

Religious Influence on Indian Literature

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Abstract:

India and religion are connected with each other. Indian literature is also influenced by religion. Literature in Indian context, beginning from the times immemorial would never have been possible without the profound impression of religious and spiritual aspects. 'Vedas' are the most ancient Indian literature. The Puranas and two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata hold considerable significance even today. Religious influence upon Indian literature made a transition from oral to written. Hindu mythology portrays the deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. This mythology has influenced Indian literary texts, from Sanskrit literature to modern literature in Indian English. This influence continues even till the present day.

The great Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* transcend the description of mere classics. They are a source of unending and everlasting inspiration. We have learnt the whole way of our life – our manners, our morality and our ethics from these epics. They have guided and sustained us over times immemorial, through our triumphs and failures, hopes and despairs and have shown us the right way of life. Both these epics have always fascinated Indian novelists.

Key-Words: India, religion, connect, influenced, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Sanskrit, literature, inspiration

Introduction:

The Ramayana is the celebration of human relationships whereas Mahabharata presents life in its stark and naked realities full of faults and follies, tricks and strategies, temptations and conspiracies, selfishness and sacrifice. Both the epics are relevant to all ages and times. S. Radhakrishnan feels that the spirit of these two great epics has furnished the Indian spirit with love for supreme self. According to Sri Aurobindo, these Indian epics include heaps of moral, religious and ethical content:

They represent Indian way of life and a view of family system and society. These epics represent an overview of ancient Indian culture and traditions which are still being carried by Indians. They give us mental strength and poise in difficult times. Religion has always been the life force of Indians.

Religion and the attitude to religion has been a strong strand in fiction, for religion intrudes into every sphere of life: learning, worship, rituals, birth, marriage and death, as well as the workplace, the social system, and the caste attitudes. It is also reflected in the philosophical beliefs and thus encompasses the personal, the interpersonal and the socio-political sphere. Religion and faith have often been written about in other cultures, but in Indian writing it has acquired a political connotation and is much more than a relationship between the individual and his God.

The historical consciousness is also a religious one in the Indian novel. The early novel in the late nineteenth century in its exploration of history and in its search for a national identity placed it within a religious context. Religion is very much present in many fictional works. Literature written in India during last two centuries depicts the convolution of the cultural exchange between England and India.

The earliest Indian Literature in English was in the form of essays, memoirs and treatises, e.g., those of Rammohan Roy. It was in fact mainly a liberal humanist criticism of Indian society, of Indian religions itself and of imperialism also. Rammohan Roy's objective was to demonstrate to Europe a religion in its pure form that was a viable, admirable and highly ethical culture, strongly theistic and moralistic. Roy can therefore be considered as an unconscious ally of the imperialists and also as the first nationalist and liberal reformer. He was essentially a humanist and a syncretistic and in this respect as much as religious as Kabir, Gandhi and Nehru. Sri Aurobindo was a patriot and an excellent Indian figure writing in English.

Rabindranath Tagore is an internationally recognized poet and his short stories, memoirs, dance dramas and essays all are of great literary value. Speaking of his prose poems he says: "There is a weight and restraint in the language of poetry. That is what is called meter. Prose is not squeamish. It goes about everywhere with its head erect. *The Gitanjali* is full of rare charm. The one hundred odd songs in it form a mighty piece of prayer and pleading exultation. Tagore is one of the greatest

lyric poets of the world. His message is spiritual. According to Varghese the main features of his poetry are, “its humanistic essence combine with spirituality, a love of nature and man, and the expression of the beauty and splendor of the earth. The poet’s spiritual message does not, however, enjoin us to run away from the ‘fret and fever of life’ and seek shelter in a hermitage, but insists on our full participation in the joys and sorrows of life.”³⁰ (2004:13) Tagore had the knowledge of Indian customs and traditions and this knowledge is the driving force of his poems and short stories.

Aurobindo Ghosh, a versatile genius and an intellectual giant, his outstanding achievement in prose, poetry and drama rank him as the great figure of Indo-Anglian literature. In his long stretching career from 1890-1950 he has written lyrics, narrative poems, a comic epic and a large body of philosophic poems. Sri Aurobindo’s epic *Savitri* transcends the Dantean model of the universe which is based on theology. He constructs a universe based on a spiritual and mystical foundation. He is a poet to whom vision and revelation counted much. In *Savitri*, the three domination figures are Savitri, Yama and Satyavan representing Love, Death and Truth. Savitri represents grace; the Lord of Deaths stands for pain, death and fate, and Satyavan is the representative of the suffering humanity entangled in death and incapacity. Savitri also restores the life of Satyavan from the grip of the Lord of Death. In *Savitri* we come across three lady characters having symbolic functions. The Divine Mother herself is a character, who is the source of Mercy. The Queen, mother of Savitri, is an ordinary human being who has nothing to do with the grace, except that she is the human channel through which the divine Grace is upon the earth.

The first generation Indian writers represented the culture and history of India, which is a land of diversity. Such is the impact of religion on Indian literature that today there exists a different genre for Indian spiritual literature from Vedic period. The religious books have provided material for centuries to the writers of India. The elements of narrative structure relate us to the big questions in life that religions have asked and attempted to answer.

Objectives:

The objective this present paper is to attract the attention of the readers towards the **Religious Influence on Indian Literature**. The research scholar also tells that the theme of great Indian epics has gripped the creative imagination of Indian English writers, who have used it to articulate the experiences of life in the backdrop of these epics.

