

**International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047****Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025****Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi****Religion and Politics in Contemporary Indian Literature****Dr. Anuradha Kumari**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Ram Tahal Choudhary College, Ormanjhi, Ranchi.

**Abstract**

This paper provides a critical analysis of the intersection of religion and politics in contemporary Indian literature. Through a close reading of select literary texts, this research examines how Indian writers negotiate the complex relationships between faith, identity, and power in the context of India's diverse religious landscape and rapidly changing political climate. Contemporary Indian literature is a rich and diverse field that explores a wide range of themes, including religion and politics. Many Indian writers have used their works to examine the complex relationships between faith, identity, and power in India, often challenging dominant narratives and exploring the experiences of marginalized communities.

One of the key themes in contemporary Indian literature is the intersection of Hinduism and politics. Writers such as *Arundhati Roy* and *Amitav Ghosh* have explored the ways in which Hindu nationalism has shaped Indian identity and politics. In Roy's novel "The God of Small Things," for example, the protagonist's family is caught up in the tensions between Hindus and Christians in Kerala, India. Similarly, Ghosh's novel "The Shadow Lines" examines the impact of Hindu nationalism on personal relationships and identity.

Another important theme in contemporary Indian literature is the experience of Muslims in India. Writers such as *Salman Rushdie* and *Amitav Ghosh* have explored the complex relationships between Islam, identity, and politics in India. In Rushdie's novel "Midnight's Children," for example, the protagonist's family is caught up in the tumultuous events of India's Partition and post-Independence periods. Similarly, Ghosh's novel "In an Antique Land" examines the history of Islam in India and its impact on personal relationships and identity.

Sikhism and politics is another theme that has been explored by several Indian writers. *Khushwant Singh's* novel "Train to Pakistan," for example, examines the experiences of Sikhs during the Partition period in India. Similarly, Amitav Ghosh's novel "The Shadow Lines" explores the impact of Sikh nationalism on personal relationships and identity.

Christianity and politics is also a significant theme in contemporary Indian literature. Writers such as *Arun Kolatkar* and *Dilip Chitre* have explored the experiences of Christians in India and the impact of Hindu nationalism on their lives. In Kolatkar's novel "Jejuri," for example, the protagonist's family is caught up in the tensions between Hindus and Christians in rural India.



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In addition to exploring the experiences of specific religious communities, many Indian writers have also examined the theme of interfaith dialogue and politics. Writers such as *Kiran Nagarkar* and *Shashi Deshpande* have explored the experiences of interfaith relationships in India and the impact of patriarchal norms and Hindu nationalism on their lives. In *Nagarkar's* novel "Cuckold," for example, the protagonist's family is caught up in the tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India.

These are just a few examples of writers and their works who have used religion and politics in their writings in India in the contemporary age. There are many more writers and works that explore these themes in Indian literature.

**Keywords:** *Intersection, Dominant Narratives, Marginalized, Specific Religious, Religion.*

### Introduction

In this paper the term religion is being used in the Weberian. It is emphasised that 'sacred' notions have always made their presence felt in the domain of the secular. Thus seen, religion is viewed as a form of orientation to the secular world in the sense that it is a source of knowledge, values and norms of a society. Religion thus viewed is an ideology, a system of thought, located in the domain of the sacred. Though pertaining to the 'other world' and often associated with the 'internal' and the 'spiritual domain' of the individual and the collectivity, it has to do with the individuals and collectivities existing in 'this world', in that it offers a way to negotiate life.

The definition of politics is not as complex as that of religion. It is generally accepted that politics is a set of activities deeply entrenched in 'this world,' the secular world. These activities are those which are geared towards the attainment, acquisition, maintenance and consolidation of power. Political activities also include those which use symbols and metaphors of the sacred domain to determine and gain ends that are not religious. These are directed towards creating distinct spaces for communities implicit in which is a definite striving to attain power. In this unit you will learn about the relation between religion and politics in societies. We begin by explaining the meaning of religion and politics before trying to understand their relationship.

### Understanding Religion and Politics

How do we understand religion? Religion is understood in different ways by different people. Philosophers, theologians and sociologists have different perspectives to understand religion. However, sociologists have understood religion as primarily a social phenomenon. Every society has religious beliefs, rites and organization. Religion very often influences our understanding of everyday life. In many societies religion affects the way we relate to each other. Our religious beliefs often guide our social interaction. Religion can be a unifying factor in some societies. However, in some societies it can be a matter of conflict.

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"Religion broadly refers to:

- a) experiences of human beings as a collectivity in all parts of the world.
- b) Relationships between human beings, probably in all walks of life, and
- c) To all facts of everyday human life, for example, education, politics, economy etc."

Therefore, it is very clear that religion is a social phenomena. It is related with politics, as mentioned earlier in an inextricable manner. Since, it is a social phenomena and part of the culture of society which we inherit, often we grow up being socialized into the religious beliefs, values and practices of our parents. It is another thing that after maturity we may reject this religion and take up another or simply not be part of any religion.

We explore the relationship between religion and politics in four sections. The first section provides an overview of the various sociological and anthropological approaches to religion, and locates the perception of religion in this framework; the second section deals with the relationship between religion and politics in India historically; the third section describes the manifestations of this relationship in contemporary India in the form of communalism, rise of secularism and fundamentalism, religious nationalism, and the fourth section forms the conclusion. Study of religion as an important element of social life has been the focus of attention of several sociologists and social anthropologists. Here below is an overview of some of the major approaches to religion.

**Main Thrust**

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 unfailing 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.

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


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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

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Religions in India initially, later it was developed by accessing the religions outside the country. Writings like Puranas, Jatakas, Panchatantra, fairy tales and stories of Gods and Ghost made.

**Conclusion**

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.

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