Chapter III
India and the Religious Order: A Representation

If history is the movement by which a society reveals itself as what it is, there are, in a sense, as many qualitatively different histories as there are societies, and India, precisely because she is indifferent to history, has carefully laid it down in the form of her society, her culture, her religion.

Dumont (qtd in Dirks 58)

Religion plays a central role in the absence of a unified history in India. India attempts to find a history for itself through religion. Religion, so central to India, has been manifest through a number of things namely the Indian scriptures, mythologies and epics. The history of the landmass called India has been a witness to various religions and beliefs over the past several centuries which include Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and a few more sects like Buddhism, Jainism, etc. Every religion and religious faith has its own deities and beliefs which are worshipped and practiced by the followers of that faith. Max Muller says in *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, “The Indian never knew the feeling of nationality and his heart never trembled in the expectation of national applause. There were no heroes to inspire a poet,—no history to call forth a historian. The only sphere where the Indian mind found itself at liberty to act, to create, and to worship, was the sphere of religion and philosophy; and nowhere have religious and metaphysical ideas struck roots so deep in the mind of a nation as in India” (30-31). Post-independence India has also been designated as a “Secular” nation by the Constitution of India making it home to different religious beliefs.

However, it is equally true that Indian religion has largely revolved around Hinduism. Asserting the fact, Nicholas B. Dirks says that “‘Hinduism’ [has been] a systematic, confessional, all-embracing religious identity” (7). Hinduism, alongside being the religion of the largest population in India, is also the oldest. The roots of the religion go back to the time of the Aryans and their invasion of India. J. N. Farquhar opines in *An Outline of the Religious Literature in India*, “The investigations of the past century have shown clearly that the people who conquered India and created the Hindu religion and civilization belonged to an ancient race, now usually called Indo-
European…” (1). He adds, “In the study of the evolution of religion in India we shall constantly...give...attention to the Aryan race and community…” (4). The other religions came to India later, especially Islam and Christianity.

Central to Hinduism through the ages has been the all-pervading caste. “Indeed, caste has generally been seen as fundamental to Hinduism” (Dirks 7). E. C. Sachau’s assertion that Alberuni opined for caste that “The Hindus call their castes varnas, i.e. colours, and from a genealogical point of view they call them jataka., i.e. births. These castes are from the very beginning only four” (100) reflects the longevity of caste in India. Religion and caste with the passage of time have become inter-related. “…caste as a kind of civil institution, and Hinduism as the religious basis for it” (Dirks 25). Religion and caste have played a critical role in holding together the multifaceted society of India.

However, there is another perspective that has gained ground: the non-relationship of caste and religion. Gandhi said, “Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know…” (qtd in Dirks 234). Hence, there is no clarity as yet about caste and religion and their inter-relationship in the wake of these conflicting observations. “Muller asked the fundamental question about the religious or social status of caste, and noted that there was no easy answer: ‘Now, if we ask the Hindus whether their laws of caste are part of their religion, some will answer that they are, others that they are not’” (Dirks 39).

However, one thing that asserts repeatedly is that the two have acted together in the annals of history and still continue to function today as shapers of society and the social order. The activities and lives of the individuals have revolved around the concept of religion and caste. In addition, it also determines the identity of the individual by placing him in a religious group. In fact, this group identity that religion has accorded to an individual in India stands in direct contrast to the West which is highly individualistic. A major factor for the individualistic identity in the West is the religious uniformity there, in the form of Christianity. This individualism of the West, assert historians and critics alike, made it difficult for the British to understand India and Indians. The concept of a group identity based on religion was greatly baffling for the West. The religious heterogeneity of India gives a group identity to people here
and even migration from one faith to the other just changes the way one comes to be known, and he still remains a part of a group.

More often than not, religion has downplayed the individuality of a person by making him more a part of a particular religion. These ethnic identities have sorted out men in the society more than anything else. Dumont points out that “caste not only subordinated the political, it also reduced the individual to a position of relative unimportance” (qtd in Dirks 59). Religion and caste, have, hence, buttressed the group identity of a person rather than individual uniqueness of that person.

Related with the concept of religion is the idea of minority and majority. Religion largely thrives on inequality, not all people are equal, either within or without a religion. This principle of ‘hierarchization’ based on religion is essential to understand the identity of the individual as a member of a particular group. The entire idea is based on superior-subordinate relationship and the identity of the individual is based on his or her position in the tree of religion which again is two-fold. First, the particular religion that one professes and its position in the ‘rank’ of religions, and secondly, the position of the group to which that person belongs within his religion. Hence, a person’s position is determined by two factors: his religion and his ‘rank’ within his religion.

The identity of the person, then, is determined in terms of his being a member of a particular religion and, within that religion, his position amid the hierarchy. Hence a person can be a member of a dominant religion and belong to a dominant caste in that religion much like a Brahmin or be a member of a dominant religion but from a dominated caste like a Shudra. On the contrary, one can be a member of a ‘minority’ religion. In other words, the birth of a person in a particular religion identifies him as he is just another member of a religious sect.

