



## Peasantry and Ecology in Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Six Acres and a Third*

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**Abstract**— *Fakir Mohan Senapati's novel "Six Acres and a Third" intricately weaves together themes of peasantry and ecology, offering a profound exploration of the complex relationship between rural livelihoods and environmental sustainability. Set in colonial India, the novel delves into the plight of peasant communities grappling with land dispossession, exploitation, and environmental degradation. Through vivid character portrayals and compelling narratives, Senapati sheds light on the multifaceted challenges faced by peasants as they navigate the ecological complexities of agrarian life. Central to the novel is the concept of "Six Acres and a Third," symbolizing the meagre landholding of the protagonist, Ramachandra, and by extension, the broader struggles of rural peasants. Senapati skilfully intertwines themes of land rights, agrarian reform, and ecological stewardship, emphasizing the inseparable link between peasant empowerment and environmental justice. The novel underscores the invaluable role of peasants as custodians of the land, drawing attention to their traditional knowledge and sustainable farming practices. Through its depiction of peasant resistance and resilience, "Six Acres and a Third" challenges dominant narratives of progress and development, highlighting the destructive consequences of exploitative land policies and industrialization. Senapati's narrative serves as a poignant critique of colonialism and capitalist expansion, while also offering insights into the enduring struggles for land rights and environmental sustainability in contemporary contexts.*



**Keywords**— *Colonialism, Ecology, intricately weaves, Peasantry, Stewardship.*

Fakir Mohan Senapati's "Six Acres and a Third" stands as a seminal work in Indian literature, exploring the intricate relationship between peasantry and ecology in colonial Odisha. Through vivid storytelling and keen observation, Senapati delves into the lives of peasants, their struggles, aspirations, and the ecological backdrop against which their lives unfold. In this article, we'll delve into the multifaceted interplay between peasantry and ecology as portrayed in Senapati's work, examining how the socio-economic dynamics of the time influenced ecological realities and vice versa. To understand the dynamics of peasantry and ecology in "Six Acres and a Third," it's

crucial to contextualize the narrative within the broader historical framework of colonialism. British colonial policies profoundly impacted agrarian societies, transforming traditional land tenure systems and disrupting ecological balances. Senapati's narrative unfolds against this backdrop of colonial exploitation and peasant resistance, where the struggle for landownership intertwines with ecological concerns. British colonialism in India was characterized by exploitative economic policies aimed at maximizing profits for the colonial administration and British capitalists. The British East India Company's conquest of Indian territories led to the imposition of new

land tenure systems that favoured colonial interests at the expense of indigenous landholders. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 in Bengal Presidency and subsequent land revenue policies introduced by the colonial government led to widespread land alienation and impoverishment of peasants. The imposition of colonial land policies disrupted traditional agrarian systems that had been in place for centuries. In "Six Acres and a Third," Senapati vividly portrays the upheaval caused by colonial interventions, as traditional landowners lose their ancestral lands due to exorbitant taxes and arbitrary regulations. The Zamindari system, introduced by the British, further entrenched social inequalities and exploitative landlord-tenant relations, exacerbating agrarian distress and peasant indebtedness.

The oppressive nature of colonial land policies sparked numerous peasant uprisings and rebellions across India, including in Odisha. "Six Acres and a Third" captures the spirit of peasant resistance against colonial oppression, as depicted through the protagonist Gour Harihara and his fellow villagers. Senapati portrays peasants' collective action as a response to unjust land acquisitions, exploitative taxation, and arbitrary eviction by colonial officials and local landlords. The Kondh uprising in the novel symbolizes the broader struggle for land rights and social justice in colonial Odisha. Colonialism marginalized peasants economically and socially, pushing them into cycles of poverty and exploitation. Senapati vividly portrays the socio-economic hardships faced by peasants in "Six Acres and a Third," as they struggle to make ends meet under oppressive colonial regimes. The loss of landownership and traditional livelihoods leads to widespread destitution and social dislocation within agrarian communities, fuelling resentment and resistance against colonial authorities.

