

Self-reflexivity in Fiction: A Study through Selected Fictions of Fakir Mohan Senapati

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Abstract

This paper studies 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. 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 will analyze 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.

Keywords: Self-reflexivity, Postmodernism, Realist fiction, Indian English Literature, World Literature.

Introduction

Self-reflexivity as a literary phenomenon became the topic of discussion in world literary studies in the post-modern era although it existed in a nascent form from ancient times, the time of the epic Gilgamesh, an anonymous text which dramatises the concept of self-reflexivity. When fictional literature is self reflexive it essentially develops a narrative without losing consciousness of the fact that it is a fiction.

Self-reflexive narratives constantly remind the readers of the fictionality of the work and do not allow the readers to forget what they are doing and feel transported into the world of the text. In *Gilgamesh*, the narrator clearly mentions that it is recorded on a stone thereby reminding the readers of its textuality. However, it was at its most basic form in the earlier writings and did not become fully developed till the later decades of the twentieth century. In the hands of major writers like John Fowles and Orhan Pamuk self-reflexivity found its utmost complexity. Fowles in his famous work *The French Lieutenant's Woman* employs a realist narrative technique in the first 12 chapters but in the 13th chapter he suddenly starts commenting on the writing process. The narrator then goes on to question himself and his relationship with the author of the text:

This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and "voice" of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know it all, yet he tries to pretend that he does.....So perhaps I am writing a transposed autobiography...(Fowles)

Fowles here shares the details about the writing process along with his readers. He self consciously reflects on the craft of writing. He explains to the readers how the author or the narrator is not omniscient, rather, he is also like a character in the novel whose reliability or capability when it comes to representation of facts is questionable.

Pamuk on the other hand negotiated the post-structural idea of reality in narratives. Post-structuralists believed that it is impossible to imitate the world as reality is a linguistic construct and therefore any imitation that has to take place has to be at the linguistic level. Hence, his fictions instead of being a reflection of reality create a 'verbal reality' and therefore are self-reflexive. To quote Pamuk: "I make collage. I borrow many things from many books but this does not make me feel bad... However, as James Joyce states, this functions only as a bridge... I create a work of art with my own will... I do not mind what I have borrowed." (Pamuk)

Here Pamuk talks about the process of writing in a confessional tone. He tries to make his readers aware of the process of the writing and how he feels about it.

As the idea of self reflexivity came of age, writers and theorists could differentiate between its subtle nuances and thus divided it into several sub-genres like 'misguided self-consciousness', the 'künstlerroman', the 'self begetting novel' and the 'extended midrash'. Misguided self-consciousness portrays the narrator as an artist and he/she tries to analyze his/her own text and fails in the attempt due to lack of insight. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) would be a fine example of representation of misguided self-consciousness. In *Lolita* the narrator tries to immortalize and romanticise a rape which in actuality is his own misconception. The author of the novel distances himself from the narrator in the preface where he explains his account as a psychological case. His younger colleague Martin Amis observes: "Nabokov describes himself as writing novels as he would solve chess problems he posed to himself. What could present a more rigorous challenge than to tell a story, at a high artistic level, from the perspective of a monster?" So in these types of fiction, the writer usually tries to present something as reality but in actuality it is a perverted form of reality as interpreted through the mind of a mentally unstable person.

The *künstlerroman* technique which demonstrates an artist's journey to maturity is actually a disguised autobiography that reflects on the life of its author. Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Youngman* is one of the finest examples of such fiction. The two other important categories of self reflexive fiction are the self begetting novel and the extended midrash. In self begetting fiction, the novel is usually written by a character from inside the novel. These kinds of novels create the illusion of art creating itself. It is an account, usually first person, of the development of a character to the point at which he/she is able to take up his pen and write the novel we have just finished reading. For example, in Jean Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea* (1938) the central character wishes, towards the end, to write a novel so that people might one day revere him the way he respects a musician. The most sophisticated form of self reflection in a novel is extended midrash. In these novels, a reader finds references to and a discussion of other books and literary ideas. For example James Joyce spends a long chapter discussing *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare in *Ulysses* (1922). Here Joyce enlightens his readers about a literary concept inside the narrative boundary of a fiction. Often novels exploiting the technique cross over to the border of metafiction. Patricia Waugh, while defining metafiction, observes: "fictional writing which self-consciously and

systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" is self-reflexive. Metafictional works, she suggests, are those which "explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction. (Waugh)

