

Influence of Religion and Vedic Literature in Indian English Literature

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Abstract: *Indian English literature is a confluence of aspects indigenous and adopted. It is a melange of literary reactions to the Indian way of life. To unravel this literature and its base concepts, like religion and recurring themes, we must analyse the influence that Sanskrit literature has over Indian English literature, because that is the root. We must also explore the effects of British colonialism and its impact on Indian mental state and beliefs. Most of the socio-cultural problems faced today are a direct result of colonialism and its propagated ideas. Thus English as a language and India as a culture are in the process of moulding each other. In this state of affairs, we find globalisation and westernization, a rapid force of a movement gaining momentum in unclear muddy waters but shaping the world in comfort and luxury while dividing resources unequally. It somehow has started vitally balancing the commotion with an unfortunately homogenous solution. This paper, therefore, attempts to research the motives and influences that Indian literature carries with it today, with the inclusion of mythology in Vedic literature and the way modern concepts are melded into award winning subjective and objective pages.*

Keywords: *Ancient, ideas, Indian, Modern, literature, Sanskrit, post-colonial*

1. Introduction

Indian literature more accurately called Indian post-colonial literature was founded by a people whose past and present were heavily shaped by their religious texts, because they followed the moral concepts propagated by a particular religion very fastidiously, and at times what their ancestors had passed on to them, in strict observation, under the pretext of religious practices, what were in fact, scientific practices which preserved the health of a person, and which has developed into new healing sciences in different parts of the world.

For example, Pranik healing advices salt baths because it cleanses impurity from our body. The same was done in ancient India and is continued even till today, but is called superstition by modern society, because the reason for these practices was not passed down through the generations. Turmeric was used as a cleansing paste when taking a bath and as medicine. It was shunned by modern society and modern medicine as a religious practice, till its antibiotic properties in healing and preserving the skin were discovered. People thought sprinkling turmeric water around the household on religious occasions and having a sick person lie for the duration on a bed of neem leaves had religious significance. But the former turned out to be a way to disinfect the house regularly, and the latter turned out to be extremely beneficial due to the innumerable healing properties of *Neemus indica*. The same thing happens in tribal cultures as well. Because the modern world thinks their civilisation is backward, many people think nothing of displacing them. But their cultural practices have hundreds of years of hidden benefits and their unique medical expertise gets lost in the transition to the sordid urban life that awaits them, as they stop existing in a community and their heritage and knowledge is criminally wasted. Many socialists and historians are trying to record and preserve these cultures so they find at least a place in the annals and can be used in future to cure diseases which cannot be cured by modern medicines. In literature, we draw from all aspects of indigenous concepts and ideas, the daily life of the Indian and the factors

that influenced his heritage and culture. Because of the varied communities and their different cultures and languages, we have different literatures for each language in India. With a religious base, there are magic songs, chants, hymns, epics, heroic arts and artefacts, different styles of poetry, whole volumes of devotional ones written around 3000 years ago and based on gods, demons and the common man of yore. Thus we come to understand that there is a strong indelible religious grounding in Indian literature in general.

2. The Effect of Realism

The realism movement started in reflection with the western world, in India too, as a modernist movement. It is an ongoing movement just as the beat movement is in American literature. The concepts keep getting disintegrated and blended into other movements like expressionism. Speaking of blending, realism blotted out the effects of religion a bit because it focussed on how ruthless the world was, and on atheism, and the hero is usually a sufferer and an over comer. He is usually from the borders and fringes of society, or an alien in a new or uncomfortable community. So he has to lose all hope in society and in turn, God before he makes up his mind to change the society. Religion hindered with the process of “Thought to Action”. The authors, poets and playwrights of the realist movement feared that people would salvage their damaged society with prayers and stagnate in inaction. So they have to leave religion out of the narration. This is a popular earmark of a post colonial work. But when religion became the opposite of logical thinking, all the values promulgated by religion are also lost in the purging. Reasoning becomes bipolar and we forget to filter the teachings of the past with popular scientific testing.

Each advice and theory from the past needs analysis. Till it can be proved worthless or false, no element of a belief should be discarded. It may be that mankind has yet to mature to understand the beliefs of long lost civilisations which might have developed in different paths from us. These beliefs are passed down oftentimes through the ages and because the scientific explanations are difficult to inculcate, these practices exist in today’s society mistaken as superstitions.

Realism helps us uncover the shady workings of happenings and in a concocted scenario, we can be made aware and spread awareness on the stark truth without the hindrance of religion as a barrier that people might manipulate to blur lies and distort what cannot be proved as truth. In works of realism, we can uncover subjective suffering with objective solutions. These occur to you outside the mainframe of the literary work, as a solution.

3. Action is Reaction

In the now, we are dealing with unravelling problems and embracing difficulties that one commonly faces in today’s society. If there is a problem of misogyny, the story is about not how the world changes but how the protagonist changes their reaction to misogyny. In the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, we find Saritha, the protagonist living in a patriarchal society where she is a reputed doctor and chooses her own husband, and therefore is supposed to be empowered but she is not. She faces stark identity crises and is lost in confusion, looking utterly helpless to us. Towards the end of the novel however, she has either confronted the men in her life, or she has learned to face the problems posed by them. The problems all still exist though. This is shown in a metaphor when she answers the door in great fear, believing the caller to be her sadistic husband, she finds a young neighbour asking for help because a girl is ill. It goes to show the enormity of these fears in our minds, and how much of a problem is just our perception of it, and our unwillingness to confront it.

