

Relevance of Fakir Mohan Senapati's Children Literature in the Present Context: An Overview

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Abstract:

Children have a unique perspective to look at the world. Their learnings and their experiences often give a new direction to the literature produced for them. They through challenges to the literary world to come up to a level where they can be comfortable and they can utilize their world of imagination to the best of effects to enjoy a literary piece meant for them. Children literature is often produced by adult with an assumption to touch the aesthetics of the target audience. In most of the cases this type of literature is meant to give a message or educative purpose. Children today are smarter than they were before. For today's children the condition is totally different. They are exposed to various advanced systems of entertainment with a gentle touch on the screen. To get them back to reading is a tough task. In such a challenging situation we can turn to the masters of the art of story-telling. Fakir Mohan Senapati, the grand master of story telling has created a few powerful and enchanting pieces of Children literature in form of poems. Just like his timeless novels in Odia language, his children literature has a special appeal. The precious pieces can lead the literary world of the present day to approach the target audience in the best possible way. The present paper tries to study the children literature produced by Fakir Mohan in the present context.

Keywords: Children Literature, Entertainment, Aesthetics, Perspective

Children literature is mainly written for and are addressed to children, but it is written, by adults. The adults thus dominate the genre. What we must not forget is that children have a unique perspective to look at the world. Their learnings and their experiences often give a new direction to the literature produced for them. They through challenges to the literary world to come up to a level where they can be comfortable and they can utilize their world of imagination to the best of effects to enjoy a literary piece meant for them. The conventional features in children's literature exist and have become prevalent due to the general adult power surrounding the genre. Children's literature which is exclusively written for children seems to rest on three criteria: the first is whether the protagonists are children or teenagers, the second is whether the theme, that is the ideas, relationships and language, are simple or complex. Simplicity of theme is therefore the over-riding criterion that determines and defines literature as children's literature. Literature is literature for children if the ideas, relationship and language are simple. A classic literature like Gulliver's Travels is admitted into children's literature because of simplicity of its ideas, relationship and language. But the turn of the screw or Lolita, let us say, would not be admitted as children's literature because the ideas, relationship and language otherwise called the theme are complex. Thirdly, children's literature is often aimed at teaching moral lessons although there are a few exceptions like The Adventures

of Alice in Wonderland which is written by Louis Carroll, only to give simple pleasure and help the children to travel into their own world of fancy and imagination.

In Indian scenario mostly mythological characters and their childhood often have fascinated the imagination of the children as they have heard the stories of such characters from their elders. Mostly, the purpose of the adult authors in such cases is to not to teach moral lessons directly but in a thought-provoking way. The story telling process has gone through an evolution over the year but the oral story-telling and lullaby is still in practice. It is hard to find a child with genuine interest to read such pieces but powerful children literature produced in a regional language like Odia can provide a scope to attract young readers to enjoy the beautiful pieces created by non-other than the master story teller of Odisha, Fakir Mohan Senapati. Simple language and natural way of dealing the themes has made him popular among the mass. He has become a house-hold name and his characters are also popular. He seems to have tested the aesthetic need of common people of Odisha. With similar ease he has treated children literature which he has produced for his students initially and then for his own children when he was taking care of them after the sad demise of his second wife, Krushna Kumari.

Most of the works of Fakir Mohan were critically studied multiple times, his children literature was not studied much from critical perspective. Of late Nilakantha Parhi, Tanutrushna Panigrahi and Himanshu S. Mohapatra wrote a research article named ‘Self-reflexivity in Fiction: A Study through Selected Fictions of Fakir Mohan Senapati’ . The study was focused on Fakir Mohan Senapati’s use of self-reflexivity in his fictions taking his two meta-fictional short stories namely ‘*Aja Nati Katha*’ (Grandpa Grandson Dialogue) and *Samalochana* (Criticism) and his most critically attended novel *Six Acres and a Third* as its framework. Senapati’s engagement with unique narrative techniques and fictional devices which can be seen as contemporary and post-modernist takes him beyond the boundaries of nineteenth century Indian realist fiction according to the researchers. Written during the last few decades of the nineteenth century, when the world was ignorant of the phenomenon of literary theory, Senapati’s novels and short stories demonstrate an unusual kind of complexity that assign him the position of a canonical writer in Indian literature. The paper has analysed how through the use of such narrative techniques Senapati creates a reading experience very similar to a postmodern text, while carving out a space for realist fiction which faced resistance from the conservative Odia reading public of the times. (35). In Education, Empowerment and Eros: Fakir Mohan Senapati’s “Rebati”, Gourhari Behera studied Fakir Mohan’s ideological ambivalence towards women’s education as well as heterosexual love as represented in the story. (1-6) The study on Rebati(1889, Utkala Sahitya) is extensively done by Dr. Shruti Das. The story presents a microcosmic view of colonial Odisha in the late nineteenth century, where non-Western orthodoxy and values of Western emancipation are at conflict with each other. This paper attempts to analyze how the colonial or past significance of the depiction of the social history in Rebati has meaning for the modern reader in the present context. The analysis shows that the problem here is not whether or not to accept the orthodoxy of a world of non-Western culture and a different world offering Western humanistic rationalism as points of reference. (30-36). It is evident that the most of the research work is done on his novels. A few of the short stories of Fakirmohan like *Duliababa*(1913) and *Dakamunsi*(1913) also attracted the attention of bloggers as well. The book *Odia Sahitya ra Itibruta*(1992) edited by Suresh Chandra Kar is an extensive work on critical analysis of Odia children literature. In this book Dr Maneendra Mohanty’s article on Fakirmohan’s Children literature is noteworthy here. Dr Mohanty has studied the children literature produced by Fakirmohan from various angles and also tried to judge the works on the basis of the style and literary essence. His focus was more towards the children literature for small children and

young adults. It has provided an extensive factual study on the children literature of Fakirmohan. But the relevance of Fakirmohan's children literature for today's generation is not given enough space. This paper tries to study the relevance of Fakirmohan's children literature for the new readers. The paper is going to highlight the features of his writings which can bring the readers back to books.