Fakir Mohan Senapati and the Self-reflexive Narrative Technique

Fakir Mohan Senapati, came to be recognised as a major South Asian novelist of nineteenth century India wrote in Odia language, the official language of Odisha, a state located in the eastern part of India. A major anticolonial voice from India, Fakirmohan Senapati wrote during the time of Odia linguistic protest for an independent language status, not as a part of Bengali language, a time when Odia fiction was still in its infancy. He was modern and his works included techniques that were much ahead-of-his-time. Self-reflexivity technique in fictions is one among them; a complex and sophisticated characteristic of modern narrative technique, and his negotiations with it strengthen his position as a leading figure in the world literary map. Unlike most writers who were contemporaneous with him, he was self-conscious and did not turn a blind eye towards the existing dogmas. Especially in the context of Odisha, where writers as modern as Manoj Das, indulged in glorification of the past of Odisha and its values, Senapati represented the society as it existed. In short stories like 'The Crocodile Lady' and 'A farewell to Ghost' Manoj Das tries to paint the blind belief and gullibility of Odia society in a romantic light. Fakirmohan, on the other hand, has criticized the same attitudes in fellow Odias. In the Chapter on 'Asura Pond' in his novel *Six Acres and a Third* (Chhamana Athhaguntha) he ridicules the credulousness of Odias by drawing an analogy with the relationships shared by birds frequenting the pond;

Some sixteen to twenty cranes, white and brown, churn the mud like lowly farmhands, from morning till night. A pair of kingfishers suddenly arrive out of nowhere, dive into the water a couple of times, stuff themselves with food, and swiftly fly away. Oh, stupid hindu cranes, look at these English kingfishers, who arrive out of nowhere with empty pockets, fill themselves with all manner of fish from the pond and then fly away.

The author-narrator functions as a critical insider, one who satirises both the invaders and the ruled. Again the satire for the Hindus is driven by double literary consciousness.

Senapati was fighting two simultaneous battles : one with his own community, and another with the imperialists of England. The literature of realism that he produced was subtly characterized by this double consciousness. However he did not limit himself to doing that alone. In spite of the difficulties and threats that he could have faced from the British as Odisha was under British rule , he criticizes them and their prejudices. For example, in the same chapter he states how most of the history written by the British historians are biased and paint a false picture of Indian reality.

“Oh you English educated Babus , don’t snigger at this piece of history as recounted by our Ekadusia Chand. If you do , you will have to laugh at, even say good bye to , at least half of what your old historians Marshman and Tod have served up.” (Mohapatra,2022)

Fakirmohan successfully dealt with another hurdle which stood in his way of establishing prose fiction as a genre in Odia literary landscape. He had to convince the newly emerging readers in Odisha of the truth telling function of literature without compromising with the quality that makes literature the discourse it is, namely imagination, make believe and fiction. The Odia readership was not yet ready for the complex and new genre of literature, such as the realistic novel. The major reason for this was there was no fictional literature in prose available for the community to read and look upto and whatever was available were puranas , the mythological texts, which were originally written in Sanskrit and later adapted in Odia and were considered as revealed truths. Hence, the fictional world was a completely new world for them and naturally drew resistance. The more conservative section of the society were skeptical about the need of such writings and accused this new breed of writing of spreading falsehood.

Literary history is witness to such resistances throughout. In Greece when literature was crawling from its infancy to childhood, Plato questioned its relevance accusing it of falsehood and treachery. Wordsworth, with his first edition of Lyrical Ballads, also faced resistance from the English readers of his time. Literary Criticism came to the rescue of literature and Aristotle in the first instance and Wordsworth himself in the second through their critical essays defended themselves. Aristotle in his Poetics responds to the platonic allegations against drama by explaining the cathartic effect that the drama has on a viewer. Wordsworth, on the other hand defended his new breed of poetry in his Preface to

Lyrical Ballads in which he justifies his poetry as more genuine as it features people who live in close proximity with nature. Sir Philip Sidney defended poetry in his work *An Apology for Poetry* where he responded to the accusations of George Gosson in his *Schools of Abuse*. In the 18th and 19th centuries, writers such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding made attempts to establish the novel as a model literary genre. They kept on writing new novels which created a taste for the same in the English readers of their time. When we contextualise Fakirmohan here, one comes across his uniqueness in his approach; instead of writing critical essays, he used his fiction to defend itself.

