

## **Caucasian Mystery: Revelation and Salvation Reclaimed Through Literature**

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**Abstract:** All literature evolved from the religion at the outset. Nature came second and human love followed thereafter. From the Father of English Poetry- the supreme Geoffrey Chaucer in the West and the even earlier our paramount Thiruvalluvar in the East. The basis of their notes was religion which turned out well through the ages, nations, languages, cultures and civilizations and their respective authors. A study of English and Tamil authors in this regard have been attempted here. After Chaucer the puritans were the ones to write purely religious tales as Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and Milton's Paradise Lost. Moving through the ages we notice the heavenly minded writings recede to the background in the Restoration periods only to rise again with all its uncertainties during the Victorian age-creating a Hopkins leading way Eliot (Thomas Stearns) In our Mother tongue Tamil too hailed the gods of various sects of the same religion- Hinduism. A comparison and contrast of the "Revelations" in most of these manuals, treatises, pamphlets, poems, plays, and the great epics in the light of influence study, comparative approach and the content analysis aimed by this Conference.

**Key words:** journey, periods, puritan, recurring, religion,

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### **I. Introduction**

A very good morning to everyone assembled. The thrust area I hold up in my hand is Religion and Literature with the title 'Caucasian Mystery: Revelation and Salvation reclaimed through Literature'. All through the cosmos, literature evolved from the religion at the outset. Nature followed behind while human love can be said to be the third theme. Religion has remained a Caucasian mystery for the English while it is a sort of 'Chidambaram Rahasyam' for us Tamils. How various religions from the Greeks, English, Sanskrit and Tamil contribute to literature are put to proof in the course of this paper.

When we trace the tablets of memory, there appears Homer with his great guidebooks 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' with the Gods Odin, Jupiter etc. There is no mention of a specific religion in those times. Real religious literature followed in the period of Chaucerian England, ironically against the holy orders of the day. Chaucer in his 'Canterbury Tales' questioned the holiness of the humans who manned the churchdom. Consequently the Puritans were born in England with their onslaught on the sitting Catholics. As such there has been no religious literature on the official religion of England either by Shakespeare or any of his contemporaries.

Hence Religious Literature was actually born out of the non-conformists of the day-the puritans. John Bunyan with his 'Pilgrim's Progress' leads the religious contingent, followed by the studious and industrious Milton with his Paradieses - Lost and Regained. Puritan Literature flourished upto Hopkins with his questions and prayer to God. Until the arrival of T.S.Eliot and G.B.Shaw we are actually unfriended with the official religion of England.

To analyse the major Puritan work 'The Pilgrim's Progress', it is not only an allegory with a universal and timeless appeal but also a literary work which takes its place beside the masterpieces of English prose. As the Hindu God Vishnu in his various avatars destroying multitudinous demons and giants, Bunyan's hero Christian faces fiends' spirits as well as goblins. Since the work is an allegory, the characters can be divided into two groups-those who impel Christian on his journey and those who impede his progress.

The impellers may be enlisted in alphabetical order thus

(i) Charity as a damsel at the Palace Beautiful

(ii) Discretion and her companion 'Evangelist' who frequently appear to advise Christian at several stages of journey.

(iii) Faithful a fellow pilgrim who is martyred in Vanity Fair

(iv) Help who pulls Christian out of the town of Vanity.

(v) Hopeful who pulls Christian out of the town of Vanity and goes with Christian to Celestial City

(vi) Innocent a maid in the house

(vii) Interpreter who reveals rare insights to the pilgrims and explains their significance

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(viii) 'Piety' a maiden in the Palace Beautiful and finally

(ix) 'Watchful' the helpful porter at the Palace Beautiful who assists all needy pilgrims after they have clambered up the Hill of Difficulty

While all the above may be termed as harpies, angels and goblins, the monsters, ogres, fiends and the infernal creatures coming as the 'impeders' are large in number - Apollyon, Beelzebub, Mr. Blindman, Mr. By-ends, Civility, Mr. Cruelty, Demas, Giant Despair, Mrs. Diffidence, Enmity, Envy, Fair Speech, Lord Hate Good, Mr. Hate-Light, Mr. High-Mind, Mr. Implacable, Mr. Legality, Mr. Liar, Mr. Malice, Mr. No Good, Obstinate, Pick Thank, Pliable, Talkative, putting an end with Mr. Worldly Wiseman who gives Christian bad advice to deflect him from the Pilgrimage until Evangelist appears to get him on the right road again.

Even as the 'Pilgrim's Progress' presents the forces of Good and Evil for the possession of Everyman, it differs from other allegories in that it does not present a recurring dramatic tension.

