Some sixteen to twenty cranes, white and brown, churn the mud like lowly farmhands, from morning till night. This is the third proof that there are fish in the pond. A pair of kingfishers suddenly arrives out of nowhere, dive into the water a couple of times, stuff themselves with food, and swiftly fly away. Sitting on the bank, a lone kingfisher suns itself, wings spread like the gown of a memsahib. Oh, stupid Hindu cranes, look at these English king-fishers, who arrive out of nowhere with empty pockets, fill themselves with all manner of fish from the pond, and then fly away. You nest in the banyan tree near the pond, but after churning the mud and water all day long, all you get are a few miserable small fish. You are living in critical times now; more and more kingfishers will swoop down on the pond and carry off the best fish. You have no hope, no future, unless you go abroad and learn how to swim in the ocean.

The kite is smart and clever; it perches quietly on a branch, like a Brahmin guru, and from there swoops down into the pond to snatch a big fish that lasts it for the whole day. Brahmin gurus perch on their verandahs, descending on their disciples once a year, like the kite.

(Fakir Mohan Senapati, *Six Acres and a Third* 103-104)

This is an extract from *Chha Mana Atha Guntha (Six Acres and a Third)*, a classic nineteenth-century novel about colonial India by Fakir Mohan Senapati (Fakirmohan hereafter), the eminent Oriya writer whose literary career began in 1866 and continued up to his death in 1918. In this extract, the narrator of the novel ostensibly describes the public pond of the village, but, mimetic accuracy of representation of rural India apart, the extract recommends itself to us for its much wider range of significance. Following the trail of a trite question, ‘whether there is fish in the pond’, the narrator examines several issues and offers a variety of interpretation about things which apparently have very little connection with the main theme of the novel. Trying to fit it into the kind of model of Victorian Novel which they had in their minds, the early critics of this novel therefore saw this entire chapter as an aberration (Mohanty 1981 76).
Even though he owes a lot to the Victorians for the novel form, Fakirmohan, clearly, was not writing like an eminent Victorian. The “Asura Dighi” chapter which will be under consideration here is integral not only to the scheme of the novel but to the entire oeuvre of Fakirmohan. By drawing upon the resources of empirical science and reason, on deductive method of logic, and on resources of history to point to the existence of fish in a pond, he is clearly lampooning colonial forms of knowledge and historiography; but, more importantly, in a thinly disguised allegory he gestures towards the universal theme of exploitation, colonial or otherwise. If the fish stand for the natural resources of the world, the four types of predatory birds represent four types of human beings in a stratified colonial society. Representing the lowest rung of the exploiters in the society, there are ‘Kaduakhumps’ who survive on physical labour alone. They are the lumpens lacking insight into the complex reality that circumscribes them. Like beasts of burden, they complacently allow themselves to be used by others. The cranes represent the calculative comprador class of the petty bourgeois who survive on white-collar jobs. Above them are the hangers-on, who, using their mythically superior status of caste, feed on the labor of others. They use their shrewdness in order to fatten themselves without contributing anything to the process of production. They are compared to the kites. These three groups are all exploiters of the resources of the land no doubt, but due to a lack of proper skills of exploitation and the ability to understand the world around them, they are condemned to a lower level of subsistence. In contrast, the outsiders like kingfishers are a skillful and clever group who can be properly said to live off the fat of the land. They run away with the very best the land can provide, thanks to their superior skill, power and tact. The narrator compares the kingfishers to the English colonisers, whose exploitation is much more acute and pervasive than the exploitation of the local indigenous natives.