Aja Nati Katha as a Self-reflexive Text

Aja Nati Katha is written in the form of a dialogue between a grandfather and a grandson in which the grandfather, after the knowledge that a short story printed in a magazine is not based on facts, blames western education for spreading falsehood. The old man, who fails to distinguish between literature and news reports published in the Gazette, wonders why there would be false news in a printed document. And when he learns from his grandson that it is a short story, not a news report, he fails to conceive what is the rationality behind printing and publishing something which is not factual. The objection of the grandfather is two fold. He opposes the idea that something which is not factual should be read and written and secondly, prose, which is accepted as the medium for narrating historical incidents, will be used in such narratives with imaginary characters and incidents.

Whereas the first allegation is the byproduct of the age-old assumption that the Puranas are based on the truth which renders everything written as meaningless and irrelevant, the second allegation comes from the attitude of the common folks towards literature which was deeply rooted in the ancient pedagogical tradition of Odisha. This tradition had created the assumption that prose narrative is the prerogative of history writing and hence anything that is written in prose should be the documentation of facts. (Satpathy, 2017).

It would be apt to mention Bhubaneswar Dutta who initiated the tradition of self-conscious reflection on literature. In his preface to the compilation *Model Questions on Oriya Literature: Sahityabisayaka Adarsha Prasnavali*, he presents a fictional account which will help the readers get an idea about the problematic relationship between prose and

fiction. When a colonial school inspector visited a school in Odisha, he walked into a literature class and asked the students to write about the origin and uses of camphor. The literature teacher who equates literature pedagogy with grammar is surprised. "But this is not history! Why do you ask such a question?" he responded. (Datta, 1879) The enlightened colonial inspector actually gave the students a task in realist narration. But it was beyond comprehension of the traditional Odia literature teacher. For him, prose narrative can only be used to narrate a historical incident or to report a piece of news. The grandfather of the story in discussion belonged to the same school which the traditional Sahitya teacher did and hence he is uncomfortable to see realistic narration techniques being used to depict fictional incidents.

Ganapati, the grandson, is the writer's mouthpiece and responds to the allegations hurled against both the category of fiction and the narrative technique employed to portray it. He responds to each and every question posed by the old man and eventually secures his victory in the war of words. In order to answer the question about the need of fiction, Ganapati draws on the Puranas and explains how, contradictory to the popular assumptions, they are fictions. He cites several episodes from the Puranas to prove that these incidents are not possible in the real world and the Puranas are also fictional:

That's alright, grandpa, some other day we both will visit him and get our doubts cleared when you will be feeling better. But when we are to take wise man Ram Mishra's help, we must be ready with some substantial number of questions. I would like to cite another little anecdote to clear my confusion. As recorded in Bhagavat, the infant Krishna was in Gopapura Village when Kansa, his maternal uncle, sent Putana, the cruel ogress, to kill the infant. The ogress changed herself by supernatural powers into a suckling pretty young woman, to poison and kill the divine child by feeding him poisoned milk at her breast smeared with poison on nipples. She took the infant to her breasts for giving him a feed. Lo, in none go, Krishna sucked away her life along with her poisoned milk and ogress Putana lay dead with a loud scream. In death she returned her gross and terrible form of ogress, her deadbody covering a landmass measuring nineteen yojanas, one yojana was equivalent to four kosha equal to about eight miles. So, when Putana's huge ogress form measuring nineteen yojanas fell down dead at Gopa Pura, you may imagine the

area covered , not less than one hundred and fifty miles. Fall of such a big heavy object would crush the flora and fauna of the region including humans and their settlements. Isn't it a little fantastic to believe , I mean, the size of Putana's body which might have destroyed human habitation of an area measuring a hundred and fifty miles? Grandpa, we are to ask our Ram Mishra Sir, how big was Gopa Pura and why the resulting destruction by fall of a huge ogress has not been reported in Bhagavat anywhere in any manner. Also the same episode has been recorded in Mahabharat as well but differently. It has stated that a vulture swooped down on Gopa Pura village after Krishna's birth to harm the kid. The word putana of Bhagavat is also a synonym for vulture. In yet another puranic text it is mentioned that during his childhood , Krishna was afflicted with jaundice , a disease of the liver. The word putana also has a third meaning and stands for jaundice. Tell me Grandpa, which of these versions of our Puranic texts is true? (Mishra,)

