for the new generation indifferent to the waning

culture. While the former type includes *māne*, embarrassed Shah Jahan, the withering flower, the circular cave, the blurred story and the idle Shah Jahan, the latter type comprises the storm of youth, glistening dew, the aura of flower, the singer of the fusion song, the cunning Śililummā, the open sky, the *sumnimā* airs, and the heat of fame. Additionally, the images of ancient *deurālī*, *dāyo,* and *huiluṅ* invoke a sense of heritage, tradition, and mysticism, reflecting the cultural significance of the Kirātas.

Rai has used several images, which, at the same time, serve the function of several figures of speech. For example, the image of Shah Jahan is a metaphor, an allusion, a universal image and an irony. Of these, the last one needs little discussion. He has used the image of Shah Jahan twice in the poem, but with two different epithets; in the first stanza, the image is used with the epithet 'embarrassed', while in the last one, it is used with 'desperate'. The historical Shah Jahan, the glorious emperor, has thus been compared to the speaker, and, by an extension of the metaphor, to a *māne*, and has been shown both embarrassed and desperate. Similarly, *phūlarānī* (flower-queen) and *sumnimā* airs, too, serve the function of multiple images. While the former has been used as a metaphor and an irony, the latter has been used as a metaphor, airs bearing the primordial purity, and archetypal image. The overlapping of the images has not only tightened the poem but has also supported the central theme.

Similarly, the use of similes in the poem has cultural and aesthetic effects. The handkerchief fallen from the gallant's hand has been compared to two abstract things concretised by metaphors. In the first stanza, it is compared to the storm of the youth of the young woman, "allāreko hātabāṭa khasne rumālajasato/ timro/ baiṁsako āṁdhīlāī" (Rai, 2010a, lines 1-3) ["To your/ Storm of youth/ Like a handkerchief fallen from a gallant's hand"], while in the last one, it is compared to her heat of fame, "tannerīko hātabāṭa khasne rumālajasato/ timro carcāko rāpalāī" (Rai, 2010a, lines 60-61) ["To the heat of your fame/ Like a handkerchief fallen from a gallant's hand"]. In both cases, the poet uses metaphors within the similes, first comparing the vigour, intensity, and sometimes turbulence of youth to a storm, emphasising the dynamic and turbulent nature

of this stage of life, and then the fame of the persona as a singer of the fusion song and a mythical dancer to the heat, suggesting how the youths are driven by the motive of fame, for which they can take up two opposite roles at the same time.

Rai's poem also incorporates various sound devices, contributing to the musicality of the verses. The last stanza except for some variation is a repetition of the first one in structure and sound pattern. As the central theme lies in the first stanza, the repetition serves as both a musical device and an emphasis on the theme. The poet's skilful use of enjambment and line breaks also effectively controls the pacing and flow of the poem. The enjambment allows for a smooth continuation of ideas between lines, maintaining the poem's coherence. The strategic placement of line breaks emphasises certain words and phrases, adding emphasis and emotional weight to key elements of the narrative. The last stanza, for example, runs with a balance of line breaks and enjambment, in addition to long pauses marked by dashes:

> *Yo khullā ākāś*
>
> *Yo sumnimā hāwā*
>
> *Ra*
>
> *Nāgavelī pardai bagekā yī-*
>
> *Dharatīkā ām̐suharū*
>
> *Śiramā rākhera bhanchu-* (Rai, 2010a, lines 54-59)
>
> [This open sky
>
> This *Sumnima* airs
>
> And
>
> The tears of the land
>
> Flowing through the winding routes
>
> I put them on my head and say-]

Frequent use of alliteration, as in *bunchara parvatirakī bitpāta Śilimummā* (Rai, 2010a, line 26) or *dobaṭomā ubhyāieko dāyo jasto* (Rai, 2010a, line 68) too, has made the sound effect of the poem match with the effect of the archetypal images.

