

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Critically commenting on the process of de-mythologization at work in Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Six Acres and a Third', and how that contributes towards the making of 'irony', which according to Lukács constitutes the 'normative mentality of the novel'<sup>1</sup>**

**Sneha Chakraborty**

Department of Comparative Literature,

Jadavpur University

---

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to comprehend the origins of novel-making as a literary tradition in India. It will also go into greater detail about how Fakir Mohan Senapati uses satire, irony, and humor to criticize the colonial rule that dominated much of Indian history. The subversion of myth-making will be considered to gain a better understanding of the novel-making process. Although the novel as a literary tradition emerged first in the European context, this paper will attempt to focus on its exclusivity in India concerning its socio-political situation. It will attempt to reconcile it with the theory proposed by Hungarian philosopher György Lukács in his book "*The Theory of Novel*" about the normative mentality of a novel and determine how much it applies to the act of novel making in India, which is a melting

pot of cultures, religions, and intersectionality of class, caste, gender, and color. "*Six Acres and a Third*" is a lively text that raises serious concerns about the flaws in the institutionalized knowledge structures that served as the gospel truth in Indian cultures. The paper will also attempt to comprehend the criticisms in the hierarchized knowledge system that propelled information dissemination based on manipulation and colonial interest.

**Keywords:** novel, colonial rule, myth, knowledge, tradition

**Introduction**

Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918) used the vernacular language (Odia) and depicted rural characters extensively in his novel, *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* ("Six Acres and a Third")<sup>2</sup>. His use of irony engages readers in a unique narrative style in which he destabilizes established 'myths' (which carry historical baggage) in an 'indirect' but significant way. There is no coherence between the character descriptions and the actions they appear to perform in the text. He accomplishes this by introducing a narrator who constantly contradicts himself within the narrative's discourse (telling the tale). Through the narrative style, he successfully reveals the

---

<sup>1</sup>György, Lukács, "The Theory of the Novel"

<sup>2</sup>Fakir Mohan, "Six Acres and a Third"

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

ulterior motives of the feudal lord towards serving their subjects in India, forming a unique relationship with the readers. He criticizes social and political institutions indirectly through irony in the narrative structure, rather than directly criticizing them. He employs 'irony' as a tool to accomplish the task of immediately providing readers with paradoxes, hypocrisies, and contradictions within age-old values—norms, conventions established by religious, social, and political institutions. Mangaraj, the feudal lord, is described as a religious man who serves his 'subjects' justly, but as the layers within his characters are gradually revealed through wit, humor, and irony, he and his ally, Champa, become the source of oppression, where their actions come to the surface.

Mangaraj was initially praised for his brevity, magnanimity, and religious fortitude. The narrator immediately contrasts it with his evil actions, which re-shuffles the established 'horizon of expectation' of his characteristic qualities, and the truth gradually emerges. He becomes the archetype of the exploitative colonizer, and he eventually pays for his exploitative deeds and 'ascension through dehumanization and alienation from the community.'

**Lukács and the 'Normative mentality of the novel'**

Lukács attempts to understand the development of the novel from the epic form as a mode of storytelling in *The Theory of the Novel*. There are several divergences and convergences in the generic points about the epic and the novel. Individuality was limited in the epic tradition because it was divinely ordained. There was no room for personal dilemmas because everything was predetermined. The kings/princes become divine agents in both the Western and Indian epics, and their actions serve as the main theme of the epical narrative. There is a congruence between human activities and supernatural (metaphysical)reality when the divine will be directly reflected in human activities. Lukács mentions the 'metaphysical assonance,' which occurs when humans come into contact with the elements that make up nature and is thus driven by divine will. In romance, we can find a more secularised version of the epic, with chivalric rules and social orders confirmed. There is a level of human agency in which the protagonist is regarded as a hero for his accomplishments (but cannot go beyond the pre-given predestined doctrines of divine will). However, because it is limited to the mere fulfilment of human desires, there was still a lack of correspondence with the readers. There is a discernible difference between the character's world and the world imagined. The dissonance between the two worldviews allows us to see the world through the lens of its differences. The

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

separation between humans and the elements that make them up is depicted with irony. 'Irony' becomes an expression of dissonance, which establishes the novel's existence: the novel facilitates the expansion of the 'individual human will' in a more concrete way. Fakir Mohan Senapati employs irony in the dissemination of the traditional knowledge corpus. The ontology of being a novel is considered, based on the irony that constitutes human life. The narrator has an association with the characters, looking at their actions by having the knowledge disseminated with the readers through the use of 'irony,' which also makes it significant for the readers to understand. The author's foundational ground for creating a novel is the dysfunction between the course of the character's actions and the assumed characteristics qualities described by the narrator. He creates a schism and disorientation between the individuals and their way of interacting with their surroundings. The omniscient, and knowledgeable narrator quotes 'Nyaya-shastra' to validate his arguments, but he intends to deliver the erroneous application of the ostensibly 'logical' explanations through the discourse. As a result, applying logic can be misguided. Often, written scriptures are used to manipulate people. Through quotations from the shastra, the narrator attempts to critique myths and destabilize their foundational ground by focusing on their erroneous implications.