If we dissect the situation in the East especially in India, again there stand two great epics, 'The Ramayana and The Mahabharata' - and two great sects of the same religion the Saivaites and the Vaisnavaites. Though the major two epics are on the vaishnavite gods, there are hundreds of epics on the various other gods in India - Siva, Brahma, Sakthi Vinayaga, Murugan, etc.

Countless number of poems were also written on these gods, beginning from Avvaiyar's 'Aathichoodi' to the later part of Bhakthi Movement - Arunagirinathar's 'Thiruppugazh'. Unlike in English and other Western Literature, the coming and going of gods is very frequent in Eastern Literature. The respective gods not only interact with the relevant authors but also initiate them into the process in many occasions as Lord Murugan does to an adulterer - Arunagirinathar.

Much of Tamil literature was religious as said above, about the two major sects of Hinduism. But 'Thirukkural' the foremost of all literature was not about a particular religion or sect. Though it talks of God and the related morals and duties, Thiruvalluvar is universal in speaking these aspects. The qualities and morals he advocates can be representative of any religion or God spoken in any literature/ country.

Setting at naught the array of religious works in Tamil, Silapathigaram, Manimegalai, Divya Prabandam coming upto Tiruppugazh, there is only one major component of an epic, 'The Bhagavat Gita' that can be said to be universally acceptable religious literature. Being an integrant part of 'Mahabharata', we can say that no other religious work speaks of the duties and responsibilities of humans to that of Gods and their orders. It can be realized from the translation of the Gita in a number of languages, Indian and foreign, and the influence studies by great authors in various languages from almost all countries.

For our knowledge we can take up the study of the aforesaid authors George Bernard Shaw and T.S. Eliot. Both of them had great esteem for the Gita and never stood upon ceremony in acknowledging its influence upon their works. Shaw went even deeper to read the Upanishads and forge the theory of 'Life Force' existing in every human which is actually 'Jeeva Sakthi' mentioned in the Upanishads.

It is T.S. Eliot who tried to intertwine 'The Bible and The Gita' through 'The Murder in the Cathedral'. And he was infinitely successful too in his attempt to transcend the ideals reverberated in the Gita through the voice of sermon by Thomas Becket, the Archbishop. The concept is inculcated through the Four Tempters as well as the Four Murderers apart from the Chorus.

There were three major sources for John Bunyan and John Milton in producing their great works - "The Holy Bible, their own spiritual progress and their shrewd understanding of human nature". But, for G.B. Shaw and T.S. Eliot, the Indian influence esp. of the Bhagavad Gita was added to their understanding of humanity. Specifically Eliot's study of Sanskrit language and Oriental philosophy contributed to his major works like The Wasteland, Four Quartets and The Cocktail Party apart from The Murder in the Cathedral.

The lines from The East Coker of the Four Quartets,

"And what you own is what you do not own is,

And where you are is where you are not", and finally

"For us, there is only the trying. The rest

Is not our business" echo the words of Lord Krishna to Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. Considered to be the masterpiece of T.S. Eliot The Four Quartets has the theme as well as the pattern adopted from eastern thought. In Burnt Norton, the element is 'Air', in East Coker it is 'Earth', in The Dry Salvages it is 'Water' while the final part Little Gidding the element is 'Fire'. The one thing here lacking among the five demons or Panja Boodas is 'Sky' as we can guess.

We can consummate the discussion with an Indian Writer restructuring the myths in Indian religious philosophy - Girish Karnad. His remakes of the myths, Yayati, Hayavadhana, Naga Mandala, The Fire and the Rain, Tale-Danda and the history Tuglak attract our attention to the discussion on hand. The search for identity forms the main theme of all these myths - Kapila and Devadatta with their transposed physiques in Hayavadhana, Rani of Naga Mandala and Vishaka of The Fire and the Rain, Rambhavati in Tale-Danda and Yayati himself in Yayati - with his wives Devayani and Sharmishta. Girish Karnad proves himself to be a master

dramatist of Existential philosophy which concentrates on man who is at the centre of the universe. He meritoriously deals with Indian culture in general and performing arts in particular.

## **II. Conclusion**

Religion has contributed to much of literature on the whole. Discussion can be had in profusion on this area but we culminate it with the worldview that is summarized in the speech of Thomas Becket in *The Murder in the Cathedral*:

“We do not know very much of the future  
Except that from generation to generation  
The same things happen again and again... Only  
The fool, fixed in his folly, may think  
He can turn the wheel on which he turns.