From the above description it appears as if the narrator sets up a binary opposition between the coloniser and colonised and that his sympathies are all with the colonised, the disempowered, and the lowly whom he exhorts to raise themselves by honing their skills and raising their awareness about their own disadvantaged status. Several readings of Fakirmohan go along with this simplistic binary of the coloniser and the colonised, the powerful and the disempowered and interpret his art as an attempt to give voice to the voiceless and as a plea for social justice and equity. But a closer reading of the text reveals that the narrator, in fact, does not take sides at all. It is true that the narrator identifies the outsider kingfisher as the most dangerous of all the birds; but the tone of the narrator towards other groups, is equally contemptuous or patronizing. Had the narrator identified himself with any of the groups he would not have remained so detached from all of them. The narrator ostensibly remains outside the action and fails to identify with any of the groups. Being a colonial subject himself, why does Fakirmohan create a narrator who is so ubiquitous within the narrative yet so elusive when one
tries to locate his real sympathies? We would suggest that the sympathy or the lack of it of the narrative voice towards the colonial world that is represented in *Six Acres and a Third* in fact corresponds to Fakirmohan’s own complex response to the colonial structures of power and culture.

Colonialism generated a wide range of responses and subject positions in various colonised societies. This was due both to the attitude of the colonisers and to the social, cultural, political and economic condition of the subject population. Some colonised people welcomed their subject position with a hope of economic advancement. This hope was often based on the assumption that, as in case of Europe, economic advancement would take place in a symmetrical manner without undermining the dignity and self-respect of the colonised, who visualised colonisation as the agent of modernity in the absence of which their own would become moribund. A section of the emergent Hindu middle class in India to which Fakirmohan belonged harboured such illusions. However, while they interacted with colonial structures of power they were often assailed by misgivings and suffered occasional disillusionment. They were in a kind of mental see-saw game between despair and hope—despair at the perception of threat that colonisation posed to their traditions and hope that the traditions would be able to withstand the threat. Sometimes the despair also led them to a reactionary quest for utopias formulated in the past. Several contemporaries of Fakirmohan sought refuge in such utopias. Fakirmohan rarely perceived the phenomenon of colonisation in such simplistic categories. He seems to have seen colonisation despite its so-called modernizing agenda as a grafting. In order to understand the complexity of Fakirmohan’s response, we need to analyze his position as an individual and social subject within colonial structures.

British occupation of the coastal districts of Orissa was almost forty years old by the time Fakirmohan was born January 13, 1843, in Balasore, one of the coastal districts. The political condition of Orissa at the time of British occupation was extremely unstable. For long, Orissa was a hotbed of conflict between different Muslim rulers on the one hand and the indigenous power-elite on the other. Immediately before the British occupation Orissa had come under the hegemony of a Maratha chieftain ruling from Nagpur. Since Marathas were not interested in establishing a State or the rule of the law, they used the area only for extortion. The British East India Company took advantage of this fluid political condition in order to occupy the area quite easily. The British justified their imperialism in the name of establishing the rule of law and providing “order” in a “failed state.” They also constructed a befitting historiography which claimed that only fifty East India Company soldiers marched into the Barabati Fort (the seat of power of these districts) and established the company rule without almost any resistance from local militia. But, the so-called rule of law or order was so elusive and the economic exploitation so harsh that there were popular uprisings against the
British occupation within months. However, it took almost a decade for these uprisings to consolidate into a major revolt in the form of the Paika Rebellion of 1817. Although the colonial administration and historiography has tried to designate this as an insurgency mounted by the remnants of the traditional feudal class, it was actually a mass movement involving people from all sections of Oriya society. The revolt was inevitably mauled by the company forces armed with superior weapons. The local militia lacked training badly and was using very archaic weapons.