In this group identity, two groups that stand out are Hinduism and Islam, two of the most dominant and ‘rival’ religious sections in India. Islam’s existence, since the advent of the Mohammedan dynasties in India has been alongside Hinduism which has older roots in India. The British exploited this aspect of the composition of Indian society with their “Divide and Rule” policy which, according to Thomas R. Trautmann, is rooted in their belief that, “Hinduism...as the religion of the native
Indians,...or the Hindoos, [was] in distinction from the Muslims; Muslims were regarded as foreign conquerors” (67). In post-independence India, a section of Hindus has tried to raise its head by harping on the ‘outsider status’ of the Muslims leading to a major Hindu-Muslim crisis which, ironically, is not religious but political in nature. Alongside this duality are the other religions that have existed for centuries.

In the backdrop of so many different religions and religious faiths in India, it has been increasingly difficult to present a single image of India and religion in it. Literature has reflected upon various aspects of religion, though emphasis, in the main, has been on Hindu-Muslim dichotomy. The chapter tries to analyze the representation of religion by the five writers and see how identity has been affected on the basis of religion. The analysis of religion and identity in the five texts is invariably related not only to the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy but also to other aspects of religion beyond it, especially in The Inheritance of Loss.

The issue of religion in A Passage to India assumes significance given the importance religion holds in the life of the Indian people. Any passage into the country leads to a rendezvous with the ubiquitous issue of religion that has governed life since centuries. The time of the composition of the novel makes the question of religion and identity all the more relevant owing to the independence struggle under the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League against the British colonial hegemony. As such, it is critical to know how much space Forster has offered to religion in his novel, and how religion has been treated in that space.

Traditionally, the novel has been seen as one having colonial implications. It is evaluated as a text that distinguishes between the ruler and the ruled concentrating on the racial difference between the two. June Perry Levine opines: “The side of the tame includes Forster's own tradition: the English professional classes, whether conservative or liberal, educated at public school and Oxbridge, possessed of secure social position, adequate income, and religious or ethical scruples of "civilized man"; the province of the savage, the "natural" man, lies outside the English ruling class: its representatives are either foreign-Mediterranean, Eastern-or working-class English and educated not by a university but by the tribe or self” (72). This racial distinction between the East and the West is considered to be at the centre of A Passage to India.
There are two classes, the colonizer and the colonized, and this defines all the other aspects of the novel, including identity. June Perry Levine adds, "A Passage to India, arguably Forster's greatest novel because its pattern does not overwhelm character, [it] ends in an uneasy standoff: the Indian Aziz, who has been the victim of British racism, is vindicated, and he and the Englishman Fielding recognize that private relations suffer in a world of imperialist domination" (81). Moreover, because of two races and classes in a colonized country, one need must be superior to the other: the British race assumes a superior status to the Indian, the native.

The narrative distinctly uses words like 'muddle', 'wretched', 'force', 'die', 'creeps', 'types' and 'mysterious' for India and Indians. The use of such words in the narrative reflects the image of the Orient dominant in the West. The West looks at the East as the 'White man's burden' and the language used to inscribe India in the narrative reflects the same. In spite of the fact that he was influenced by India, when it came to drawing Indian characters, he was satirical and uncomplimentary. For Forster, then, the first identity of his characters is not on grounds of religion but 'Indian' and 'Western'. There are Indian characters and there are English characters and Forster reflects how the two go about their lives in the presence of one another.

Forster belonged to the race of the colonizers and he was writing about a major colony, India. Hence, even though he may have had sympathies with the Indians, his identity as an Englishman restrained him from being downright vocal about it. The Indian identity, then, remains marginalized before the British identity in the text. Be it the better efficiency of Dr Aziz; or an individual 'voicing' India as a 'good' nation, it is put down before the British point-of-view that prevails in the text. Quentin Bailey points out that the "rhetoric of racial superiority... was frequently couched in terms of a mythic Anglo-Saxon identity" (330). An important point here is that the Indians are not classified on the basis of their religion but they are differentiated racially from the English who have nothing in common with or 'learnable' from the Indians. Religion too becomes a part of this colonial duality in the novel. As June Perry Levine says: "The body of the story tersely indicts the interdependence of evangelical religion and colonialism in the imperialist endeavor" (84).

However, there is more to the issue of religion than being a shadow behind the racial distinction offered in the text. It is religion that defines the Indian characters' identity
in the narrative. In fact the novel is structured on religious patterns: the protagonist of
the novel, Dr Aziz, is a Muslim, and the novel has three sections, “Mosque”, “Caves”
and “Temple”, and as is evident, two names are related to religion.

The primary issue pertaining to religion in India is the Hindu-Muslim relationship and
*Passage to India* touches upon this issue. Dr Aziz is the major Muslim character in
the text while Godbole is the main Hindu character. Frances B. Singh says that in *Passage to India*
“the influence of the Hindu and Muslim religions can be traced in
the attitudes and actions of two characters who have been shaped by these religions—
Godbole and Aziz” (265). The two have no deep-felt affection, but neither is there any
hatred among them: they share a normal relationship of acquaintance but what also
emerges is that they don’t go together extremely cordially owing to their religious
differences. Martin Price, opines: “He [Dr Aziz] can at first be ‘entirely
straightforward.’ But, as the ladies lament the failure of their Indian host to fetch
them, he soon swings to identification with the English. ‘Slack Hindus,’ he exclaims.
‘It was as well you did not go to their house, for it would give you a wrong idea of
India. Nothing sanitary. I think for my own part they grew ashamed of their house and
that is why they did not send’” (613). Aziz’s description of the Hindu household
reflects the deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the Hindu style of life in the mind of a
Muslim.