The ecological ramifications of colonialism are intricately woven into the narrative of "Six Acres and a Third." Colonial land policies and commercial agriculture practices led to environmental degradation, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity in Odisha. Senapati highlights the intimate relationship between peasants and their natural environment, portraying how colonial exploitation disrupted ecological balances and threatened peasant livelihoods dependent on agriculture, fishing, and forest resources. In Fakir Mohan Senapati's "Six Acres and a Third," the land occupies a central position both literally and symbolically. Beyond being a mere backdrop for the narrative, the land embodies deep ecological imprints that resonate throughout the novel. Senapati masterfully weaves the ecological fabric into the story, using the land as a canvas to explore themes of ownership, identity, sustenance, and ecological interconnectedness. In this essay, we delve into the symbolism of land in "Six Acres

and a Third" and its ecological implications. The titular "Six Acres and a Third" serves as a potent symbol of identity and ownership for the protagonist, Gour Harihara, and his fellow villagers. The land represents not just a parcel of earth but a tangible manifestation of their ancestral heritage and cultural identity. Senapati portrays the peasants' deep emotional attachment to the land, depicting it as a source of pride, security, and belonging in a world marked by uncertainty and exploitation. Through vivid descriptions and evocative imagery, Senapati paints a rich tapestry of peasant life intimately intertwined with the land. From the rhythmic cycles of sowing and harvesting to the seasonal rhythms of nature, the peasants' existence is intricately bound with the ecological rhythms of their surroundings. The land sustains not only their physical needs but also their spiritual and cultural well-being, fostering a sense of ecological embeddedness that transcends mere economic value.

Senapati's narrative is replete with descriptions of the ecological bounty bestowed upon the peasants by the land. The fertile soil yields abundant crops, sustains lush vegetation, and provides nourishment for humans and animals alike. Agricultural rituals, such as the worship of the earth goddess and the observance of seasonal festivals, underscore the peasants' reverence for the land and their recognition of its vital role in their sustenance and survival. Despite its fecundity, the land in "Six Acres and a Third" is also a site of struggle and resistance against colonial oppression and social injustices. The peasants' quest for landownership symbolizes their defiance against exploitative land systems and their determination to reclaim their rights over the land. Senapati portrays the land as a battleground where peasants wage a relentless struggle for autonomy, dignity, and social justice, challenging the hegemony of colonial authorities and oppressive landlords.

However, the land in "Six Acres and a Third" is not immune to the ravages of colonial exploitation and environmental degradation. Senapati vividly depicts the ecological consequences of deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution caused by unsustainable agricultural practices and commercial exploitation. The degradation of the land mirrors the decline of peasant livelihoods and the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge, underscoring the interconnectedness between human societies and the natural environment.

Senapati vividly portrays the agrarian life in colonial Odisha, depicting the peasants' farming practices and their symbiotic relationship with nature. Through vivid descriptions of agricultural rituals, seasonal cycles, and ecological rhythms, Senapati highlights the peasants' deep-rooted ecological knowledge and their reliance on natural

resources for survival. However, colonial policies and exploitative land systems disrupt these ecological balances, leading to ecological degradation and agrarian distress. Senapati vividly captures the seasonal rhythms that govern agricultural labour in "Six Acres and a Third." From the onset of the monsoon to the harvesting of crops, the peasants' lives are intricately intertwined with the cyclical changes of nature. Through evocative descriptions, Senapati portrays the peasants' arduous labour in ploughing fields, sowing seeds, and tending to crops with reverence and diligence. These seasonal activities reflect the peasants' deep ecological knowledge and their adaptation to local climatic conditions.

Central to Senapati's narrative is the depiction of traditional farming techniques rooted in ecological wisdom. The peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" rely on age-old practices such as mixed cropping, crop rotation, and organic fertilization to maintain soil fertility and enhance crop yields. Senapati highlights the peasants' respect for the land and their recognition of the importance of biodiversity in sustaining agricultural productivity. These sustainable farming practices embody an ethos of ecological stewardship that contrasts with the extractive agriculture promoted by colonial authorities. In "Six Acres and a Third," Senapati portrays the symbiotic relationships between peasants, their livestock, and the surrounding wildlife. Cattle are valued not only for their labour but also for their role in enriching the soil through manure. Peasants coexist harmoniously with wildlife, recognizing the ecological services provided by birds, insects, and other fauna in controlling pests and pollinating crops. Senapati's portrayal highlights the interconnectedness of human communities with the broader ecosystem and the importance of biodiversity in sustaining agricultural resilience.

Agricultural rituals and ceremonies play a significant role in "Six Acres and a Third," serving as expressions of gratitude and reverence for nature's bounty. Senapati depicts festivals such as Nuakhai, the rice-harvesting festival, as occasions for communal celebration and spiritual renewal. These rituals symbolize the peasants' deep-seated connection with the land and their acknowledgment of the cyclical rhythms of nature. Through these ceremonies, Senapati underscores the importance of cultural practices in fostering ecological consciousness and social cohesion within agrarian communities. Despite the peasants' adherence to sustainable farming practices, their way of life in "Six Acres and a Third" is threatened by ecological disruptions and environmental challenges. Colonial interventions, such as deforestation, land alienation, and water pollution, disrupt the delicate ecological balance upon which peasant livelihoods depend.

