



Religion and literature in India

KEYWORDS

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India and religion are connected with each other. we can say that religion is synonym for India. There are number of religious philosophies. Indian literature is also influenced by religion.

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.

'Vedas' are the most ancient Indian literature. The basic religious influential texts of Sanskrit in India literature would comprise - the four Vedas (Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda); each of these Vedas is again divided into four parts - Samhitas (the principal text containing the mantras), Brahmanas (their application to religious rituals), Aranyakas (portions intended for deep meditation and for those residing in forests) and lastly, the Upanishads. The Upanishads form the concluding part of Vedic literature and are referred to as the Vedanta - the quintessence of Vedic thought, vision and wisdom. They are also referred as Veda Sirsha, the top-ranking text in Vedic lore. The Mukhtika Upanishad enlists 108 Upanishads, of which Adi Sankara had commented on eleven - Isha, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taaittiriya, Aitereya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka and Narisimhapurvatapinii. The Puranas, which are dated later than the two great Epics, are the epic legends comprising five main topics: sarga (creation), pratisarga (dissolution and recreation), vamsa (divine genealogies), manvantara (ages of Manu) and vamsanucarita (dynastic history). 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. Sanskrit literature has given us all types of literature like-poetry, prose, drama or short story and also epic.

The Puranas (eighteen), The Manu Smriti Yajnavalkya Smriti (4-5th century A.D.), Katyayana Smriti-saroddhara, Brahaspati Smriti and the Narada Smriti are the best illustrations of brilliantly upholding religious influence upon Indian ancient literature. The mythology of the prevailing Hindu religion has time and again portrayed the deities Vishnu, Shiva, the God-

dess (Devi) and others. This mythology further has influenced Indian literary texts, from ancient epics in the Sanskrit language to medieval poems in umpteen various languages of different regions, to modern works in Indian English

Influence of religion in Indian literature had begun thousands of years ago and being continued even till the present day, there have been in India even in ancient times songs of heroes which in the course of centuries got condensed into two great popular epics - the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. These sagas were the sources, which had supplied material for centuries to the poets of India in the Middle Ages.

All sorts of religious influence of Indian literature begins and literally ends in Sanskrit literature. However, it needs to be noted that Sanskrit literature was an out and out Hindu attempt, with Brahmin, rishis and learned men or sages trying to propagate religious doctrines or theories. Buddhism or Jainism were also worked on but was a much later concept. Only Islamic religion influenced in medieval literature. Lacking aside Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism have also been considerably victorious to have exerted a tremendous religious influence upon Indian literature, beginning from the 6th century. Amongst the Jains, the earliest work in Sanskrit was thoroughly dedicated to religious writing is Umasvamin's Tattvarthadigama-Sutra, which epitomises the whole Jain creed in approximately 375 sutras coiffed in ten chapters. Buddhist influence on Indian literature, most manifest under Gautama Buddha, however, does not only begin and end in this enlightened man, but stretches to other venerated disciples after his Mahaparinirvana (the death of Gautama Buddha). Buddhist texts in Sanskrit were enriched and lend a special lexicon by great writers like Asvaghosa, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dinnaga, Vasumitra, Dharmapala, Dharmakirti, Santideva and Santaraksita.

The principal religions of the country have been Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and of course, Islam had exercised a strong influence on Indian literary writing. As such, religious influence on Indian literature cannot just be ignored and stacked away in the haystack. By the termination of the earliest period of the beginning of the first centuries A.D., the 13th and 15th centuries were most crucial with regards to the emergence and spread of the 'Bhakti' cult. With every possible Indian religion coming under the charm and sway of this Bhakti preaching that had turned into a movement, various religious thinkers and literary personalities had sprung forth. The Bhakti Movement during the 13th to 15th centuries, had been captivating and was indeed like a catalyst, which was victorious to attract the common mass towards literature for the first time, as it was penned not all in Sanskrit - regarded the language of the elite and the high-classed. With men like Kabir, Chaitanya, Surdas, Meera Bai, Tulsidas, Ravidas, Namdeo, or Tukaram, including several other masters - Indian Bhakti literature in every domain of poetry, lyrical verses, drama, or just simple doctrines of philosophical thoughts