Here through the character Ganapati , the author brings our attention to the fact that even mythologies which are believed by commonfolk as revealed truth are fictional in nature but it is not completely devoid of reality as the element of reality finds symbolic representation in here just like in other fictional narratives.

The other accusation against fiction was that there is no need to write falsehood for entertainment or education when these purposes can be served by portrayal of truth, the embodiment of which are the scriptures written in ancient times.

However, the reaction is expected as the reading masses were the product of a culture where faith played a very important role and the existence of Gods and mythical creatures were surmised indisputably. But Fakirmohan tactfully takes this attitude on by drawing on a symbol from the same culture and attacking it as falsehood. In the story, the grandson points at a picture of Krishna playing the flute and questions whether the absence of the flute sound can be taken as proof that it is a false-Krishna. And when the grandfather replies that it is a replica of Krishna, not a false-Krishna Ganapati uses the old man's own answer to convince him. He justifies fiction, not as the opposite of reality (falsehood) but as an imitation of it.

He further questions the Puranas by citing more incidents which were inconsistent with reality. Starting from the incident where there is a debate between a python and King

Yudhisthira, he cites several incidents which are impossible in the real world and thus concludes that Puranas are nothing but fiction. But he does not dismiss these as falsehoods. Although these episodes will be impossible in the real world, these are not irrelevant to it. These are symbolic representations of real life which is a more creative way of reporting facts than history writing. So, Fiction for Senapati is a symbolic way of expressing reality, it is an alternative history. A similar example is Orwell's *Animal Farm* where he symbolically represents the entire history of the rise and fall of the communist movement in Russia. Another fine example of the symbolic representation would be *The Great Indian Novel* by Sashi Tharoor where he chronicles the history of India post its independence using the frame of the Mahabharata.

Stephen Greenblatt in his 'What is the History of Literature', talks about how the definition and function of literature have changed over the years. From distinguishing men of learning to saving the heads of people from gallows, literature has always added value to human life. Literature distinguishes itself from other forms of discourse as being constructed. As Francis Bacon rightly puts it, literature is figured language and feigned history. So, in literature, either through conspicuous beauty of words or conspicuous fictionality of matter or both the constructed quality of literature are foregrounded. However, this constructed quality does not completely snap ties with reality. Rather there is a complex mixture of the two where some characteristic of each is retained. To use Stephen Greenblatt's terms "the interest of literatures resides in the place where imaginings may be made real and realities may be disclosed as products of the imagination resides in the placewhere the made up and made real touch." (Greenblatt, 1997) The truth behind Greenblatt's assertions can be realized by analyzing various episodes from the Puranas. These mythological texts have been commonly accepted as factual documents but it would be very hard to establish if contested. These improbable and fantastic incidents have passed on as truth simply because these are ancient texts and the contemporary fiction could also be read as factual documents in the future.

So, by bringing together the two seemingly contradictory categories of fact and fiction, he also brings together two other categories whose relationship is extensively debated: creative writing and criticism. His creative writing is, therefore, a veiled argument advanced in defense of fiction. In other words his creative writings are also critical

documents. By skillfully weaving criticism into his fiction and by pleading a case for realist fiction implicitly, he proves realist fiction to be self-reflexive. If we compare Senapati with other writers of his times, he clearly lacked a tradition yet he did not fall short in engaging some of the most subtle craftsmanship in the field of fiction. If we look at the portrayal of reading and writing in literary works of his time, his are undoubtedly the most complex and advanced. The 'self-reflexivity' that we see in Senapati stands out as a very subtle technique of engaging with reading and writing within the frontiers of fiction.