Senapati portrays the peasants' struggles against these environmental injustices as they confront the forces of modernization and capitalist exploitation that prioritize profit over ecological sustainability.

In "Six Acres and a Third," Fakir Mohan Senapati intricately intertwines themes of peasant resistance and ecological consciousness, portraying a nuanced narrative of struggle against colonial oppression and environmental degradation. Senapati's depiction of peasant resistance goes beyond mere acts of rebellion; it encompasses a deep-rooted ecological consciousness that underscores the peasants' intimate connection with their natural surroundings. In this essay, we delve into the portrayal of peasant resistance and ecological consciousness in "Six Acres and a Third," examining how these themes shape the narrative and illuminate broader socio-environmental dynamics. At the heart of "Six Acres and a Third" lies the peasants' defiance against colonial exploitation and social injustices. Senapati portrays peasants' resistance as a response to arbitrary land acquisitions, oppressive taxation, and exploitative landlord-tenant relations imposed by colonial authorities. The protagonist, Gour Harihara, emerges as a symbol of peasant resistance, challenging the hegemony of colonial powers and asserting his rights to land and livelihood. Through acts of defiance and solidarity, the peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" assert their agency and demand justice in the face of systemic oppression.

Central to peasant resistance in "Six Acres and a Third" is the reclamation of land as a symbol of identity and autonomy. The peasants' quest for landownership represents not only a struggle for economic survival but also a reclaiming of their cultural heritage and ancestral rights. Senapati portrays the peasants' attachment to the land as deeply intertwined with their sense of self-worth and dignity, fuelling their determination to resist colonial encroachments and assert their place in society. Through their collective action, the peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" challenge the erasure of their identity and assert their right to self-determination. In parallel with their resistance against colonial oppression, the peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" exhibit a profound ecological consciousness rooted in traditional knowledge and sustainable practices. Senapati portrays peasants' reverence for the land and their recognition of the ecological interdependencies that sustain their livelihoods. Traditional farming techniques such as mixed cropping, crop rotation, and organic fertilization reflect the peasants' respect for the land and their commitment to preserving its fertility for future generations. Through their stewardship of the land, the peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" embody an ethos of ecological sustainability that stands in stark contrast to the extractive practices promoted by colonial authorities.

Peasant resistance in "Six Acres and a Third" is characterized by solidarity and collective action, as villagers unite to confront common challenges and assert their rights. Senapati portrays the strength of community ties and mutual support networks that sustain peasants in their struggle against colonial oppression. Through collective mobilization and grassroots organizing, the peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" amplify their voices and challenge entrenched power structures, paving the way for social change and environmental justice.

Gendered ecologies constitute a significant aspect of Senapati's narrative, with women playing pivotal roles in agricultural labour and environmental stewardship. Senapati highlights women's intimate knowledge of local ecosystems and their contributions to agricultural production. However, gendered divisions of labour and patriarchal norms often marginalize women's voices in ecological decision-making, exacerbating environmental degradation and social inequalities. Senapati vividly portrays women's integral role in agricultural labour within the peasant households of "Six Acres and a Third." Despite societal norms that dictate gendered divisions of labour, women actively participate in farming activities such as sowing seeds, transplanting seedlings, weeding, and harvesting crops. Through their tireless labour, women contribute significantly to the productivity and sustenance of peasant agriculture, often shouldering the burden of ensuring food security for their families. (4782).

In addition to their contributions to agricultural labour, women in "Six Acres and a Third" possess invaluable ecological knowledge and skills essential for resource management and environmental stewardship. Senapati highlights women's intimate understanding of local ecosystems, including plant diversity, soil fertility, and water management techniques. Women play a central role in preserving indigenous agricultural practices, passing down traditional knowledge from one generation to the next, and ensuring the sustainability of agricultural production. Senapati portrays women as guardians of biodiversity, responsible for the conservation and propagation of plant varieties essential for household food security and community resilience. Women actively engage in seed selection, saving, and exchange practices, preserving heirloom seeds adapted to local agro-climatic conditions. Through their role in seed saving and crop diversification, women in "Six Acres and a Third" contribute to the maintenance of agricultural biodiversity, safeguarding against crop failures and environmental degradation. (Mohapatra62).