The tripartite structure of the novel, where the ‘Mosque’ and the ‘Temple’ are divided
by the section of the ‘Caves’, seems to enact the differences between the Hindus and
the Muslims. Lionel Trilling says in *Passage to India* about the differences
between the Hindus and the Muslims that they “cannot really approach each other;
Aziz, speaking in all friendliness to Professor Godbole, wishes that Hindus did not
remind him of cow-dung and Professor Godbole thinks, ‘Some Moslems are very
violent’” (84). The Hindu-Moslem relationship in the novel is hence constructed on
incompatibility. But this incompatibility is not based on hatred but on the fact that
they know a bit too much about each other to be on comfortable terms as against the
British who know too little.

The representation of the Hindu-Muslim relationship puts history as well under
scrutiny. Dr Aziz says, “Do you know what Deccani Brahmans say? That England
conquered India from them...and not from the Moguls...They have even bribed it to
appear in text-books...” (*A Passage to India* 79). The Hindus have long held the belief that the Muslims were invaders who came to India and became the rulers; while the Muslims, as is evident even from Kamleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan*, see India as a place where Babur settled down and made it his nation. Forster has touched upon this aspect of religion in the novel and one thing that stands out in the novel is that there are “broad divisions between Moslems, Hindus, and various other ethnic minorities” (Behm 7). It clearly shows how the Hindus see the Muslims as the ‘outsiders’ and hence not a part of India. The Muslims, on the other hand, assert that they belong to India and hence are the ‘insiders’, an integral and rightful part of the country.

Another aspect of religion emerges in the “caves” section of the novel where the echo in the caves is referred to as ‘boum’. Critics opine that the Hindu ‘Om’ is the answer to the echo in the caves. The Hindu perspective of spirituality, unlike the West’s excessive rationalism, can take the echo in its stride. Hunt Hawkins opines, “*A Passage to India* does suggest a solution to the echo, of course. There is some doubt, however, whether Forster himself subscribed to this solution. And the solution contributes nothing to the argument against the Raj since it transcends politics and all other worldly concerns. The solution is Hinduism, which is shown countering the echo by abandoning reason and embracing the muddle of the universe with irrational joy. The negative echo "boum" is thus transposed into the affirmative chant "OM," representing the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva” (62).

The problem here, however, is twofold. First, Forster himself said that the word ‘Om’ was not in his mind while composing the ‘boum’ of the caves. In “‘God si Love’: On an Unpublished Forster Letter and the Ironic Use of Myth in *A Passage to India*, Robert L. Selig mentions a letter by Forster written to him in which he says, “For one thing, you credit me with the reading of much I have never read. I never thought of Aum when I wrote Boum, and I was unaware of the subdivisions of the mystic syllable” (473). Secondly, the Hindu religious faith does not appear too convincing in *A Passage to India*. Towards the end of the novel, in the Hindu festival, there is a statement: “Love si God”. It appears to be a ‘misprint’ of “love is God” but is not so. The “si” turns the meaning upside down and Hinduism, instead of emerging an encompassing religion emerges as a ‘self-centred’ religion. The same article later adds, “In pidgin English-Italian, "God si Love" means God loves Himself. That this is,
indeed, the meaning is indicated by the reappearance of "God is Love" in the later context of the absurd religious "games" played at the Hindu ceremony... the Deity of "God is Love" shares existence with no individual but Himself... This God of doubtful existence is nevertheless described, in the account of the temple ceremony quoted above, as an inveterate practical joker (477-479). Hinduism, then, does not satisfy the echo of the 'Caves' in a convincing manner.

Looking at the text it also appears that Forster is more fascinated by the Muslims rather than the Hindus. Dr Aziz is the protagonist and not Godbole. The Hindu and his religion is shown to be inadequate as compared to the efficient doctor. Godbole, when asked to explain the Marabar caves to the two English ladies is unable to do so convincingly. Dr Aziz, on the other hand is the efficient doctor whom the British also admire. As Martin Price asserts, "As a Moslem he is more a rationalist in his religion than the Hindu,... He is warm, generous, eager to be loved and shown regard;...Still, in the author's words, 'he possessed a soul that could suffer but not stifle, and led a steady life beneath his mutability'" (613). Later as well, Dr Aziz is shown to be innocent in advance when the charges are pressed against him by Adela.

All the events associated with Dr Aziz and Godbole fall in the category of the colonial narrative. However, in the Indian context, a Hindu should have been the protagonist of the novel owing to the fact that India has Hindus in majority while the Muslims are a minority. It is also pertinent that "the British, though they rule[d] India for two hundred years and at first—with great success, never succeeded even in discovering the Hindu mind, not to speak of getting to grips with it" (Chaudhuri 92-93). As an Englishman, then, Forster, too, prefers Muslims over the Hindus.