As a result, the concept of reality and the embodiment of the possibilities of 'being a novel' constitute the normative mentality, in which the novel as a form employs irony to show dissonance between the individual and the world that encapsulates him. Fakir Mohan Senapati succeeds in demonstrating dissonance (which is the essence of a novel) but twists it further. Senapati's dissonance emphasizes the myth-making process and the erroneous implication that surrounds it. By providing significant cues, he places the onus on the readers to understand the dissonance. Although Senapati succeeds in highlighting the dissonance through irony, the readers also play an important role in analyzing and comprehending it. The narrator also plays an important role, providing a birds-eye view of the characters from above, observing their actions minutely. There is an open dialogue established between the readers and the narrators (there is an oratory tone while depicting the story that invites the readers to participate to listen to the story). This could be because the term "novel" as a written mode of storytelling was still in its early stages, with authors still figuring out the "correct" way to tell the story and present it to the readers. As a result, if we look closely, we can see that the story was told as if it were being told to the readers by a person. As a result, there is assonance, a unity that unites all of the readers through the act of dissonance.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Usage of ‘Charit’ as an act of demythologization**

In Chapter two<sup>3</sup>, there is a reference to ‘Charit’ as a genre of story-telling. ‘Charits’ are normally commissioned pieces of works of literature given by a person who wants someone to write about them. Kings often commissioned the poets to write about their deeds so that they would be immortalized. However, writing ‘Charits’ bears certain obligations as the commissioned writer is compelled to write whatever he is asked to without having any creative freedom. Here, Fakir Mohan Senapati is again playing with the genre of ‘Charit’ as a pun which is an established form of story-telling. He is not writing ‘Charit’, nor has anybody assigned him to do so. The genre creates a horizon of expectation (since the masses are not familiar with the novel genre). It creates a point of departure but it also creates a connection with the masses to begin the task of reading his novel. Fakir Mohan Senapati uses the established genre of ‘Charit’ and twists it according to his will. He is extremely critical in the depiction of the characters which cannot happen in ‘Charit’ as the authors are bound to be appreciative without making judgments about the person concerned. Therefore, it is creating a point of departure that marks the very essence of the novel that comes to

light by critically departing from the point of origin.

**Dissonance from the conventional realist novels**

Realist novels must be self-deprecating. It's similar to the job of a newspaper reporter who refuses to characterize himself/herself in the report. Similarly, the realist narrator should not apply his judgments to the actions he is witnessing. The artwork does not draw attention to itself as an artwork. It should reflect the person in question's life. Senapati's fabricated stories are a challenge to the existing order of story-telling. He introduces a narrator who deviates from the conventional realist narrators with the subjects (which is supposed to be impersonal). Even though he is not involved in the novel, he is fully aware of their whereabouts. The impersonal distance is reduced because the narrator almost acts as the character's advocate. He would even go to great lengths to defend Mangaraj, but this would cause readers to take his judgment with a grain of salt (as the narrator plays with the idea), which raises an important question about ‘reason’ and the tradition of truth-making.

**Irony and the act of Demythologisation**

The ‘Dharmashastras’ prescriptions are human constructs that perpetrators have rigorously used to manipulate mankind. For example, the myth of "prosperity dwelling

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 40-45

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

in commerce" is a culturally constructed concept. Myths are historical constructions of self-evident truths born of human civilization that speak of businessmen's prosperity. This article focuses on a specific period in history that shaped culture during the colonial regime. Fakir Mohan Senapati uses the relevance of 'myth making' to demonstrate the emergence and gradual transformation of myth over time. The novels were not simply meant to follow the codes that comprise cultural constructiveness with the potential of cultivating the given myth. It should participate in the creation of new knowledge.