The Grandfather and Grandson dialogue was not a one-off story which was adorned with such complex features. There are several other pieces of writing by Senapati which bear the markings of self-reflexivity. There is a piece titled "Samalochana" which is a meta-discourse on Senapati's first published short story "Rebati." In "Samalochana", Senapati has anticipated a number of questions which may have occurred in the minds of the readers of his time after reading "Rebati." The short story was published in Utkal Sahitya just a few months before this meta-discourse was published in the same magazine in the January issue of 1899. Like all parents who are anxious about the well-being of their children, Senapati also was very keen to create the stage for a good reception of this short piece. As Wordsworth wrote a preface in his second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to establish a taste for the new breed of poetry that he and Coleridge had started writing, Senapati in his innovative fictional approach wrote this piece for the same purpose.

In this discourse he presents a dialogue between himself (Mohan) and Shankar (Gourisankar Ray), the then editor of *Utkal Deepika*. In the mouth of Shankar he puts the questions that may arise in the minds of the average reader and answers those in his roundabout and tongue-in-cheek style. The two main questions that are raised in the narrative are why it is such a slender volume and whether the author is not in favor of women education and empowerment. In addition to these two, he also responds to the question of why the author wiped out the whole family of the innocent girl.

In his response Senapati says that the piece is not very thick because his primary objective was to reach out to the general public. He cites Poet Valmiki who is the writer of the epic *Ramayana* and states how he has been confined into the places of worship. The example of Herodotus is also discussed by the writer in order to prove how historical

writings could not reach beyond a few scholars and students of history. Here, by his subtle argumentative style advocates for a new genre of writing namely short story. In other words, Senapati emphasizes the need for a slim fictional narrative which will be easily available and accessible for all. Just as in "Aja Nati Katha", he used his fiction to defend itself, here he writes a short story to carve out a space for itself in the literary landscape of Odisha.

The response to the second question is more complex. Instead of directly telling the readers his views on the question of women education and empowerment, he lets the story and its devastating conclusion cause an outrage in the minds of the reader. As Chandradas Choudhry states in his foreword to the book *Rebati: Speaking in Tongues*, Senapati's narration is all the more powerful because the writer does nothing to challenge the perverse interpretation: he merely shows us things as they happen, letting the outrage and the horror build up not inside the story but inside the reader". However, in "Samalochana" he gives his readers certain hints from which it could be concluded that his views on the question of women education and empowerment were not conservative and regressive. When questioned about the untimely and miserable death of Rebati's family, he suggests that it has nothing to do with Rebati's learning to read and write rather fate is responsible for such a catastrophe. In his subtle and indirect way, he suggests that the colonial government is responsible for the things that happened to Rebati and her family. In "Samalochana" when Sankar asks him about who mourned (in the traditional Odia way) for Rebati and her grandmother, Senapati sarcastically replies that the Lat council did it which implies the colonial administration did not come to the rescue of the poor old lady and her little grand daughter when they needed its help.

This proves that Senapati was an extremely self-conscious writer who was not just aware and concerned about the literary taste but also shaped it through his fictions.

Six Acres and A Third as a Self-reflexive Text

Senapati's masterpiece *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* is undoubtedly narrated in a self-reflexive style. However, this time he is not concerned with arguing a case for his work; rather he employs realism in a self-conscious and self-reflexive manner. His realism is very different from that of his contemporaries or predecessors as the realism portrayed in his late works is much more subtle and analytical. While

the other realists of his time in Indian literature merely aim for a photographic representation of the life as lived by the Indian masses, Senapati's realism delves deeper by engaging with their socio-economic conditions and simultaneously showing and explaining their stories. The realism which he incorporates in his writing is interpretative, which means it doesn't just present a spectacle in front of the eyes of the readers but analyzes that spectacle and explains its various parts and their intricate relationships.

A comparison with Bengal Peasants lives by Lal Bihari Day will show how Senapati's take on realism is much more complex and nuanced than it was common in his times. As Satya P Mohanty states in his introduction to the translation of Senapati's celebrated book *Six Acres and a Third* , " much of Day's novel is written in this embarrassingly turgid style ,where the main goal seems to be to convert the village women into specimens of this or that caste , this or that subregion of Bengal , so that the reader may be amused by the cultural details ." However Senapati , while presenting a similar episode as Day,takes the indirect route by presenting the whole scene through the mouth of a narrator who embellishes the account through his own insights. These insights from the narrator showcases the interpretative realism of which Senapati was an adept.In other words , Senapati's realism was self-reflexive in which he explored and explained simultaneously the lives of the working class people of his time. A passage from Day's work and that of Senapati's is quoted for better illustration of the point.