This attraction of Forster's towards the Moslems can also be attributed to the rising influence of Gandhi when the novel was composed. Gandhi advocated that the Hindus and the Muslims should work together for attaining independence. Forster sympathized with the Indians against an adamant British administration which he wanted humanized, though not overturned. As a result, his work shows the influence of Gandhi, making a Muslim the protagonist in a Hindu dominated land. Francis B. Singh opines that "A Passage to India breathes a Gandhian spirit. It is not only that Forster was partial to Muslims that made him choose Aziz as his central character. Rather, he saw, like many of the political leaders of the early twentieth century, that in
India, religion and politics went hand in hand. He picked upon a Muslim because he believed that if a Muslim could thrive under the influence of Hindu politics, then India's nationhood could never be belittled. In this way, Forster expresses in fiction what Gandhi had also said, that India was a nation because there were people belonging to different communities living there” (275).

However, in the text, there is a larger juxtaposition, that between Indian religion and Western religion. In other words, the Indian religions are contrasted with Christianity. It is more like a triangle with Moslems at one point, Hindus at the second, while the Christians at the third point. Each is juxtaposed with the other two but owing to the equation of the colonizer-colonized, two points come together as Indian religion in contrast to Christianity. But even in such a union, the individuality of each Indian religion persists. Frances B. Singh asserts, “However, while Aziz' Young Party orientation leads him to formulate an independent country, that nation is as different from what Muslim politicians like Iqbal and Ali had in mind as Mecca, the place mentioned in the poem, is from India, the place mentioned in the political statement. The nation which they conceived was to be an Islamic one meant exclusively for Muslims, an extension of Mecca. Aziz' state, on the other hand, is plural and inclusive: ‘Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all ....’ (266).

Christianity, in the text has two facets. One, the sterilized one of Ronny, the master, as Glen O. Allen observes in “Structure, Symbol, and Theme in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India”, “Ronny's religion was of the sterilized Public School brand, which never goes bad, even in the tropics” (936). The other, that of Mrs Moore, more intellectual, as Glen O. Allen adds, “Mrs. Moore, the other major character of the western group, bears a strong though subtle resemblance to Fielding and Adela. Though endowed with some of the emotional spontaneity of an Aziz and the mystical sensitivity of a Godbole, her strongest moorings are of ultimate intellectual origin. Though not doctrinaire in her beliefs, she is nevertheless a practising Christian, and so deeply embedded are the roots of Christianity in the traditions of western thought that Mrs. Moore, without being intellectually disposed, is intellectually committed; without having the capacity for thought, she is nevertheless a victim of her intellectual heritage” (937).
Men like Ronny are not concerned with religion in India, surprising as it appears, for ‘Divide and Rule’ was a major weapon unleashed by the British on the natives. They are solely into the administrative and political aspect of India. Women characters like Adela and Mrs Moore are the ones who try to comprehend India through religion and find their own religion wanting. Glen O. Allen adds, “The experience of the caves thrusts upon these western women the inadequacy of the Christian and the intellectual points of view (946). Their religion fails the test of the caves where everything comes down to a ‘bourn’. Christianity misses out on an important aspect of religion, merriment and joy, found in Hinduism and reflected through the festival. Glenn Pedersen says, “The Hindus have included ‘what Christianity has shirked... merriment. All spirit as well as all matter must participate in salvation’; otherwise ‘the circle is incomplete’ (241). Forster, hence, rejects Christianity as it provides a moral system instead of providing an integrated view of life.

However, in the juxtaposition of Indian religion with an inadequate Christianity, the Indian religion, too, shows its limitations, as Glen O. Allen says that “it is not surprising that India, which, according to Forster, "mirrors the universe"...has no unity itself, [and] in the history of its religious philosophy...embraced an approximation of each one of these "attitudes towards life" as a way of salvation” (937). Islam emerges with its limitations and a pertinent example is seen when it is not able to grasp the caves at all and hence, the ‘echo’ eludes Mohammedanism. Michael Spencer opines that “to turn to the novel itself...we can see Mohammedanism dismissed with the comment that it, like Christianity, does not penetrate very far into the mysteries of reality. At one place in the book we are shown Fielding thinking about the echo in the Marabar Caves and then we are told that "it belonged to the universe that he had missed or rejected. And the mosque missed it too...” (282).

Hinduism, the other Indian religion in the text, attempts to answer the caves with its inclusiveness of everything into itself. Michael Spencer adds, “In Hinduism, the monistic approach to reality is represented primarily by Vedantic philosophy, where everything is a part of Brahman, an impersonal God without any qualifying attributes capable of making Him conceivable to the mind” (284). But the caves are not Hindu, they are Jain, a sect that looks at Hinduism with skepticism. Moreover, the Hindu
God, as discussed earlier, is all for Himself, as Robert L. Selig asserts, "If Mrs. Moore's "God is love" refers to a Christian Deity who saves meritorious individuals and resurrects them into a heaven filled with other separate individuals ("and am I good and is he bad and are we saved?") the Deity of "God is Love" shares existence with no individual but Himself" (478). What Hinduism, then achieves is only a reconciliation of the 'self' rather than a unity with the universe and the divine. Gertrude M. White says: “Unity of this kind is achieved not with but against; it is essentially hostile and evil in nature, and the breeder of more hostility and more evil” (137). The “Temple”, then, attempts a reconciliation and not unity. What emerges, then is an ‘Indian muddle’ that is unresolved making the Indian-English friendship an impossibility till the English stay in India. When the English leave the country, the external power structure will cease. Then, maybe, the ‘Indian muddle’ will be resolved and this might give rise to a narrative where a possibility of friendship on equal terms is feasible.