The quelling of the revolt demoralised the Oriya community completely, even as it somewhat tempered the British maraudery. The company subsequently made some constructive gestures and tried to establish a semblance of rule of law, but this was done in order to further its own imperialistic designs. It ushered in institutions of ‘modernisation’ like the school, the judiciary and land reforms. Under its aegis the missionaries of various Christian denominations established schools, a health-care system, and printing presses to start publication of books in the vernacular language of Oriya. However, many Oriyas could not participate in the ‘civilising mission’ of the British at that time because of their lack of will, economic impoverishment, and state of demoralisation. The inaction of Oriyas at a time when imperialism was bringing about massive changes in social structures both by its coercive and ideological state apparatuses created a vacuum in the social space. In the meantime, due to their early exposure to the British administration and the forces of “modernisation” which it unleashed, the neighboring Bengalis had consolidated themselves into a sizable comprador class. The British had become increasingly dependent on this comprador class for the smooth functioning of the administration. This Bengali comprador class started manning most of the government jobs in Orissa. They spread their subcolonizing tentacles by appropriating the Zamindari estates in Orissa, especially after the promulgation of the Sunset Law.1 In order to perpetuate their hold over property, jobs, and hence, access to power, the Bengali elite wanted to valorise the Bengali language and marginalise the local language Oriya. (Dash & Pattanaik 2004). Writing about the sorry state of the Oriyas at that time

1 There was no such law of this nomenclature in British India. The term came into popular usage as a result of the widespread practice of auctioning of the estates of zamindars who defaulted on the payment of rent. The rate of the rent was somewhat stabilised in places like Bengal after Lord Cornwallis’s Permanent Settlement Act in 1793. However, this Act was never implemented comprehensively in places like Orissa and such other areas newly acquired by the East India Company. In Orissa, the rent was fixed for a period that varied between one and three years. Often, the East India Company authorities raised the rent arbitrarily without properly informing the landlords. When the landlords defaulted in payment their zamindaris were auctioned off in far away Fort William in Calcutta, again, without properly informing them. Since the auction was held at the time of sunset, the term “sunset law” got currency in popular parlance. Fifty-two percent of Oriya landlords were disinherited between 1804 and 1816 due to the faulty implementation of the land revenue system by the Company and the comprador class assisting it. The widespread disaffection caused by this disinheritance paved the way for the Paika Rebellion of Orissa in 1817.
Natabara Samantaray cites the following opinion of Mr. Nolan, the Collector of Cuttack in 1879: “It may be doubted whether the Oriya is holding his own in the struggle for existence. The Bengali is ousting him from the land and from service; the Bengali, the Marwaris and the Europeans, from trade; the Telugu from the rougher kinds of labour” (Samantaray 1963 55).

Fakirmohan’s literary activism was a response to this complex scenario. On the one hand, by providing governance, democratic law and the fruits of modernisation and protecting the people from years of Pathan, Mughal and Maratha misrule, colonialism had provided a semblance of order to a chaotic society, but, on the other hand, it had grafted an alien culture upon an unsuspecting majority. It had leveled down traditional oppressive hierarchies at the same time as it had created a new oppressive comprador class who were not loathe to exploit the disempowered majority by taking advantage of the loopholes of the systems of law and governance and the instruments of modernisation.

Penned long after he was established as a writer, Fakirmohan’s autobiography (Dash 2002) bears testimony to the fact that his career as a writer was an offshoot and a part of a grander design of political struggle. Initially, the struggle was directed against the hegemony of the comprador class of Bengali subcolonialists who had manipulated the structures of colonial power to their advantage and were trying to marginalise the already disempowered Oriyas further. The very survival of Oriyas as a community depended on a tactical collaboration with colonial structures of power. Fakirmohan was aware of the dangers the British posed to the Oriyas who had to align with them in order to stave off the immediate prospect of losing their identities as Oriyas due to the machinations of the Bengali subcolonialists. He was also quick to see that the source of Bengali power was their proximity to the British and the forces of so-called modernisation such as British schools, print technology and literary culture.

Commenting on *Six Acres and a Third*, Paul Sawyer remarks that “[i]n a world governed by official and unofficial duplicity, those who are ‘below’ survive, not by subtle disputation, but by reading the signs, catching hints, forming quick conclusions based on long experience—what is often called ‘peasant wit’” (Sawyer 2006). Fakirmohan’s reading of the world around him was acute. He read the signs well and spent a large part of his early life developing education, establishing printing presses, writing text-books for children and in spreading the literary culture by producing literature and disseminating it through the periodicals, newspapers and journals he helped in publishing. Through all these means, Fakirmohan was trying to create a civil society strong enough to resist the onslaughts of the people of other linguistic groups on the lives and livelihood of the native Oriyas.