Religious Beliefs:

Indian writers have realized that the story based on religious beliefs contains universal truths. They have made contemporary realities more comprehensible to Indian readers by using the archetypes, images and myths of religious books. The present Indian era deserves a special mention as regards epical influence. English writers like Narayan, Raja Rao, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Kamala Das, Arundhati Roy and many others have loved to quote their affinity for ancient epics and their everlasting and charismatic concepts. The earliest Indian literature took the form of the canonical Hindu sacred writings, known as the Veda, which were written in Sanskrit. To the Veda were added prose commentaries such as the Brahmanas and the Upanishads. The production of Sanskrit literature extended from about 1500 BC to about 1000 AD and reached its height of development in the 1st to 7th centuries. In addition to sacred and philosophical writings, such genres as erotic and devotional lyrics, court poetry, plays, and narrative folktales emerged.

Because Sanskrit was identified with the Brahminical religion of the Vedas, Buddhism and Jainism adopted other literary languages (Pali and Ardhamagadhi, respectively). From these and other related languages emerged the modern languages of northern India. The literature of those languages depended largely on the ancient Indian background, which includes two Sanskrit epic poems, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, as well as the Bhagavata-purana and the other Puranas. In addition, the Sanskrit philosophies were the source of philosophical writing in the later literatures, and the Sanskrit schools of rhetoric were of great importance for the development of court poetry in many of the modern literatures. The South Indian language of Tamil is an exception to this pattern of Sanskrit influence because it had a classical tradition of its own. Urdu and Sindhi are other exceptions.

Beginning in the 19th century, particularly during the height of British control over the subcontinent, Western literary models had an impact on Indian literature, the most striking result being the introduction of the use of vernacular prose on a major scale. Such forms as the novel and short story began to be adopted by Indian writers, as did realism and an interest in social questions and psychological description. A tradition of literature in English was also established in the subcontinent.

Relationship between Region and Literature:

The relationship could not be analogue within a period of time; no theories can exactly prove when these two were born or its birth in different era, but it's proved Religion is the relation in which human being bears to ultimate being and literature is the relation in which humanity bears with religion. All the ancient languages of the world like Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Sanskrit used as a tool to represent the religions like Christianity, Islamism and Hinduism. In the early writings from author is those languages is mostly about religions it doesn't meant the author have nothing to write apart from religion, they somewhat believed the art of rhetoric can be expressed to the pinnacle when they communicate about divine source. Many theories can put up to prove they are formed by the same force, since they both make a constant appeal to life, whenever the mind of humanity is in need of endorsement and in the state of depression only two limits could provide the source of remedy, first its Religion and the second is Literature in both the cases the receiver must need a tremendous maturity to understand it's working. Through these two the emotions are expressed in its unique way of presentation.

Religion and Literature in India:

In various sections of literature like Drama, Fiction, Poetry, Novels, Short Stories, Criticism like more and variety to offer, literature has prominent in its own style in India known as Indian Literature, whereas the writing comprises in all the above mentioned variations, the embodiment of Indian Literature is framed through the source and the body of Religions in India initially, later it was developed by accessing the religions outside the country. Writings like Puranas, Jatkas, Panchatantra, fairy tales and stories of Gods and Ghost made

The Indian literature popular among the readers, since it delivers and understands the mindset of the countrymen. Even Non-Literary works like writings on Administration, Law, Health, Astronomy, Grammar, and the writings that describes the heritage and the life style of country has become popular among the readers, it is obvious when readers get attracted towards a style of book, the prefer themselves into a perspective of unique style in their personal life, since all the writing in the above mentioned types, somewhat prescribe and proclaim the religions of India, the authors and the readers prefer themselves to apply and adapt to expected format both in writing as well as in reading. The Indian modern literature began in nineteenth century, even by that time writers continued their support to religion by giving array of works to the readers, Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitanjali' is been the inspiration for writers

and readers to tend and tilt towards religious writings, from there on authors from different parts of India preferred to write on religions.

Summing Up:

Both Religion and Literature is a wonderful creation it doesn't matter it is from above or below, but still it enhances and emulates the humanity to have enough intelligence and intellectual to run their daily life which is normally in full of struggle and discomfort, it takes extraordinary skills for every human in order to show themselves to be different from other creatures, hence everyone is in common demand to figure out a way to overcome their burdens, so far with no reprimand both religion and literature provides a constant remedial measure to the entire humanity. Indian literature, when accumulating the most ancient to the still metamorphosing present and the yet to be gauged future, is truly unimaginable and inconceivable to the normal eye and the average brain. Indian literature that has been penned since has been a masterwork of unrelenting geniuses. Literature in India is indeed a production which has reproduced tons and tons of useful and unforgettable materials, borrowing practically from every aspect of Indian indigenous life, both rural and urban. However, when wanting to delineate more and more over the aspect of religious influence on Indian literature, there does not remain any room for describing the domain of 'Indian Literature' into a separate genre; it does not need any more introduction. The point that needs very much to be established is the fact that literature in the Indian context, beginning from the ancient times, would never have been possible had it not been for the fact that religion and spiritual aspects had impressed upon it most profoundly. Indeed, such has been the impact of religion on Indian literature, that there today does exist a separate genre, 'Indian religious literature', rooted from the period of the Vedic era. Literature in India is always incomplete without its portrayal of history, which does overlap over and over, in the long run, creating a massive concept to make one comprehend that religious influence is of course one that holds considerable significance. Religious influence upon Indian literature can be mostly counted into that historical period, which had made a transition from oral literature in India into written literature.

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