Religion, then, as a whole, in the text, emerges as unsuccessful and unconvincing. In "Déjà vu:" Forster's Self-Echoes in "A Passage to India", Archibald E. Irwin says, “And in this last novel religion fails” (457). Forster’s comparison of Gokul to Bethlehem towards the end of the “Temple” indicates the inadequacy of any of the three religions in finding an underlying unified identity for the country. The inability of Forster to resolve the religious muddle of India can be attributed to the largely individualistic philosophy of the West, evident in Midnight’s Children and The Inheritance of Loss. The West largely concerns itself with the individual rather than the group whereas India regards the individual only a part of a particular religion and caste, barriers that cannot be broken unlike in the West. In “Forster's Symbolic Form”, Glenn Pedersen asserts, “But to be aware is also not enough. One must be” (232). The Western Intellectual perspective was applied by Forster to conceive of the Indian religion but Indian religion is based in ‘being’ a part of a set-up. In “Authority and Identity in India”, T. G. Vaidyanathan asserts, “Indian identity is never the sovereign identity of Western man (which, as we have seen, is guaranteed by a sovereign divinity) but is derived endogamously from others belonging to the same clan, tribe, or caste. It is an other-directed identity” (153). The Indian religious affair, then has never been personal, unlike the West. But Forster applied the Western Principle to Indian religion and hence fails to resolve the religious muddle.
In this muddle, as Forster sees it, three things go missing: the divide and rule policy of the British; the role of the missionaries in India; and the caste system in the country. Hardly does one find any mention of the Divide and Rule policy by the British officials. They are rather immune to religion, Ronny being an example. They have a one-point agenda of ruling the "wretched country by force". Secondly, the text does not rake the issue of the missionaries coming to India for spreading Christianity. Probably, the failure of Forster to portray Christianity convincingly prevented him from doing so. Third, and of course, one of the most vital ingredients missing is caste, the system that divides the society into categories. It has been a part of Indian religion since time immemorial. Michael Spencer opines that an "overturning of the caste system, since everyone is mingled together in the act of worship, [is] a condition which would never occur in the daily routine of the average Indian village" (286). But Forster does not deal with it, rather he concentrates on the individualistic philosophy of the West.

The narratorial point-of-view becomes important in the entire discussion. Forster is an Englishman and the narration reflects this through language which is more 'Englishized' than Indianized. The characters, then, emerge from the perspective of the West. The representation of religion too has to be analyzed in the light of this. The 'colonial weight' on Forster's shoulders must have affected his portrayal of the characters. Critics assert that the colonial ideology in the minds of the English writers has dominated their productions. The work, as a result, largely revolves around the 'Western outlook' because he belongs there. "At the most, one finds an American, British, or European scholar trying to interpret them [Indians] in the light of a prefabricated psychology" (Chaudhuri 92). However, Forster's failure to convincingly present Christianity too is a debatable issue.

Religion, then, assumes a critical space in the text, sharing equal, if not more, space with the colonial question. In fact, both the issues of religion and colonialism work together towards the issue of imperialist hegemony and the validity of the British in India. In "The Tame in Pursuit of the Savage: The Posthumous Fiction of E. M. Forster", June Perry Levine asserts, "The body of the story tersely indicts the interdependence of evangelical religion and colonialism in the imperialist endeavor" (84). However, just as Forster leaves the colonial question unanswered, religious
question too is not clearly answered, with none of the religions assuming a satisfactory stance, thereby adding to the ambiguity which has been attributed to the novel since its publication. Archibald E. Irwin opines: “In *A Passage to India*, religion, merely sporadically in the background in his other works, comes to the fore and represents a context in which the tension between vision and nightmare informing the whole action can be appreciated” (457).

India, then, emerges as a country with two religions, Hinduism and Islam, and the two share a relationship that is not ‘extremely cordial’ but at the same time, not grounded in hatred. Hindus and Muslims verge on a dislike for each other but in spite of that, they are united in their mutual hatred for the British. Forster’s India, then, revolves around Hinduism and Islam that is juxtaposed to Christianity. Indian religion emerges unsatisfactory, just like the muddle, thereby reflecting the presence of the colonial order in India. What however, is surprising is that even Christianity, the colonizer’s religion emerges unsatisfactory. Forster’s India, thus, emerges as a multi-religious nation struggling to free itself from the colonial oppression.

Salman Rushdie bears certain affinities to the author of *A Passage to India*. Just like Forster, Rushdie too belongs to the category of writers who are not settled in India but have an experience of the country: while Forster is a British who visited India twice, Rushdie is an Indian born, but not a regular resident of the country. As such, his authority over the representation of India has been regularly questioned. As Samir Dayal observes in “The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*”,

If after *Satanic Verses* Rushdie was attacked for his allegedly unflattering representation of what is dear to Muslims, after the more recent book [*The Moor’s Last Sigh*] he has been attacked for being hostile to the rhetoric of Hindu fundamentalism and Hindutva: Bal Thackeray, a contemporary Hindu nationalist lampooned in the novel in the character Raman "Mainduck" Fielding, has abjected Rushie as "a man with no homeland" and therefore no right to criticize. Is Rushdie maligning the Hindu majority in India and demonizing Islam from a Eurocentric or cosmopolitan perspective? (40).
The representation of religion and identity in *Midnight's Children*, then, assumes vital significance in the light of the above statement. How does Rushdie deal with the all pervading issue of religion and identity in the text?

