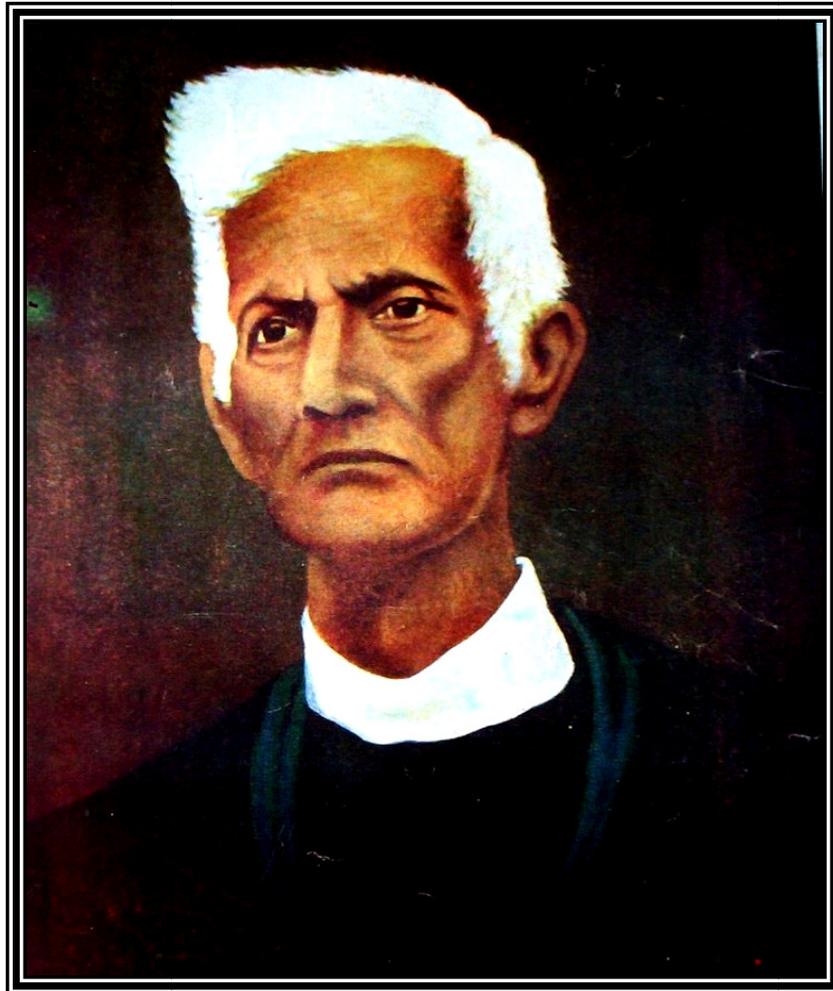


About Fakir Mohan Senapati



Fakir Mohan Senapati

January 13, 1843 – June 14, 1918
Place of Birth: Mallikashpur, Balasore

“ଲୋ ରେବତୀ, ଲୋ ରେବି, ଲୋ ନିଆଁ, ଲୋ ଚୁଲି”

“Lo Rebati, Lo Rebi, Lo Niaa, Lo Chuli”

The stated phrase has been taken from the first Odia short story '*Rebati*' written by Fakir Mohan Senapati.

Rebati is the story of a young girl who had a strong desire for education in the context of a conservative pre-independence society in a backward village of Odisha. And as per her superstitious grandmother this desire had seemed to invite misfortune for herself and her community. “Rebati” and her story became an allegory for female edification and liberation.

Katha Samrat Fakir Mohan

Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918) father of Odia novel and short stories is also the first Indian novelist to use vernacular language and rustic characters and dialogues in the fiction. His fiction *Chha Mana Anthaguntha* (Six Acres and Half), written forty years before Premchand's *Godan* was a masterpiece on many accounts. For depiction of a vivid and pathetic picture of rural poor's oppressed by the Zamindars and upper class people *Chha Mana Anthaguntha* should be taken as a specimen of first progressive novel. Fakir Mohan's talents are not confined to the literary pursuits only. He is the saviour of Odia language and literature. At time when there was a serious conspiracy to finish Odia language by dividing them into Bengal and Madras prsedency and central province, Fakir Mohan stood as beacon light to save Odia language and literature from extinction. He brought a Printing Press by bullock cart from Calcutta to Balasore in 1868; wrote textbooks in Odia to prevent Bengali access; published *Sambada Bahika* and *Bodhadayini* at Balasore. Fakir Mohan also organized public meetings and published articles in *Utkal Deepika* challenging the move for abolition of Odia - a rich and ancient language spoken by millions of people. He aroused public opinions to confront this conspiracy. With the help of John Beams – district collector of Balasore Fakir Mohan started the language agitation movement for preservation of Odia language.