4. The Root of the Influence

Populous and multi-ethnic as India is, it is no wonder that there is such a tangle of confluence in the influences of Indian literature. There are varied sources of influence, ranging from ancient math to astrological texts. [2] There are languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Lahnda, Siraiki and Sindhi have played a huge

part in lending its aspects to present day works. Sanskrit especially is the be all and end all point of Indian literature, because of the strong grounding in Vedic literature and considering how much older it is than the other languages. It is right up there before Greek and Latin It is also the oldest indo European language for which substantial text exists so it is an important part of Indo-European studies. Besides being the primary liturgical language of Hinduism, the religion born of the Indus valley civilisation which initially populated India, and the home religion, and other religions born in India like Buddhism and Jainism, Sanskrit was the lingua franca of ancient and medieval India and Nepal. We infer here that Hinduism was born of the Indus valley civilisation because ancient excavations and evidences prove the enormous number of similarities between the religion that was followed in the Indus valley and Hinduism, like animal symbolisation of gods, for example. The themes of this period point to wars between good and evil while being deeply immersed in philosophy. The reason is, philosophy and wisdom were highly prized in India 3000 years ago, when literature was first born. And philosophy is highly connected to spirituality, which in Indian terms, is one and the same with religion we look at in monotheism. When we consider the one god doctrine, we find that texts in Tamil literature like the Thirukkural, which is universally applicable to all religions and even to atheists, and we find the unity of religious doctrines in this regard. We find different paths leading to the same destination, be it of sand or stone. The reason is, all religions have texts which advise Man of the virtues he must follow in order to reach god and succeed in the pursuit of true happiness. From here, we can work towards monotheism because if God's text is asking man to behave virtuously, why couldn't he unite the voice of God, and in the process, God himself?

5. Vedic Influence

When we talk about Sanskrit,[3] we must consider its position as a dead language, i.e., a language that people do not speak anymore. It is used today to chant hymns and songs of praise to God in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism and Jainism though had adopted other languages for their expression like Pali and Armagadhi respectively.. It is popular belief that Sanskrit literature was canonical, in that it focuses on religion sacred writings and God, instead of on common literature. [4]This is actually inaccurate because the Sanskrit era took up issues and values that it wanted to convey and used religion as a medium to promulgate it because the past society was extremely religious. Sanskrit occupied the position of a Brahmanical language and so was identified with brahmanical religion, which was the Vedic religion. The disadvantage was that, common people did not know Sanskrit and weren't exposed to nor did they influence that literature. Experts believe today that history is made by the common man and it is what happens to him that eventually affects the masses. So that is one of the reasons Sanskrit is no longer spoken in the world.

But, there are some texts in Sanskrit which deeply affect and morally found Indian society, and some of those are. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata the two great epics of mythology, the Bhagavat Gita , the holy text of Hinduism, the Puranas, which were the moral tales and stories of yore, and the huge amount of philosophical output in manuscripts of the pre-colonial period which were invaluable unique and filled with rare knowledge. Sanskrit also influenced court poetry and rhetoric in literature. Tamil language is an exception because Sangam literature was almost as old as Sanskrit and had its own style, thus not being influenced much by Sanskrit literature. The Vedic influence can be seen in television today in India, in books published on mythology, in retelling of mythology like the Novelist Amish does in "The immortals of Meluha" series. Since it is mythology and its virtue is flexibility it is being flexed and experimented upon by authors and poets today. The result is a plethora of fiction which gains power as a textual influence, primarily because it is being read by the youth and young adults of the country and the world. So it has a stronger impact on the future. It expands the imagination and stretches concepts to accommodate new ones. Thus Vedic literature and its influence serve to enrich the source of literary expansion and introduce religion from an objective perspective. This is extremely beneficial because due to religion being a personal issue in one's life, it becomes difficult for Man to view situations in real life from a clear vantage point. The objectivity that the current pliability gives is dynamically directional for Indian literature. Change is vital for language and communication studies. We saw what happened to Sanskrit when it refused to shed rigidity.

6. Conclusion

We must identify change in religion and the concept of religious studies, how important exposure to different opinions in any way is, because religion is fast being misunderstood as the world experiences advancements in science and in turn in logical reasoning. We have seen how concepts we believed to be obsolete or based on superstitions have been discovered to be well thought out phenomena and theories propagated with genuine practical applications. We see how the lessons of the past, after long periods of being shunned are now being proved true by scientists. Keeping this in mind, we must take logical reasoning with a pinch of salt. There is a whole division of study called the Metaphysics which records for future, what man has discovered but not yet managed to explain in relation to modern day science. It might so occur that theories which now seem strange to us within the folds of old manuscripts, coincide with future discoveries as Man evolves and reaches the potential reached by civilisations in the past, the difference being that he does it in his own unique way, with unique revelations and in connection to the rest of humanity.

7. Acknowledgment

Author thanks her father for supporting her throughout her endeavours to expand her platforms and extend her voice. Author wishes to thank her mother for being the encouraging voice in her heart and believing in her. Author would like to thank her College for giving her legroom to flex her writing and for letting her work off-situ. She is grateful to her professors for giving her invaluable advice and ideas. Author conveys her gratitude to the International association of humanities and management and to LHSRS-2017 for letting her share her thoughts and further enriching it.

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