Critics see the novel as composed from a Westerners’ perspective, thereby carrying little of the Indian point-of-view. They maintain that Rushdie’s global ethnicity, greatly against its Indian counterpart, portrays an India that is distinct from the ‘real’ India. Of course, there have been voices against this interpretation of Rushdie’s novel, as is evident from the following observation of Samir Dayal: “At any rate, the cosmopolitan sensibility in Rushdie is always leavened by an acute sense of the local and the everyday, so it need not be "read" simply as rootlessness. His cosmopolitanism does not disable his characteristically astute ability to light upon the odd, piquant detail in order to evoke an immediately experienced and invincibly lived sense of everyday life in the non-metropolitan Third World. Rushdie is ambivalent about the implications of cosmopolitanism, but he construes situational ambivalence as both a problem and a strength. What is more, he construes ambivalence as necessary to understanding cultural location in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, and nation,...” (“The Liminalities of Nation” 41). But, by and large, the expatriate nature of Rushdie is seen as a major reason for his ‘rootlessness’ leading to his alienation from the ‘real’ India. Critics argue that it is Rushdie’s alienation from India and his own religion that gives *Midnight’s Children* a monotheistic look. M. Keith Booker observes:

> Time and again, Rushdie emphasizes the fact that Islam is the religion of one God, a monotheism that forms a particularly striking symbol in the context of heteroglossic, polytheistic India, "a country whose population of deities rivalled the numbers of its people". As recent reactions to Rushdie's work so vividly demonstrate, it is characteristic of certain fanatical devotees of Islamic fundamentalism to be totally intolerant of all alternative modes of thought (991).

Rushdie, then, emerges as a writer who, thoroughly Westernized as he is, challenges any possibility of religion having any alternative modes of thought. The identity of an individual, thus, is also determined and stable as being a Muslim or a non-Muslim, a Hindu. The other identities assimilate within this. This is much like *A Passage to*
India where the characters primarily are natives or non-natives and then other identities, including religious, comes within this fold. He is held by critics to be a thoroughly colonial writer in post-colonial times.

However, *Midnight’s Children* seems to reflect more than a colonial representation of India; similarly, too, its religion represents much more than mere monotheism. A very pertinent example is the saving of the life of Lifafa Das, a Hindu, by Amina Sinai, a Muslim, by threatening people with her pregnancy and letting him in in spite of opposition by Zohra. Though a minor incident in the context of the novel that deals with the history of a nation and Saleem, it is nevertheless, extremely significant in reflecting the religious amplitude of the text. The incident reflects the multifacetedness of the country, as reflected in the text, and the presence of characters who revel in it. In “The Novels of Salman Rushdie: Mediated Reality as Fantasy”, Syed Amanuddin asserts, “Amina, a Muslim lady, threatens to sacrifice herself and her child (she is pregnant), if the life of the innocent Hindu who came to entertain people in the Muslim neighborhood is not spared” (44). It reflects that religion is more than merely the Hindu & Muslim differences.

*Midnight’s Children*, therefore, seems to represent religion and identity in a more vivid and complex manner than what the conventional critics believe. The novel deals with a Muslim family and early in the narrative a religious crisis takes place. This crisis, as depicted by the narrator, is initiated due to Westernization and so the representation of religion revolves around Westernization and its impact on the Eastern concept of living. “One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915, my grandfather Aadam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray...he resolved never again to kiss earth for any god or man” (*Midnight’s Children* 4). The dislike for religion is evident right in the very beginning. Aadam, for the reason that the prayer led to an injury on his nose, decided to do away with praying. The real reason behind the exercise, however, was that he was unable to come to terms with a God that could not stand on the parameters of Western thought. “To reveal the secret of my grandfather’s altered vision: he had spent five years, five springs away from home. Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and
feel so utterly enclosed” (*Midnight’s Children* 5). The West changes the perspective from a group ideology to an individualistic concept. The Western ideology centres on the individual and hence is in conflict with the Indian ideology of the group. Nicholas B. Dirks opines that the “old Hindu conception of the group being the basic unit of organization and the excessive individualism of the west” (3) are distinct. This conflict created problems for Aadam Aziz upon his return from Germany.