A woman robbing her feet sees another woman preparing to go and says to her,

" Sister, why are you going away so soon? You have not to cook ; why are you then going away so soon?"

" Sister, I have to cook today. The elder bou is not well today. She was taken ill last night."

" But you have not to cook much. You have no feast in your house?"

" No; no feast , certainly. But my sister has come from Devagrama with her son. And the fisherman has given us a large Rohita, which must be cooked."

" Oh! You have guests in your house. What are you going to cook?"

" I am going to cook dal of mashkalai, one tarkari, badi fried, fried fish, fish with pepper corns, fish with tamarinds , and

another dish of which my sister's son is very fond, namely amda with poppy-seed."

"The everlasting badi and poppy-seed. You bania are very fond of these things. We Brahmans do not like either of them."

"The reason why you Brahmans do not like badis is because you do not know how to make them well. If you once taste our badi, you will not forget it for seven months. You would wish to eat it everyday. As for poppy-seed, what excellent curry it makes....though you are Brahman, once taste my badi. Badi will not destroy your caste."

So saying the banker woman went away with the kalasi in her waist. (Day,121)

Senapati's passage goes like this.

"The gathering at the ghat became very large when the women came to bathe before cooking their daytime meals. If there had been a daily newspaper in Gobindapur, its editor would have had no difficulty gathering stories for his paper; all he would have had to do was sit at the ghat, paper and pencil in hand. He would have found out, for instance, what had been cooked the previous night, at whose house, and what was going to be cooked there today; who went to sleep at what time; how many mosquitoes bit whom; who ran out of salt; who had borrowed oil from whom; how Rama's mother's younger daughter in law was a shrew, and how she talked back to her mother-in-law, although she married only the other day; when Kamali would go back to her in-laws; how Saraswati was a nice girl and her cooking was good, her manners excellent..."

It is clearly evident that Senapati, while portraying the authentic life of his people, also goes deeper by giving his readers an insight of the workings of the society he is portraying. He doesn't simply revel in showing the cultural diversity of Odisha village life, but, he goes an extra mile by engaging with the inner workings of their lives: showing and explaining how the social negotiations take place.

A reading of Chha Mana Athha Guntha will inform the readers of the techniques through which Senapati has been able to expose the social undercurrents without being outrageous. He employs irony to intimate to his readers the hidden social reality of the times. He also very humorously makes use of western dialectics to justify the vices of the men and social institutions. The garrulous narrator of the story becomes the bow through whom he shoots these

seemingly benign arrows at the exploitative Indian and colonial masters. Let's for example look at the passage from the chapter three of the book

There were seventeen drumstick trees in the master's orchard and their leaves possessed certain medicinal properties. They aided digestion, were nourishing and delicious; besides, they helped restore the sick to health. We do not know if books really claimed such properties for the leaves of the drumstick tree, but then we have no expertise in that field. We have merely written down what we have heard from Mangaraj himself. Naturally enough, not a single leaf found its way to the market; they were reserved exclusively for the well-being and nourishment of the farmhands. And the flowers of these trees constituted the most wholesome food in the world; when cooked with mustard, they were wonderful. In God's creation good and bad are everywhere intertwined. Consider how a jackfruit is sweet and wholesome, while its fibers harm the stomach. People who are wise, however, can effortlessly sort the good from the bad. They know that everything that the drumstick tree produces is good, except, of course, the drumsticks themselves. Which is why Mangaraj never served those to the farmhands; they went straight to the market.

Here, Senapati exposes how cunningly Mangraj deceives his innocent farmhands. Instead of directly showing or narrating the story, he lets his tongue-in-cheek narrator build up an excuse to justify Mangaraj's exploitation of his subjects.

Conclusion

In a time when Senapati was writing it is very rare to find such self-conscious writing which makes him one of the most sophisticated writers of his times. Even though he lacked a developed writing tradition, the style and narrative techniques that he used puts him in a very select list of writers who deserve global acknowledgement. The self-reflexivity in his fiction is a proof of his complex and advanced writing style which served as a head start for sophisticated writing culture in Odia Literature.

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