Fakirmohan’s own life had adequately prepared him to be a ‘reader of signs’ of the colonial society of his times. His resources for ‘catching the hints’ were much more than that of a ‘peasant wit’ in the sense Paul Sawyer
uses the expression, and his views in Six Acres and a Third were not always from the “below” as Satya P. Mohanty (2005) has suggested, points we will take up later. Suffice it to say here that Fakirmohan was a typical colonial subject whom Ashis Nandy designates as both civil and sly at the same time, a bricoleur who took advantage of the colonial structures in his personal as well as communitarian struggles. Coming from a landowning warrior caste, he alternately worked as a trader, school teacher, administrator, Zamindar, editor of newspapers and journals and an author working intimately with various sections of the society, the British overlords, the Bengali subcolonialists manning official positions of power, the local feudal class and the nobility, and the common public. His survival and rise in the social hierarchy often depended on playing one against the other in a series of shifting allegiances. Though firm in his egalitarian ideology, he allowed himself the compromises that pragmatism entails. His art is a demonstration of the tension that ensues when a man of vision and contemplation doubles with his antithesis, the pragmatic man of action in a challenging social situation.

Acutely conscious of his subject position as a petty bourgeois British comprador, he struggled to declass himself for the sake of his ideals and vision. In his literary ventures, too, he had to tactically appropriate in a calibanesque manner the aesthetic principles and modes of expression from the colonisers and the subcolonisers with whom he had an adversarial relationship ideologically.

He had to take recourse to the models already set in motion by the Bengalis in the literary ventures he undertook and in the institutions and establishments he helped to shape. For, the Bengalis had already developed the institutions of Press, the School, the newspaper and even a form of the modern novel. For a long time, even the language he used replicated the diction of Bengali language and that of Sanskrit. Moreover, a larger part of the so-called civil society was either Bengali babus or an Oriya elite group aping the cultural taste of the colonisers and sub colonisers. After trying his hands at translating scriptures and epics, writing essays, poems and short stories, Fakirmohan turned at a late age to writing novels, the popular genre of the then elite reading public. In a speech delivered at Alochana Sabha of Ravenshaw Collegiate School, Cuttack, in 1912 (Dash 2008, volume III FM), Fakirmohan demonstrates his awareness of the growing popularity of literary culture in general and the genre of novel in particular. He sees in serialised novel an instrument with which the journals and periodicals could be sustained and popularised. Since journal publication was crucial to the formation of civil society, the primary goal of Fakirmohan, the activist, the writing of serialised novels became almost mandatory. Six Acres and a Third was conceived as an answer to a social need and the needs of a specific mode of production. Fakirmohan was actively involved in the publication of the journal Utkala Sahitya, and, partly in order to sustain its publication, he serialised his first and oft-discussed and oft-translated novel, Six Acres and a
Third. Not only *Six Acres and a Third*, but even *Lachhama* was also serialised in this journal. Our intention here is to show how his four novels and especially *Six Acres and a Third* encode the ideology of Fakirmohan the visionary, even as they grew out of his aspirations as an activist deeply involved in his community’s struggle to safeguard its linguistic autonomy and identity.

The nationalist search for the identity of a community is often preceded by a construction of knowledge and consciousness of that identity. Towards the latter part of his career as an author, Fakirmohan was busy constructing this knowledge and consciousness especially in his short stories and novels. Such an effort inevitably led him to an engagement with the history of his land and community. Natabar Samantaray rightly observes that Fakirmohan’s four novels represent two hundred years of Orissan history (Samantaray 1972: 45) from pre-colonial times to various phases of colonial rule. He used the novel form to develop a discourse of history which, apart from recording the political, social and economic changes that obtained in the society, tried to register the impact of the change in the lives of the common man. Moreover, his novels were not mere representations of historical or contemporary reality; they were diagnostic insights into the causes of the advent of colonialism, its perpetuation and meditation upon the possible methods of overcoming the traumas of subjugation.