Fakir Mohan served as a teacher at first in Barabati School and after that in Baleswar Mission school. He realised the importance of text books for the students. He has translated the Bengali work *Jeevan Charita* of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Later on he was busy in managerial profession and couldn't give much time to his writings. A few of his poems for children appears in his work *Pushpamala*(1894). *The poems for children in this collection are*

Janha mamu, koili nani, Benga Bhai, Dahani Alua, Chakua Chakoi Katha and Bhai-Bhauni. Pushpamala was written when Fakirmohan was staying in Domapada as a manager of the princely estate. He lost his wife during that period. He was taking care of the two children. After that he came to Cuttack with his children for better educational facility. It was an ideal phase for his children literature. A few of his poems in his book '*Abasara Basare*'(1908) may be taken into consideration. The poems such as *Gardhaba ra Shukhshma Budhhi, Chandamani ra Anga, Shankhi Biradi, Bani Pakshini, Bhua Biradi, Kalia Kukura, Bipanna Nabika, Budha Palasha, Raja o Fakira* are noteworthy in this category. Mostly these poems are amusing stories written in form of poems. The rhythmic wordplay of the master storyteller makes the reading easy and enjoyable. '*Budha Harina Katha*'(Pousha :1324) published in Utkala Sahitya can also be taken into consideration.

The most striking feature of Fakirmohan's children literature is the language he used. Fakirmohan has always used the language of the common folk. The children get the best entertainment if the language is easy to understand. The early childhood is mostly flavoured with songs and lullaby which are soothing to listen and interesting as well. The language is the language a mother uses to soothe the child. The poems which are written for very small children are very popular as Fakirmohan has touched this feature swiftly with characters like *Koili nani, Bengabhai, Shankhi Biradi* etc. For young readers, the poems which he has written are meant to be understood by the children without any need of paraphrasing. The poem *Shankhi Biradi O Bani Pakshini* can be taken as an example of the same. Children could take the pleasure when the bird outplays the cat who was trying to eat the babies of the bird. To what extent a mother can be protective and finally express her anger on the enemy of its children, they can also understand and the fine word play:

“ତାଆଣି ! ଜଗଟି ମଗଟି ଗୁଡ଼ିକୁ
ମୋ ପିଲା ଦୁର୍ଦ୍ଦିକୁ ଭୁଜ !
ସାଆ ସାଆ, ଖାଆ, ବସାରେ ପଡ଼ିବୁ
-ମୋ ପିଲାଙ୍କ ଗୁଡ଼ି ମୁଜ ।”

Thy greedy witch!

*You want to eat my children
You hunt for them to hit
Go go now and in the nest
Get their dung and shit*

The children could easily understand the language and get the fun associated with it. The language of common and day today life is used extensively.

The second major aspect of Fakir Mohan's children literature is the theme. Most of the poems written for children by Fakirmohan have the known theme. The animals whom he used are common animals like, the cuckoo bird, the frog, the common Myna, the white cat, the black dog—the children must have seen the activity. They could relate to the poem when they associate them to the funny activities described in the poem. Thus the theme becomes easy for the children. At times the imagination of the children becomes colourful when they imagine the fulfilled activities of commonplace animals. But these poems often carry important messages as well. Not only the animal world but the close bond between brother and sister as it is shown in the poem *Bhai Bhauni* can be an example in this context. How the two kids were enjoying the boat ride and how they survived a storm is the major theme but there was an underlying message that children should not try such things without adult supervision and also shows that patience and strong will power can help you in challenging circumstances. So, the Children learn moral lessons and get entertainment at the same time. A scientific concept such as the phases of the moon and the colours of the moon is the theme of *Chandamani ra Anga*, which can serve as a point of interest for the child to look at the celestial object from this point of view and also enjoy the poetic beauty of expression to give a surge to the creativity of the child.

A few of his stories for the young adults can be taken into consideration when we discuss on the theme of social reform. The concept of social reform must be inculcated in the young minds in such a way that it would have a long-lasting impact. He has used the major problems of the society such as , superstition, lack of proper education for girls, respect for values, respecting parents, and the harsh impact of alcohol—in short stories like, *Dhuliababa*, *Rebati*, *Dakamunsi*, and short play like, *Patent Medicine*. These short stories and plays were published in various literary magazines like, *Utkala Sahitya*, *Mukura* and weekly literary coroner of *Utkala Deepika*. These stories are no where mentioned as children literature. But can definitely be taken as literature for the young adults or the school goers.

Modern children literature borrows mostly from the super fantasy of the science fictions and gives fake entertainment to the children and at times there are deadly games in the name of such fantasy. The isolation of the children from their grandparents and to some extent from their parents makes the children vulnerable to such forms of entertainment. In the present context the literary creations of Fakirmohan for children has greater relevance. Although there is such a world of false fantasy the popularity of animations on Ramayan, Mahabharat and Krishna remains intact for the children. Of late, the concept of story telling session has gained popularity. Mostly the children are promoted to tell stories of their own. To enhance the creativity of the children story writing has become a part of language and literature curriculum. In Such a situation the children literature of Fakirmohan has great relevance as a guiding force for the children.

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