Fakir Senapati hits the nail on the head by starting the process of novel creation by breaking away from what has already been built. Senapati's basic disposition is to deconstruct the correspondence rather than continue to correspond with it. In Chapter 3, he invokes 'Shastras,' an embodiment of exclusive Sanskrit scriptures available only to a select few. Fakir Mohan Senapati, on the other hand, mentions the Shastras in one of the vernacular languages, Odia, which adds a flamboyant attitude and removes the seriousness associated with the Sanskrit paradigm. Shastras were only accessible to a select group of people, but Fakir Mohan reduced the distance of scriptural knowledge by using a localized language. As a result, by using local languages, Fakir

Mohan is demythologizing the myths that have been built around reading scriptures and have been used to manipulate people. People can now read the scriptures in their native language and understand them without fear of misinterpretation by others.

“Adyapratavevanistadarśhinimjatam, na jane kimanabhimatamdarśayisyati.(Translate: The day begins with the sight of an evil man. I know not what that day will bring!) Brahmins often chant slokas; there isn't much we can do about that.”<sup>4</sup>

A Brahmin uses the slokas to mock Mangaraj in this example. Fakir Mohan Senapati wants readers to understand how it is frequently used to manipulate people who do not have the privilege of knowing the language in a structural way. Culture is regulated by the codes of behavior that are frequently stipulated in the Dharmashastras, articulated by the Brahmins, or used by the authority.

To justify his truth claims, the narrator invokes certain established norms by various institutions, whether historical facts or claims made by specific institutions such as religion or law.

“It goes against our principles to tell lies, and our estimate is based on information

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 49

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

supplied by a peon in the Income Tax Department”.<sup>5</sup>

Mangaraj is laundering money, but since his actions have been validated by the Income Tax Department, they cannot be false. Fakir Mohan purposefully pokes fun at the institutionalized version of truth-claiming by citing examples that make the truth convoluted for his readers.

Another interesting example would be the description of Champa-

“Going strictly by the Alankar Shastra, apt similes and metaphors should be used at all times: a swan sometimes waddles; at other times, it half-jumps, half-flies. When our Champa made her way along the ridges of the rice fields, the ends of her Maniabandhi sari spreading like wings, she did indeed resemble a swan.”<sup>6</sup>

Again, he uses the 'Alamkara Shastra' to mock Champa's characteristics while also changing the exclusivity associated with it to make it more accessible to people. We will notice her cunning later in the novel as she attempts to manipulate Shariya into worshipping in a specific temple that will allow her to conceive the child.

The narrator also refers to the classical poet Kalidasa, and with irony, he

attempts to compare it to his attitude toward Champa, which differs from Kalidasa's attitude toward the god-king Rama. There are also numerous references to how people use gods to their advantage.

“When there was a wedding when a child-wife attained puberty and went to join her husband when somebody fell sick or someone wanted the deity to intercede for him or her, did worship at the goddess's shrine begins in earnest.”<sup>7</sup>

In the latter part, the narrator asks the readers not to compare the Brahmins to dogs; instead, by narrating their evil actions, he compares them to vultures. Instead of trusting what the world says, Fakir Mohan cultivates distrust in his readers. The novel's world would be confronted through criticism. Each authority is given a knowledge system and is expected to produce additional items. He is presenting the system's realities through the glass plate, where the truth is not a reflection (as it should be in a realist narrative), but a refraction of the realities in question. These knowledge systems are merely constructing, and by presenting an image of the world, he encourages the readers to be critical. Religion has a broad mass appeal, and by substituting newspapers, it has almost become mass media. It is known to have control over the

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 41

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 57

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 64

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

masses' collective consciousness. Fakir Mohan Senapati attempts to examine things from various angles by refracting the narrative and scrutinizing it critically. People have a strong belief in the rule of law and religion. Fakir Mohan Senapati attempts to unpack every reality that is presented before us. The reality that exploits Bhagiya and Shariya, the realities of the law, Manu's Dharmashastra.

Mangaraj who's a supposed 'religious' person turns out to be evil, while the narrator pities his magnanimity. The true picture of Mangaraj is found when we read into the irony of the text and understand his hypocrisy. Therefore, the unpacking occurs with the help of irony where the narrator proceeds towards demythologization. It is directly related to the game of power dynamics, especially when institutionalized and sold to the public to control them. Realism as a mode begins as a reaction to Romanticism's escapist ideologies, by failing to address the fundamental pains that have been rooted in the earth. By depicting the truth and bringing the essence of reality to the world, reality brings art to the world. Because the institutionalized knowledge system creates neutrality in humans, the larger picture of reality is not paid attention to without questioning the system.