The four novels construct a discourse of history according to which colonialism is not a mere event, but an inevitable consequence of a process. The political and economic process was already active in Orissa for a long time facilitating its transition into a colonial state. While Fakirmohan, trying to locate the ultimate cause of such a process, transcends history and time to speculate on human nature and the workings of fate (something we will return to), his immediate interest concerned the fifty years of political instability before the advent of the British on the scene. His second novel *Lachchama*, mapped the decline of Oriya feudal society during the eighteenth century due to the conflict between Alibardi Khan, the Muslim ruler of Murshidabad and the Maratha chieftains. Siding with one or the other the Oriya feudal lords fought among each other and ultimately ruined themselves. The relative autonomy these feudal lords enjoyed was ultimately surrendered when Alibardi to protect the rest of his kingdom, ceded Orissa to the Marathas. These conflicts and the subsequent Maratha oppression brought a great deal of suffering to the common people, uprooting them from their traditional vocations and undermining their self-respect.

Fakirmohan’s first novel, *Six Acres and a Third*, records the political and economic situation immediately after the occupation of the coastal districts of Orissa by the British East India Company. It highlights the consequences of the greed of the British rulers and their attempt to impose an alien economic and land revenue system. On the one hand the British saved the com-
mon people from the violence and extortion of Maratha marauders, but, on the other, they ruined the traditional society in such a manner that the common people were disinherit ed from all their traditional occupations and professions. They were tied down to just one profession, i.e., agriculture. Soon, they were even disinherit ed from their lands by the Bengali sub-colonisers and were reduced to the status of farmhands. While the people in common were losing the moorings in their own land, a new privileged class was getting consolidated. This new feudal class consisted of the Bengali officers of the Company, the landlords from Bengal and the few manipulative Oriyas who used their access to British education and their proximity to power to rise economically and socially. This neo-feudals were aping their colonial masters and were much more oppressive towards the common people, at whose cost they had risen socially. Fakirmohan’s third novel, *Mamu*, dramatises this scenario of the latter half of the colonial rule. The last novel, *Prayaschita*, maps the breakdown of the traditional social fabric and cultural norms under the impact of the grafting of colonialism. It demonstrates the process of commodification of education, fragmentation of family and rigidification of caste divide due to various British administrative policies and alien cultural habits. We will try to analyse the process by looking at his most popular novel *Six Acres and a Third*.

To some extent, Fakirmohan’s analysis in his novels of the processes of history matches the historiography of the British historians, administrators and facts recorded in government minutes. But the importance of the novels is not so much due to the fidelity as to historical facts to the critique it provides of the colonial rule. Sudipta Kaviraj designates the Indian artistic and aesthetic reactions to colonialism as the expression of an “unhappy consciousness.” Citing the examples of the writers such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, he demonstrates how the consciousness of the sensitive artist in India was divided and at war with itself due to its double allegiance, the allegiance to the autonomy of a self formed by tradition and the modes of expression of that self conditioned by the colonial institutions of education, civil service, and literature, especially the genre of novel (1998:164). In this regard, Fakirmohan shared with writers like Bankim a sense of a double inheritance and allegiance, having personally been a recipient of British munificence and privilege and having encountered his ideals within an indigenous tradition. The distinctive achievement of Fakirmohan, however, was that, compared to Bankim, he was able to problematise a much more complex version of colonial mechanism and provide a much more nuanced critique of the same. The circumstances under which colonialism came to Orissa were peculiar. The British did not grab power from the hands of the indigenous rulers of Orissa. For a long time, the centre of power that ruled Orissa was outside Orissa, either at Nagpur or at Murshidabad, and in many circles the coming of the British was perceived as a deliverance from misrule. The insidiousness of the colonial structures of power and culture could
not be perceived by the common folk who had already been reeling under oppressive and exploitative systems of rule for quite some time. The apathetic reaction of a native in *Six Acres and a Third* sums up the mood of the people: “Oh, horse, what difference does it make to you if you are stolen by a thief? You do not get much to eat here; you will not get much to eat there. No matter who becomes the next master, we will remain his slaves. We must look after our own interests” (205-206). The greatness of Fakirmohan as an artist is that, unlike many other contemporary Indian authors, he could identify the insidiousness of the workings of the colonial regime and provide a critique that superseded the simple binary of coloniser and colonised.