His contribution to Odia language and its revival is immense. He has translated the *Mahabharata*, the *Geeta*, the *Ramayana* and *Boudhavatar Kavya* into simple Odia Verse. He started his career as a teacher of Mission School at Balasore. In the second phase of his life Fakir Mohan worked as *Dewan* in the princely states of Nilgiri, Dampada, Dhenkanal, Daspalla, Pallahada and Keonjhar. As an administrator Fakir Mohan was very efficient and successful. During Keonjhar Praja Meli (people's agitation) he escaped very cunningly writing a symbolic letter to the king.

The time to which Fakir Mohan survived was the Dark Age in the history. The famous *Na anka* Famine occurred in 1866. It disordered and distorted the economic and social condition of Odisha. It has been reflected in his stories, *Dak Munshi* (The Post Master), *Sabhya Zamindar* (The Educated Feudal Lord) and even in the fiction *Chhaman Atha guntha* (Six Acres and Eight Gunthas).

As a Dewan he visited different places and came in close contact with different people. He knew life and its problems which became the raw material for his fictions. Initially he gathered knowledge going through Indian classics and mythologies. He, too, translated major classics and was familiar with their themes and styles. He is a reputed poet as well. He began his literary career as a poet. His poetical works include *Puspamala*, *Upahar*, *Abasar Basare*, *Puja Phula* and *Dhuli*. His poems are mostly biographical and full of pathos. There is lyrical appeal and literary values in his poems. These are simple, lucid and melodious, that touch the human heart.

He is yet unsurpassable, so far as the Odia fiction is concerned. Most of his short stories reflect the conflict between western and eastern culture and tradition. He has highlighted, too, the superstitious beliefs cherished by the rural people. *Rebati* can be taken as an illustration. Its pathetic tone is beyond comparison. The grand old mother represents the old belief and tradition, whereas, the teacher Basu and Rebati represent modern generation. Gopal in *Dak Munshi* represents new generation taught in western education. Fakir Mohan has denounced the new educated youths vehemently, who blindly initiated the western lifestyle. Hari Singh is the true specimen of Indian life and culture, though his son Gopal, the so called affluent, a Babu, has been influenced by the English style.

His *Patent Medicine* is artistic and didactic. There is an attempt to bring a wine and drug addict husband to the true tract of life and morality. Sulochana Devi, the heroine of the story, has used broomstick to a drunkard and way-ward husband to bring him to the path of morality and to normal social being, is noble and righteous.

Randipua Ananta is a story of different taste. Ananta a very notorious, errant youth has ultimately been metamorphosed. While the flood water entered into the village through a hole of the river-embankment, Ananta pulled the wooden door of his house and covered the hole standing as the supporting pillar and asked villagers to pile soil onto it. Gradually his body was piled up and ultimately he was buried and had a living tomb. He dedicated his life for the welfare of the villages. Ananta is a rare character in the Odia short story.

His remarkable short stories are *Sabhya Zamindar*, *Garudimantra*, *Adharma Bitta*, *'Dhulia Baba'*, *Patent Medicine*, *Dak Munshi*, *Randipua Ananta* and *Rebati* etc. It is said that *Lachhamania* is his first story. But it is not traceable.

Fakir Mohan's autobiography (*Atmajivana Charita*) is unique and novel. It gives socio-cultural accounts of Odisha along with the related episode of his life spanning over half a century of the state. His autobiography, by far, is an exception of the type. Fakir Mohan's fictions and short stories bear the theme of social realism, social reform, and preservation of social values and social orders in the time of pastoral setting exposing the pathos, oppression and neglect to the rustics. In addition to two volumes of short stories, Fakir Mohan has left four novels entitled, *Lachhama (1901)*, *Chha man Athaguntha (1905)* *Mamu and Prayaschitt (Expiation-1915)*. These are monumental works. Fakir Mohan has given an eternal value to it.

Fakir Mohan is yet unsurpassable and commands the greatest rank among the authors. He is the national hero, the leader of linguistic battle and pioneer of Odia prose fiction, protector of Odia language and literature. In words of Dr. J.V. Boulton Fakir Mohan is the *Gorky* of Odisha. *Durbar of Damapada* state conferred on him the enviable title *Saraswati*. Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh calls him *Thomas Hardy of Odisha*. People call him the forerunner of Premchand and the first Indian author to deal with social realism through rustics and pastoral theme. Fakir Mohan has contributed only four novels and twenty five stories which endowed him the title of *Katha Samrat* (Emperor of Fiction) of the literature. He is a great genius, a versatile personality and an ardent literary artist in true sense of the term. This great son of our soil breathed his last on June 14, 1918 at Balasore before Odisha had become a separate province.