

Faith and Ideology in Literature

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The articles in this journal deal with the central theme of Faith and Ideology in Literature. Each article is unique and so is every writer. The issue of faith and ideology is very relevant and we have articles that traverse the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe that articulate man's deepest yearning for God, his faith in Him and also the heinous crimes committed in the name of God.

Kiran Nagarkar's article "The Split Personality Disorder Syndrome in Faith and Ideology" begins by taking up Anthony Burgess's dismissal of Graham Greene's work which he referred to it as so much 'god-bothering'. He writes that it was David Lodge who exposed Burgess' canard. Of the over thirty-five novels and entertainments that Greene wrote only three or four dealt with God and the Catholic faith. These include: *The Power and the Glory*, *Heart of the Matter*, *End of the Affair*. And, he adds that those are exceptionally fine novels.

He goes on to explain that most of Europe may have ditched God but the rest of the globe has gone completely insane with god-bothering, a third of America is devoutly church-going and the Islamic countries are in the grip of a fundamentalist fever. He then goes on to discuss his novel *God's Little Soldier* which deals with fanaticism by those who take it upon themselves to defend their God and commit murder, mayhem, and genocides in His name.

He then goes on to show the disconnect or the split personality syndrome in practically every religious group – Buddhist, Jains, Christians and Muslims when dealing with issues of violence and war. These so called religions that preach peace and respect for all living things quite easily forget their religious tenets and think nothing of perpetrating the most bloody and gruesome acts of violence on their fellow human beings.

Dr. Shireen Vakil and Dr. Sr. Ananda Amritmahal compare Indian and European Women Mystic Poets - Juliana of Norwich, Hildegard of

Bingen, Janabai of Maharashtra and Mirabai of Mewar, Rajasthan. A mystic is one who seeks complete union with God. They examined their work against the backdrop of the socio-economic and politico-cultural context of their time and the norms and restrictions laid down by a powerful patriarchal society. They then made a comparative study of the four mystics, identifying recurrent themes and common concerns.

Meenakshi Thaur's article, "Women Mystics: A Comparative Study of Lalleshwari and Julian of Norwich" also deals with the subject of mysticism in poetry. She argues that both these mystics had no real intention of subverting patriarchy, but were interested only in leading a life of devotion. They simply changed the object of their devotion from husband or lover to Divine Husband or Lover. Thaur attempts to situate Lalleshwari and Julian of Norwich's verse in their social and cultural contexts and explore how their mystic experiences were circumscribed by the dominant male ideology.

As we move to the continent of America we are introduced to the "Negro Spirituals: Identity and Liberation" by Rajan J. Barrett, who examines them from the point of view of a politics of identity and resistance with the hope of liberation. In studying the Negro Spirituals, he is prompted to consider The Bible as a slave narrative. He maintains that the 'negro' was considered only for his brawn value, devoid of spirit and was tortured and humiliated beyond all measure. Besides, the productivity of his body rested with the slave owners. It is in this context that the creative retelling of 'the gospel' through the spirituals raised their broken spirits, promised them liberation and a home in heaven.

The next article deals with "The Role of Faith and Ideology in African Fiction for Children and Young Adults: An Analysis of Achebe's Fiction for children, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Story for a Black Night*" by Kirti Y. Nakhare who makes a claims that African novelists have grappled with the question of establishing an identity for themselves, in the shaping of which faith and ideology play a major role. She examines the works of Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Robert H. Locke to discover the role played by faith and ideology in the shaping of these

works for children and young adults. She also notes the dilemma faced by the protagonists in adopting certain belief systems. She also maintains that this is an attempt at examining the contribution of these works in building a unique national identity.

Renuka Jena's article, "Existential Dimensions in Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*" deals with the philosophy of Existentialism which emerged in the writings of several philosophers, prominent among whom were Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. They believed that man / woman is what he /she makes of himself / herself, he /she is not predestined by God or by society. Jena contends that Anita Desai exhibits a strong inclination towards the existentialist interpretation of the human predicament. She reasons that in *Desai's Cry the Peacock*, Maya a hypersensitive woman who cannot cope with the practical world of her husband, is tormented by existentialist angst and feels dejected, lonely and demoralized, resulting in the ultimate catastrophe where she kills her husband out of frustration. She argues that the reader sympathizes with her helpless situation, in her struggle to lead a meaningful existence.

Arundhati Barde's paper deals with Taslima Nasreen's poetry. It centres on the basic tenets of Islamic Fundamentalism, the treatment of women under religious scriptures and Nasreen's strong protest against its ideology as revealed in her selected poems. She examines the *Qur'an* which she contends unambiguously gives men authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other. The *Qur'an* has also laid down principles regarding divorce, rape and punishment for adultery which fundamentalists or extremists strictly and blindly follow. She analyses Taslima Nasreen's poetry and her life, and holds the view that it is a strong protest against the blind followers of Islam.

Sucharita Sarkar's paper, "Made in India: Faith and the Ideology of Mass Culture," uses the lens of Culture Studies to view devotional prints in calendars, advertisements and such texts as problematic discourses of faith that merge religion, mass culture, commerce, ideology and the marketing of an 'Indian' image to 'other' or non-Indian audiences. She

claims that taken together, these objects or texts reveal the politics, shifts and resistances within and between binaries such as religion and science, tradition and modernity, coloniser and colonised, public and private, sacred and profane and Indian and Western. She quotes Theodor Adorno who critiqued the 'curse of modern mass culture', and wonders how this commoditised schema of mass culture has helped the Indian devotee to locate 'the still centre' by finding the divine in the quotidian, when in the 'Western' world, as Yeats' lamented, things have 'fallen apart'.

Finally, the joint paper presented by Preeti Oza and Maria Syed, "The Bhakti Movement in India and the Negro Spirituals of America: A Discourse of Faith v/s. Ideology", presents a parallel of two different ideologies, one in India and the other in the US which addressed the need of the marginalized to rely on religious expression in the wake of social discrimination. Dalit literature of India marks a militant protest against upper caste literature that upheld Brahmanical values. Dalit aesthetics was shaped by the Bhakti movement but it has now undergone strategic changes. In the US when the slaves faced appalling discrimination and injustice, the only solace that provided them hope and faith was the 'spirituals'. As they expressed their feelings through their 'spirituals' they gave vent to their feelings and also looked forward in hope to a better life to come.