The dehumanizing effect of colonialism can be seen in the figures of Ramachandra Mangaraj, the protagonist of *Six Acres and a Third*. Mangaraj’s rise and fall can only be visualised in a colonial set up. By leveling traditional hierarchies and discrediting social norms, colonialism had spawned unnatural ambitions and easy means of fulfilling them. In the absence of the social safety valves that are available in a traditional society, Mangaraj spends his childhood in a state of uncertainty and deprivation. In the absence of traditional social and moral reprimands he uninhibitedly pursues his design of upward mobility through unworthy means.

In a real-life world where moral and ethical interdictions had been replaced by legal checks and balances, the unscrupulous could amass wealth and power by hoodwinking the arbiters of law who were ill-equipped to understand the ruled. Writing about the condition prevailing in British courts, G. Toynbee remarks:

*Bribery, corruption, peculation and forgery, were rife in all the courts and public offices notably,—in the Judge’s. The Collector in 1816 stated that it was a regular and well-known practice for zamindars to bribe the amala to get petitions, settlement papers and other documents passed through the office with the orders wished for duly recorded on them. In the same way forged sanadas and other deeds were passed into the office and brought before the collector as genuine. (2005:95)*

In Fakirmohan’s novel, Mangaraj manipulates the loopholes in the colonial legal system quite easily and establishes himself within a new feudal order where wealth and proximity to the rulers were the only qualification for prominence. Mangaraj pays for his unnatural ambition and upward mobility through his dehumanisation and alienation from the community. The signs of his dehumanisation can be seen in the ruination of his family and the way he has turned his house into a virtual brothel: “Like birds of different feathers seeking shelter in a large tree, [women] had flocked to Mangaraj’s house. They kept arriving and leaving; it was impossible to keep track of their movements” (54).

Alienated from his pious wife and from his derelict children, Managaraj’s life is centred around cash and property. It is symptomatic that even though
Fakirmohan begins the novel as Mangaraja Carita (*Six Acres* 37) in the manner of Caritas belonging to the tradition of epics and puranas, he entitles the work *Six Acres and a Third*. It is as if the monomania for property has turned a human being into a thing, his search for commodities leading to his own commoditisation. In a colonised world exercise of power tends to be justified with the assumption that savagery is being tamed by the so-called civilizing forces; but the very act of subjugation reduces all parties into a state of savagery. Mangaraj’s downfall at the end of the novel is a grim reminder of the possible consequences not only of the instruments of colonisation, of which Mangaraj obviously was one, but of the entire project of colonisation.

Mangaraj’s monomania for property not only transforms him into a commodity, it also dehumanises the entire world around him. Fakirmohan seems to demonstrate that not only greed and the pursuit of wealth, but acute deprivation, too, could cause dehumanisation. The colonial economic instrument is in this sense doubly corrosive: while allowing a few to arrogate power unto them and to enrich themselves disproportionately, it plunges the majority into a state of penury and disempowerment. Extreme poverty and disempowerment, Fakirmohan rightly visualised, could be a source of moral degeneration and dehumanisation. In an essay on the past and future of Oriya language and in several speeches Fakirmohan has reiterated that decadence of all kinds comes with economic instability (Dash, *Fakirmohan Complete Works III*). In this sense, he was extremely radical, because traditional Hindu thought associated moral superiority with poverty and disempowerment.

