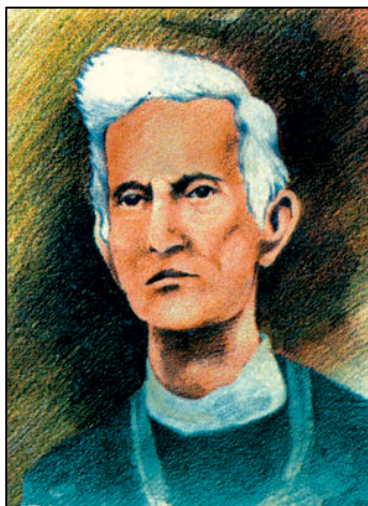




Fakirmohan Senapati : The Harbinger of Renaissance in Odia Literature

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Fakirmohan Senapati is a radiant luminary in the firmament of Odia literature for all times, for his unique contribution at a critical juncture when apocalyptic onslaught of contemporary conspirators was all set to doom Odia literature into cataclysm. Justifying the significance of the surname, he left no stone unturned to carry on the crusade with his pen to emancipate Odia literature. He saw the light of the world on the Makar Sankranti Day in January in the year 1843. In infancy, he suffered the bereavement of parents and was brought up by Kuchila Dei, his grandmother. Initially baptized Brajamohan, he was named Fakirmohan since his grandmother wanted to gratify Pira.



Fakirmohan started Pathasala education at the age of nine in 1852. Fakirmohan's education came to a halt with the completion of *Chatasali Siksha*. He was engaged an internee to learn stitching sails at the Balasore port which was famous not only in Odisha but also in different countries of Europe. When Balasore port was closed, Fakirmohan was appointed in

Nimakmahal for doing miscellaneous work. But it was stopped after some days.

Subsequently Fakirmohan studied at Barabati School for a year and a half. At the end of a year, he stood first in the class. As ill luck would have it, Fakirmohan was unable to pay off four annas as tuition fee for which after six months he could not study there. He was appointed as the third teacher at Balasore Zilla School for an honorarium of two rupees and eight annas a month. It delighted his grand mother beyond description. After two months, the salary was increased to four rupees a month. Meanwhile Fakirmohan exploited the

opportunity to learn Sanskrit privately. Rendering service in that capacity for two years i.e. from 1862 to 1864, he was appointed Headmaster at Balasore Mission School in 1864.

To make easy the learning of Odia, Hallam Sahib, the Secretary of Balasore Mission School, ventured to write an English Odia Grammar for the convenience of the English people for learning Odia in which he was aided and assisted by Fakirmohan to a great extent.



Hallam Sahib hiked his salary to Rupees twenty five a month for the results of Mission School that achieved par excellence in Odisha. Contemporary Odisha was replete with Bengali middle and lower class officers who hated Odia as a language. As Fakirmohan basked in the sunshine of John Beams, the Collector of Balasore, of his learning and sagacity, the Bengali Officers were afraid of him.

Fakirmohan was an unfortunate spectator of the danse macabre of the *Naank* Famine in Odisha in the year 1866. In his Autobiography he portrayed the horrendous happenings in which more than ten lakh people died like insects. The aurora of his literary exploits began with the writing of course books on History, Mathematics, Sahitya to shoo away scarcity of books in classes. In 1866, he wrote the biography of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar - a translation of the Bengali book written by Iswarchandra. In 1869 and 1870 he wrote *Bharatbarshara Itihas Part I and Part II* and *Ankamala Part II*. Besides he wrote a grammar book for the students. Those books were approved to be taught in schools. For the sake of fortification of Odia as a separate and sound entity, he wrote "*Rajaputrara Itihas*" with lots of efforts. He succeeded in setting up a press at Motiganj in Balasore and brought out Bodhadayini and Balasore Sambadbahika.

Fakirmohan was perturbed at the conspiracy of the dominating Bengali bureaucracy to do away with Odia from offices and educational institution by way of replacing it by Bengali. Thanks to his relentless efforts Ravenshaw Sahib, Commissioner, Odia was recommended to be retained as before which was accepted in 1870.

The bereavement of Thakurma (grandmother), the dearest Goddess incarnate, was loss beyond replacement for Fakirmohan. He married Liladevi at the age of 13. But she

died when Fakir Mohan was 29. He married Krishnakumari in 1871 who was 13 years old only. Fakirmohan loved Krishnakumari for she was ended with all sorts of womanly qualities. She breathed her last at the age of 34 in 1894. In the hour of sorrow, Fakirmohan sat near her grave and got solace.

John Beams, Collector of Balasore, recommended Fakirmohan's appointment as Dewan in the Nilagiri princely State with a salary of Rs.100/- a month. He worked there from 1871 to 1875 for four years. He was appointed Dewan in July 1876 at Dampada. There he ushered in a lot of reforms in languishing administration and revenue collection. He worked at Dampada princely state for three years. He was appointed assistant manager at Dhenkanal and in that capacity worked from 1877 to 1883. He could not be successful in his work in the insinuating situation prevailing there. During his Dhenkanal sojourn, he could translate the whole of the Ramayan into Odia. He was appointed Dewan in the princely state of Dasapalla in August 1884. He embarked on myriad constructive work like demarcation between Narasinghpur and Angul and constructed a stone embankment at Joram on the Mahanadi breach area. He also introduced the cultivation of cabbage, peas, radish in Dasapalla. But due to misunderstanding with the Raja of Dasapalla he relinquished the job in January 1886.