Beyond their immediate contributions to agricultural production, women in "Six Acres and a Third"

embody principles of environmental stewardship and community well-being. Senapati portrays women as caretakers of the natural environment, instilling values of respect and reverence for the land in future generations. Women actively participate in community-based conservation efforts, including the protection of water sources, forests, and grazing lands essential for sustaining peasant livelihoods and ecological resilience.

However, Senapati also highlights the gendered inequalities that shape women's experiences within peasant communities in colonial Odisha. Women often face constraints in accessing resources, decision-making processes, and opportunities for education and economic empowerment. Patriarchal norms and social hierarchies marginalize women's voices in ecological decision-making, perpetuating cycles of environmental degradation and social injustice. Nevertheless, Senapati's narrative also portrays moments of women's agency and resistance, as they challenge traditional gender roles and assert their rights to land, education, and participation in community affairs.

In "Six Acres and a Third," Fakir Mohan Senapati paints a vivid portrait of rural life in colonial Odisha, highlighting the ecological resilience and community cohesion that sustain peasant communities amidst socio-economic hardships and environmental challenges. Senapati's narrative celebrates the resilience of peasants in the face of adversity, underscoring the importance of collective action and solidarity in navigating ecological uncertainties. In this essay, we delve into the themes of ecological resilience and community cohesion as depicted in "Six Acres and a Third," examining how peasants adapt to environmental changes and forge bonds of solidarity to withstand socio-economic pressures. Senapati portrays peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" as adept at adapting to ecological changes and implementing sustainable practices to enhance agricultural resilience. Despite facing environmental uncertainties such as erratic rainfall and soil degradation, peasants employ traditional farming techniques such as mixed cropping, crop rotation, and organic fertilization to mitigate risks and maintain soil fertility. Through their innovative approaches to resource management, peasants demonstrate resilience rooted in ecological knowledge and community-based adaptation strategies. (80)

Central to the narrative of "Six Acres and a Third" is the theme of community cohesion and mutual support among peasants facing common challenges. Senapati portrays peasants as bound together by shared experiences of exploitation and oppression, fostering bonds of solidarity that transcend individual interests. In times of crisis, such as crop failures or land disputes, villagers come together to



provide assistance, share resources, and offer emotional support to those in need. These mutual support networks serve as a source of strength and resilience, enabling peasants to withstand external pressures and maintain social cohesion.

Cultural resilience is also a prominent theme in "Six Acres and a Third," as peasants draw strength from traditional rituals, ceremonies, and belief systems that reinforce social cohesion and identity. Festivals such as Nuakhai, the rice-harvesting festival, serve as occasions for communal celebration and spiritual renewal, reaffirming the peasants' connection to the land and their cultural heritage. Through their participation in cultural practices, peasants in "Six Acres and a Third" reaffirm their resilience in the face of external pressures and assert their agency in shaping their own destiny. "Six Acres and a Third" by Fakir Mohan Senapati offers valuable insights into the themes of ecological resilience and community cohesion within rural peasant societies. Senapati's narrative underscores the importance of adaptive strategies, mutual support networks, and collective action in building resilient communities capable of confronting environmental challenges and social injustices. As we reflect on Senapati's depiction of ecological resilience and community cohesion, we are reminded of the enduring relevance of these themes in fostering sustainable development and promoting social equity in contemporary times.

### CONCLUSION

The pursuit of ecological justice and peasant empowerment in "Six Acres and a Third" is both urgent and essential. Through the lens of environmental sustainability and social equity, it becomes evident that the empowerment of peasants and the promotion of ecological justice are deeply interconnected objectives. Firstly, addressing ecological justice entails recognizing and rectifying the historical and on-going environmental injustices perpetrated against peasant communities. These injustices include land dispossession, resource extraction, pollution, and climate change impacts, which disproportionately affect peasants and indigenous peoples worldwide. By acknowledging these injustices, we can begin to dismantle systems of oppression and work towards a more equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. Secondly, peasant empowerment is crucial for achieving ecological justice. Peasants, who often have deep knowledge of and connection to their land, play a vital role in sustainable land stewardship and biodiversity conservation. Empowering peasants involves ensuring their rights to land, water, seeds, and traditional knowledge, as well as supporting their efforts to practice agro ecology and

other sustainable farming methods. Additionally, empowering peasant communities to participate in decision-making processes regarding land use and natural resource management is essential for fostering environmental democracy and resilience. In "Six Acres and a Third," the author underscores the interconnectedness of land, livelihoods, and ecological sustainability. Through the narrative of peasant struggles for land rights and environmental justice, the book highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting the agency and expertise of peasant communities in shaping sustainable futures. By centering peasant voices and experiences, we can work towards a more just and ecologically sustainable society for all.

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