In Saria and Bhagia, the weaver couple in *Six Acres and a Third*, we see an example of such dehumanisation brought about by extreme poverty. First of all, they are uprooted from their traditional profession as weavers because of colonial economic policies. Subsequently, they are disinheritated from their land and their cow, Neta, by Mangaraj. Saria dies of starvation and Bhagia turns mad and has to be confined in jail. It is not only the lives of this couple that are affected, *Six Acres and a Third* as a whole is a picture of chaos all around where Brahmin widows like Marua resort to prostitution, unscrupulous women like Champa rise to positions of power, and where Gobara Jena, the lumpen associate of Mangaraj, is beaten to death. *Six Acres and a Third* delineates a vast landscape of waste and death where both the oppressor and the oppressed succumb in their own contradictions. Even the moral voice of

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2 Fakirmohan’s play on the genre of Carita reveals his awareness of the evolution of this kind of literature in Indian tradition. In the heterodox Jaina tradition Carita is one of the ‘Katha’ or narrative forms which is close to biography of a historical person as opposed to the purely imaginative account of a character. In the subsequent Vaishnava tradition after 16th century this form assumed the nomenclature of ‘Caritamrita’ which was a hagiographic account of a historical person. It was meant to elevate the character to a mythical and puranic status. Fakirmohan uses the term in a subversive manner thereby simultaneously establishing Mangaraj as a real character in history and undermine his historicity.
Santani is stifled into death. The contradictions spawned by the colonial world are so irresolvable that ultimately, they leave no survivors.

Fakirmohan’s representation of colonial reality and its critique is rooted in his engagement with a sense of history and a peculiar notion of time. Traditional Indian thought held a cyclic view of time in which history is a terrestrial reworking of a metaphysical Fate. Of course fate is mentioned quite often in Fakirmohan’s works (including *Six Acres*), but unlike traditional Indian notions of fate, it does not transcend the social reality and the historical process. Fakirmohan’s notions of history as a process and time as progression could have been imbibed from the Western episteme. It is fruitful to remember here that Fakirmohan started his career as a literatteur with the translation of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar’s Bengali text *Jivan Carita* and a history text book for schools entitled *Bharatbarshar Itihas* Vol. I & II. The *Jivan Carita*, in fact, was a collection of short biographical sketches of a few major western scientists. The translation and the text book are indicators of the fact that although Fakirmohan ideologically was a staunch opponent of colonialism and its knowledge systems he admired the radical possibilities he saw in Western Science and in Renaissance humanism. In many of his writings he celebrates modern modes of communication and the general mobility of individuals and civilisations. His peculiar notion of time, too, could have been the result of his attempt to synthesise Indian notions of fate with Western notions of time as a linear progression. On the one hand, Fakirmohan sees the progression of time as irreversible, and on the other, time is seen as the unfolding of a divine will. The contradiction tempers his world view so that he sees colonialism both as fate accompli and as part of a process which can be shaped by conscious social action.

In the beginning of this paper we argued that the narrative persona of *Six Acres* does not identify with any of the social and political groups represented in the “Asuradighi” chapter. This non-identification, we argue, is the stance of a radical sceptic in the manner of a Shankara or Nagarjuna3 who keep examining all the phenomenal facts and rejecting them through a process of ‘neti’, ‘neti’, not this, not this, until they attain the Brahman, the non-dual eternal reality beyond speech and thought. We further argue that the radical skepticism demonstrated in *Six Acres* in general and the “Asuradighi” chapter in particular is the result of a mindset informed by the long tradition of Indian metaphysics and tradition of Bhakti. It is fruitful to remember here that throughout his literary career Fakirmohan was an avid reader of Indian