Rai consistently uses vivid and evocative images in "Torempā" as well. Torempā, addressed both as Mānaṭeke or Mānaṭiṅge and "Nāmakāccā", serves as an archetypal image, endowing the protagonist with a mystical aura, and emphasising the heroic attributes and the reverence bestowed upon the figure in Kirāta myths. The characterisation of Torempā adds a sense of grandeur and solemnity to the poem, elevating its cultural significance. This is corroborated by the use of other images throughout the poem. Images like "*prācina 'dāyo'ma prajvalita āgoko/ harharuṁdo lapkā*" (Rai, 2010b, lines 2-3) ["Fluttering flames/ Of the fire lit in the ancient 'dāyo'"], "*Raiṁdhippā'ko reśamī rumāl*" (Line 4) ["The silk handkerchief of Raiṁdhippā"], "*Tayāmā'ko prakṛti nāc*" (Line 7) ["The nature-dance of Tayāmā"], "*daulatako lisnu*" (Line 17) ["The ladder of wealth"], "*abhedhya durga*" (Line 20) ["Impenetrable fortress"], "*bhasme-khoriyā*" (Line 28) ["Burnt wilderness"], "*jaṅgalī yugako mahasura śikārī*" (Line 43) ["The daring hunter of the wild age"] and "*dhanurvāṇako uchcha kathā*" (Line 44) ["High story of archery"] are related to the primordial freedom, nature or courage, connecting the poem to the Kirāta culture and its folklore. These images not only add depth to the character of Torempā but also imbue the poem with a sense of tradition and heritage.

Similarly, metaphors in the poem connect the archetypal images to the protagonist's courage and strength. For instance, the second stanza compares the courage of Torempā to the fluttering flames of the fire lit in the ancient *dāyo*, the craftmanship of '*Raiṁdhippā* ', and the nature dance of ' *Tayāmā*', while the third stanza compares his attempt to eat the sun to a victory over an impenetrable fortress, and welfare to a social custom. The last stanza justifies the comparison in the previous stanzas by calling the protagonist a daring hunter of the wild age, and, thus, "involving", to borrow Baumbach's words, "the reader in the recreation of a particular myth rather than presenting a mythical narrative" (2009, p. 7) alone.

In 'Torempā', Rai has used similar sound devices that he has used in "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī". Among others, alliteration and repetition have made the poem more musical,

adding, at the same time, the cultural significance of the Kirāta myths. The alliteration in "*prācīna 'dāyo'mā prajvalita*" (Rai, 2010b, Line 2) " '*Raiṁdhippā'ko reśamī rumāla*" (Line 4) and "*ajiva ra agamya sāhasa*" (Line 12), and the repetition of *salāma* in all the stanzas except the last one, along with line break and enjambment, create a rhythmic pattern, echoing the cultural and mythical aspects of the Kirāta people.

Another significant technique used by Rai is the use of rhetorical questions, seen in lines such as "*kasale jodena pula-puleso?*" (Rai, 2010b, Line 27) ["Who did not construct bridges and footbridges*?*"] and "*kasale phādena bhasme-khoriyā?*" (Line 28) ["Who did not clear the wilderness?"]. These questions invite reflection and engage the reader in contemplating the ancient past when the ancestors of every race struggled to plant the seed of civilisation, constructing bridges and footbridges, clearing the wilderness and planting *ghaiyā* (paddy) in the clearing, as did the courageous protagonist of the poem. The rhetorical questions, thus, contribute to the thematic exploration of courage and the enduring legacy of the Kirātas.

Birendra Rai, thus, has skillfully employed a range of poetic devices and techniques in his poems to delve into mythical elements and cultural significance. Through vivid images, allusion, rhetorical questions, and rhythmic flow, the poem pays homage to the heroic figures of Kirāta folklore. It explores their enduring impact on the cultural identity of the Kirātas, as, in Frye's words, the work of art is to renew the culture of the past (1990, p. 346). Rai's poetic craftsmanship captures the essence of tradition and mythology, inviting readers to plunge into the rich tapestry of Kirāta heritage.

Conclusion

This study explored the poetic domain of Birendra Rai, centring on the captivating verses of "Mero gītakī nāyikālāī" and "Torempā," unveiling a profound interplay of mythical motifs and themes that exemplify Rai's expertise in intertwining Kirāta cultural heritage and folklore within his poems. The investigation into Rai's poems uncovers that he is successful not only as a poet but also as a cultural custodian, reviving Kirāta myths through poetic craftsmanship enriched with vivid images, metaphoric depth,

and cultural allusions, thus preserving an invaluable repository of the Kirāta heritage. Moreover, this exploration spotlights the symbiotic relationship between aesthetics and myth, illuminating how Rai's artistic choices enhance readers' engagement and appreciation for the cultural and mythical dimensions within his poems. The study's significance lies in commemorating Rai's contributions to Nepali literature, celebrating the revival of essential mythical elements as part of the community's identity, and paving the way for further research. Comparative analyses and deeper examinations of Rai's work could shed more light on the cultural resonance of his poems and their universal themes. Thus, this study enriches the discourse on aesthetics and mythological essence, emphasising the enduring impact of literature on cultural preservation and understanding.

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