Aadam, the West returned, is unable to fathom the utility of prayer due to his newly acquired utilitarianism. As a result he cannot continue with his prayers and the geographical narrowness becomes a symbol of the suffocation represented by religion to him. Religion, perceived through ‘travelled eyes’, seems too ‘enclosed’ and ‘narrow’ to Aadam. His identity has undergone a drastic change with his Western education and as a result the East enchants him no more with its spiritualism. He is outside the domain of religion and hence, unlike the East, his identity seems to be outside the periphery of religion: he is more a member of a ‘class’, presumed to be elite and superior as compared to the East. “He also felt—inexplicably—as though the old place resented his educated, stethoscoped return...the years in Germany had returned him to a hostile environment” (*Midnight’s Children* 5-6). This crisis seems to give the idea of negation of religion in the India of Rushdie. As R. Radhakrishnan rhetorically asks: “…why is it more fashionable and/or acceptable to transgress Islam towards a secular constituency rather than the other way around?” (755). However, looking closely, it becomes evident that it is not the case as there is a different perspective to the behavior of Aadam Aziz. He is not able to abandon religion and it is evident in the ‘hole’ that his decision not to pray creates in him. Unable to fill the hole, he gives way to hatred and finally returns to the same ‘narrow’ Kashmir to die. He is in a state where he cannot worship a God in whose existence he cannot totally disbelieve. Religion, thus, and along with it the question of identity, become critical to the narrative.

The text places Islam as the major religion in India. This can be attributed to the fact that Rushdie, though an expatriate, is a Muslim thereby much more aware of the intricacies of Islam than that of Hinduism. Being an insider in Islam, he is more aware of his religion than any other and this is reflected in his treatment of Islam in the text. Islam, in *Midnight’s Children* emerges variously, which can also be referred to as
multiple Islams’. However, it does not mean that Islam is more than one, but rather highlights the various points-of-view which can be brought to bear on Islam.

The most prominent among these viewpoints is the one followed in the Orient. It is the orthodox Islam “understood as a set of practices inherently obstructive to progress and resulting from a certain metaphysical need or weakness, this Enlightenment version of Islam is usually the first of Rushdie’s Islams to make an impression” (Almond 1139). Rushdie’s narrative refers to ‘god’ in small case instead of the customary title case and that shows his approach towards religion and faith. Returning from Germany, Aadam’s nose accident while praying pulls him away from this kind of Islam to a more rational form of the religion. Ian Almond adds, “Within a single image, Rushdie seems to encapsulate every reservation he feels towards religion in general—and towards Islam in particular: faith as something essentially childlike and naive, a habit to be grown out of, a near-enough synonym for nationalism and capitalism, a myth which sometimes needs a good hard bump on the nose to be dispelled” (1137). Its rejection is reflected in his insisting on Amina giving up the purdah. Aadam says, “Your shirt covers you from neck to wrist to knee. Your loose pyjamas hide you down to and including your ankles. What we have left are your feet and face. Wife, are your face and feet obscene?’ But she wails, ‘They will see more than that! They will see my deep-deep shame!’” (Midnight’s Children 38). For Naseem the Burqa is “the symbol of [her] community in India. The entire body of the Muslims are under a black veil” (Chaudhuri 282). It is a part of her life and identity and she cannot come out of it in spite of all the attempts by her ‘westernized’ husband.

The challenge to Naseem’s faith and tradition reflects the gap between the Islam of the Orient and the rational religious affiliations of an expatriate. R. Radhakrishnan, in “Postcoloniality and The Boundaries of Identity” questions:

Why do Islamic forms of hybridity, such as women wearing veils and attending western schools (here again I am not defending the veils, but I hope my readers will see that I am making a different point here) encounter resistance and ridicule? Why is it that the targets of "ethnic cleansing" are people who see their identities as coextensive with a religion?... I would argue that it is only in a philosophic bohemian
sense that occidental hybridity is the victim, but historically speaking, the victims are those groups of people who are striving for any kind of collective identity other than the forms of sovereignty prescribed by western secularism (755).

However, the identity of Naseem, grounded in orthodox religion is more powerful than the expatriate and utilitarian existence of Aadam, struggling between the East and the West. Rushdie, as the author, understanding his own limitations as one between the two worlds makes it explicitly clear in the narrative that it is a piece of fiction and an attempt at finding a basis for such divided existences. His text, then is a search for an ‘imaginary homeland’, a place where he can live with his ideals and principles. Literature seems one outlet for this desire through utopia and Midnight’s Children seems one such creation of literature. This ideal homeland is difficult to come by and hence Salman Rushdie wraps up the chapter “Imaginary Homelands” in his book Imaginary Homelands with the following line: “For God’s sake, open the universe a little more” (21). His Midnight’s Children, with its magical narrative as well as Saleem Sinai tries for the homeland but in the end he says, “...annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace” (Midnight’s Children 647). But Rushdie does not see the book as despairing or nihilistic even though he lies in the middle, an insider-outsider. The reason is that this alienation from home into a ‘new world’ has its own set of values and ideals. He says in Imaginary Homelands, “...it is not an infertile territory for the writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles” (15).

It brings in the feeling of having wronged one’s ‘own’ culture and life which in turn brings a sense of alienation and a dual identity. The idea underlying this is the incompatibility of the Eastern and the Western ideologies. Rushdie avers in Imaginary Homelands,

The Indian writer, looking back at India, does so through guilt-tinted spectacles...I am speaking now of those of us who have immigrated...and I suspect that there are times when the move seems wrong to us all, when we seem, to ourselves, post-lapsarian men and
women. We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result—as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates—we are now partly of the West (15).

Rushdie offers ‘visions’ as a ‘Westerner’ and a ‘dual character’ but does not nail down one at the cost of the other. His acceptance offers freedom to the narrative. As a result of this ‘partialness’, Aadam Aziz’s life in the novel is perpetually one with a ‘hole’. “Permanent alteration: a hole” (Midnight’s Children 7). The fact that Aadam comes back to Kashmir itself, his ‘homeland’ by domicile, to die reflects a failure to find an ‘ideal homeland’ for his divided existence. The abandoning of the Oriental religion, then, does not work for Aadam.