**Deconstructing institutionalized Knowledge System**

Fakir Mohan Senapati, by subverting myths with irony, questions the given truth by critically analyzing it, where the aforementioned myths are unpacked. Only to elicit the truth is faith in the knowledge system de-established. The genuine misapplication of knowledge is done to expose the constructed nature of the myth (and how it has been manipulated for individual benefit) as well as the history of exploitation associated with the individual system.

The narrator explains the construction of 'myth' in a specific system in the Chapter, 'Goddess Budhi Mangala.' This is surrounded by Bhima's mother's testimony, who claims to have seen the goddess four times in her life. In a subsequent section, 'Zamindar Sheikh DildarMian,' we learn about the amalgamation of languages that function in a specific culture. As a result, knowledge systems that cannot be based on a unilinear lens must allow for multiple interpretations.

We also get the constant use of irony to deconstruct the making of history by juxtaposing historical events with current events. It is done primarily to demonstrate the disparity between two unrelated historical events (which is often done to manipulate people without paying into cognizance of the facts, truths, or even the situation surrounding it).

For example, 'But the space beneath them was silent and cheerless. Mian

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

gloomily, his hand on his cheek. Even Napoleon did not sit so despondently after his defeat at Waterloo'.<sup>8</sup>

Dildan Mian is humorously compared to Napoleon to highlight the fallacies made by colonial historians in comparing two unrelated situations. Colonizers and their tendency to make history were founded on flimsy grounds. They made history without taking into account the quantifiable data or the multicultural ethnicity that is India. They always tried to project everything through a homogenized lens of Eurocentric perspectives, portraying India as an uncivilized, cultureless territory in need of being saved from its barbaric nature.

“Historians say it took Clive less time to get the Bengal Subedari from the emperor of Delhi than it takes one to buy and sell a donkey. How long do you think it will take Mangaraj to get the zamindari of FatepurSarsandha from Mian?” The term "historians" is used repeatedly to reveal the reality of the knowledge system created by historians, which is frequently assumed to be the embodiment of the ultimate truth without objectivity analysis. It is used as irony once more to depict the flaws in the truth-making process. Implying that Mangaraj was more cunning than Clive who took 'subedari'(tax) of Bengal from Delhi by exploiting villagers and peasants.

**Conclusion**

‘The novel's form serves a radical political critique established on another level by the plot, which details the depletion of ethical values in the face of individual greed and large-scale corruption—embodied in the eponymous plot of land. Because of their normative rather than coercive power, literary criticism conventions tend to elude direct critique, and thus invite a more biting and subtle form of satire and irony. The novel's critical edge is comprised of this level of satire, which, ironically, is a more realistic representation of the experience of 19th-century Indian modernity. Colonial values were propagated across the cultural-political divide, manifesting themselves in programmatic reforms of every sphere of Indian life, from the practice of politics to the propagation of excessive Vaishnavism (religion), which is almost exploitative’<sup>9</sup>. As a result, it's easy to see why Senapati's critique of all kinds of political authority in *Chha Mana* is rendered in a form that is also engaged in a critique of a concomitant literary authority. As a result, I would argue that Fakir Mohan Senapati adheres to the normative reality of the novel as mentioned by Luckacs to a large extent through the process of demythologization with his work in ‘Six Acres and a Third,’ through the making of irony. However, grouping the

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 72

<sup>9</sup>Anjaria. “Satire, Literary Realism, and the Indian State: Six Acres and a Third and Raag Darbari.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

entire experience of Indian 19th-century reality through a homogenized idea of a European construct may highlight the limitations associated with it. Different communities' experiences, legacies, and cultural realities must be taken into account. Fakir Mohan, by demonstrating dissonance with the model, does not conform to the realist mode of novel making perceived in the European context in its entirety. He did not adhere to the impersonal relationship between the narrator and the readers (a major feature of the realist mode) and subtly attempted to unpack the realities of the knowledge system. To fully comprehend Fakir Mohan Senapati, one must first comprehend the impact of the colonial backdrop (to deconstruct the system built by the imperial power) as well as the cultural exclusivity of India as a nation-state (as a melting pot of multiple cultures, ethnicity, race, and religion) without directly applying it to the idea proposed by Lukács.

**References**

- Lukács, György. "The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature". London: Merlin Press, 1971.
- Senapati, Fakir Mohan, et al. *Six Acres and a Third: The Classic Nineteenth-Century Novel about Colonial India*. University of California Press, 2005. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppjng](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppjng). Accessed 29 July 2021. Copy
- UlkaAnjaria. "Satire, Literary Realism, and the Indian State: Six Acres and a Third and Raag Darbari." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 46, 2006, pp. 4795–4800. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/4418923](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418923). Accessed 18 July 2021.
-