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3 Nagarjuna (2nd Century A.D) and Shankara (788-820 A.D) belonged to two opposing philosophical systems of India, the former to heterodox and the latter to orthodox tradition. Nagarjuna was a leading philosopher of the Mahayana Buddhism while Shankara was the champion of Advaita Vedanta. However, their thinking converged in the issue of negative dialectic—a method of philosophizing which pursues truth by systematically rejecting the appearances in the phenomenal world which to them is either Sunya (void) or Maya (illusion).
philosophy, Puranas and literature and that he translated the epics like *The Ramayana, The Mahabharata* and he theological texts like the *Gita* and the *Upanisadas*. Although his subjectivity was formed within a colonial reality and he admired some of the universally applicable values emanating from the west, he had a deep veneration for the indigenous knowledge and value systems. He realised that since the western values were mediated through colonial hegemony, they could not be synthesised with the indigenous values of the colonised subjects. Further, he was pragmatic enough to visualise that it was necessary to make tactical adjustments to the changed world order fashioned by the forces of history. The tragedy in *Six Acres* is the tragedy of a failure to make this tactical adjustment. Some characters like Santani succumb to their tragedy by an uncritical clinging to the values of the past, others (like Bhagia and Saria) are unable to face up to the challenges at hand, and yet others (like Mangaraj and Champa) jump enthusiastically onto the bandwagon of change.

Like most of the visionary writers of his times Fakirmohan had a definite vision of an ideal society, but unlike them, he never sought the easy recourse of nostalgia à la Bankim, though his ideals were rooted deep in the Indian knowledge systems. We do not encounter the ideal in *Six Acres* because, at that stage, Fakirmohan himself had probably not overcome the contradictions his subject position in a colonial world had generated. Santani, his ideal character in *Six Acres*, is at best silent, amidst the ruins of moral values. However, in subsequent novels, essays and poems, Fakirmohan is more vocal about his vision of an ideal society. Fakirmohan’s moral order and the creative resolution he arrives at in these writings is extremely conservative, but, like the conservativeness of Gandhi, it is a kind of tactical conservatism that adopts what is usable from the tradition of the modern progressive thought. His was an eclectic world view deeply rooted in the indigenous tradition.

After publishing *Six Acres* and much before Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*, Fakirmohan spelt out the modalities of a new world order in his essays, poems and the novels. Issues like women’s employment, empowerment and education, the necessity to develop cottage industry as a bulwark of economic regeneration, the end of discrimination along caste lines and the trusteeship for smooth economic management that Gandhi later adopted in his political agenda were all addressed by Fakirmohan in his numerous speeches, in poems such as ‘Dhoba’ (‘Washerman’), ‘Bada Sana’ (‘The Powerful and the Disempowered’), essays like ‘Arata’ (‘Spinning Wheel’), and in novels like *Prayaschita*.

Thus Fakirmohan’s conservatism was not in conflict with what was beneficial in modernity. It was somewhat like the conservatism of Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, a leading contemporary Bengali intellectual who believed that “India should learn from Europe nothing but her ‘practical skills’ and absorb these into her inherited culture in a gradual, organic fashion” (Raychaudhuri
Fakirmohan echoed this kind of tactical conservatism which had a strong radical edge. Both believed that true modernity cannot be mediated under a hegemonic dispensation. However, since Bhudev operated throughout his life within an elite circle he did not have the scope to experience the oppressiveness of colonial structures from the position of a disempowered subject. Fakirmohan had experienced the colonial hegemony from various subject positions due to the peculiarity of his circumstances as narrated earlier. Therefore, he was in a position to provide a plan of action through which his vision could be actualised. The novel was a part of that plan of action, for through the novel he tried to create “active readers” (Sawyer) who could be instruments in the act of ungrafting colonialism and establishing the “Swarajya” or autonomy of consciousness. Fakirmohan sincerely believed that reading the novel was one of the means of reading colonialism and the active reader can make the transition from the text to the world through the act of interpretation, the kind of which we had a glimpse in the Six Acres and a Third mentioned in the beginning of the essay.

Works Cited
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