He came to Dampada as Dewan in 1894 for the second time. He saw the palace doomed in bankruptcy for the whimsicalities of the king. The King's lackadaisical attitude towards administration made the matters worse. Fakirmohan left Dampada in 1896 and lived in his own house at *Dhuanpatria Sahi*, Cuttack. At the request of Radhashyam Narendra, the Zamindar of Kendrapara, he worked for him as Manager for nine months only in 1899.



Although Fakirmohan's formal education was minimal, he by dint of his own efforts learnt Odia, Bangala, Sanskrit, Parsi, English. He started his writer's career with books on *Bharatabarsara Itihas*, *Ankamala*, Odia Grammar and Trigonometry for course books at schools.

Besides rendering the Mahabharat, some of the Upanishads, the Gita, Haribansha in the form of poem, he kept alive the writing of all sorts of novels, epics even when working as Dewan. In 1892, he wrote *Utkal Bhramana* in two days in 1895, he wrote epics "*Pushpamala*" "*Upahar*" in 1894 after his wife Krishnakumari's death. They were published in 1894 and 1895 respectively.

After retirement at his Cuttack residence he wrote a host of poems on flowers, creepers, birds etc. Majority of them were published in the anthology "*Abasarabasare*". During 1909 and 1912, he wrote and published epics "*Boudhabatara*", "*PoojaFoola*" and "*Dhuli*". These are "acknowledged as priceless contributions to the Odia literature.

His four prominent novels are : "*Chhaman Athaguntha*", "*Mamun*", "*Lachhama*" and "*Prayaschita*". "*Punahmusikabhaba*" is another novel of the writer. "*Lachhama*" is a historical novel. His popular short stories were published in the anthology "*Galpa Swalpa*" in 1912. Among other prose compositions, his "Autobiography" was published in 1927, nine years after his death.

"*Chhamana Athaguntha*" is a par-excellence social novel, it discusses thread base the ins and outs of Odisha's society at the time. The monetary transactions of the flourishing Mahajans who sucked the blood of the common people like pelicans, the sun-set law exploiting which the Bengali's manipulated extensive possession of Odisha Zamandaris, the scheming

city-dwelling lawyer's plotting to help Zamindars take possession of the poor men's land, the heinous debauchery, dubious dealings of the Mahajans and all such that prevailed predominantly in the first half of the 19th century are portrayed by Fakirmohan in the unbelievably touching way. "*Chhamana Athaguntha*" was published in a series in *Utkal Sahitya Patrika* to the wide acclamation of the story reading general mass. It was published all complete in 1902.

All his stories had a crystal clear picture of the nineteenth century Odisha. They describe the ways of living of different sections of people; the manners and behavioural patterns of people in towns and villages. They detail out the obscurantist concepts of the people, the pros and cons of the society, the adorable ideals, the detestable and vain-glorious approaches to life. The denial of educational facilities to the female section, the aristocratic contempt of the college educated Zamindar family young men, the clerks and *Amalas* dealing, the phlegmatic attitude of the higher-ups to the lower-rung and down-trodden are characteristically permeated in the novels.

Although bereft of higher education, Fakirmohan's composition potentialities and idiosyncrasies were none to second conspicuously illustrated in his writings. He sarcastically pooh-poohed the foul ideals practiced by the so-called top-most strata of people. He was undaunted in his internecine struggle against the corruption and exploitation. He was a theist and believer in the omnipotence of God. He didn't shrink back to lampoon to faked saints and *Babas* who were no less harmful to the society. With the motto of eradication of rubbish that darkened the society, he spared none that deserved condemnation. His characters were the real representatives of the society of the time. His mind was overflowing with



compassion for the destitute on whom the vicissitude of fortune wasn't ordained by providence but forcibly imposed on the self seeking man, while working in the princely states, he stressed himself to the utmost possible extent for the spread of education, enlightenment; extension of irrigation facilities, roads and development of agriculture. The deliberate isolation of women from the mainstream of the society caught to his quick.

On the whole, Fakirmohan was patriot and philanthropist. He worked through literature to awaken the people and authorities to the prevailing predicaments and to do away with them. In the lachrymose eyes of *Saria* and inhuman torture of Bhagichandra he brought to light what was done by the self-aggrandizing higher-up to flourish at the cost of innocent multitude.

From the prime of life, he exerted himself to safeguard his mother tongue and retrieve it. He was very indomitable in efforts to remove the pessimistic tinge that was cast of the horizon of his motherland. Thus he lived and died with life-long dedication. The pioneer of the golden age in Odia literature was crowned with success to unleash the forces of regeneration of his beloved Odia. He will remain immortal through all times and climes.

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