The second aspect that Rushdie reflects is the categorial. “…one Sindhi and one Bengali householder whose homes were separated by one of the muhalla’s few Hindu residences. The Sindhi and the Bengali had very little in common—they didn’t speak the same language or cook the same food; but they were both Muslims, and they both detested the interposed Hindu. They dropped garbage on his house from their rooftops (Midnight’s Children 94). Religion, or rather the hostile feelings they have in common for the other religion, identifies them. The two Muslims have nothing in common, neither food, nor language, nor culture, but still they are one in their mutual hatred for the Hindu. Identity, here is dependent on the religion one professes and the God one worships rather than any other thing. This categorial identity, as Patrick Colm Hogan asserts, is “first and foremost, identification with a name-Hindu, say, or Muslim. It does not even necessarily entail a set of shared beliefs” (518). Rushdie here adds a perspective to the discussion of religion where the intra-religious differences are negated and forgotten in the wake of inter-religious differences. It is like keeping the differences within a house aside to deal with an outsider. The Muslims in the text share no affinity to each other but are united in their mutual dislike for the Hindu.

The third kind of Islam represented by Rushdie is the one that is a majority and serves as the focal point towards a nationalism. Jamila, the singer, remains behind a veil, the equivalent of the purdah and more so, her vocation enables her to remain so. She is not seen by anyone but her visibility is owing to her voice, a task she undertook under the pressure of her ‘protectors’. Pakistan promotes her voice and her physical absence
as the cry for an Islamic nationalism. She is a female and hence needs to evade the eyes of the people and at the same time her sweet voice makes her the pride of Pakistan. She is ‘yearned’ for to be heard as Pakistan’s Nightingale. Ian Almond asserts: “Islam is invoked to facilitate the nationalisms proclaimed by the newly-born states of Pakistan and Bangladesh” (1142). It is the orthodox Islam dictating terms in the making of a nation, one that promotes the purdah but at the same time, the female serves as the ‘voice of the nation’. It also asserts the ‘superiority’ of the dominant religion in a nation. As Gayatri Spivak, in “Acting Bits/Identity Talk”, says, “...even children and young girls are sometimes being convinced that to be a good citizen...one has to internalize an absolute version of the majority religion,...” (800)

In contrast is the Islam offered by Rushdie as a minority. He places Islam in a state of minority and represents its functioning. Ian Almond asserts: “In a nation such as India, however, where Islam operates as a minority religion (albeit a two hundred million minority), Rushdie’s description of Islam and Muslims suddenly takes on a different tone. A love of the outsider, an innate concern for the underdog and the demographically disadvantaged and politically oppressed, pushes Rushdie to write about Muslims in the same way he writes about immigrants in Britain after the war. Islam, suddenly bereft of power and might, loses its image of nationalism’s metaphysical accomplice and,...almost becomes attractive through its very impotence” (1143). As a minority in India, Islam assumes a different identity and as Almond says, asserts itself through its ‘impotency’. The Muslim concern about the religion of the assassin rather than the tragic event itself, i.e. the assassination of Gandhi, indicates their status as a minority.

Rushdie, then, represents different aspects of Islam in Midnight’s Children, offering space to each in the narrative. Ian Almond opines that Midnight’s Children has “the presence of not one but several Islams..., a polyphony of different Islams...” (1138). His representation of Islam includes the orthodox and the rational, the categorial, the nationalist and the minority as well. This means that Islam in Rushdie’s novel, as alleged by traditional criticism, is not a monotheism but a polyphony. Ian Almond, towards the end of the article opines, “…ultimately, it almost suggests that there is no central, identifiable signified called Islam for all of the references in Rushdie’s books: his Koranic citations, his religious generals, his put-upon minorities and ignorant
bigots. There is nothing to link the Islam which suffered in Ayodhya with the Islam which bullies in Karachi; they are separate, almost mutually exclusive phenomena” (1144).

The narrative also throws light on the relationship that other religions share with the two mainstream religions of India. The narrator refers to Christianity and the references are brief. “Yara, you should’ve seen that Isa when he came, beard down to his balls, bald as an egg on his head. He was old and fagged-out but he knew his manners...he never called me crackpot, never called me tu either. Always aap. Polite, see?” (Midnight’s Children 13). Musa later says, “…I only took your precious possessions, but you, and your sahib, and his father, have taken my whole life; and in my old age you have humiliated me with Christian ayahs” (200). The two descriptions remind of J. M. Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World wherein the protagonist becomes a hero by telling the story of killing his father but when the father appears and he actually tries to kill him, he becomes a detested villain. The reference to Christianity in romance is appealing and beautiful but the moment Christianity comes as a reality in the lives of the people, hostility creeps in. Christianity, then, is no more a ‘polite and mannered’ religion but a destroyer of one’s life.

That religion holds a central place in the lives of the people is evident. But, there is no uniformity regarding religion and standard of the identity. This lack of a stable religion and identity can be seen from the very beginning of the text when Shiva and Saleem are interchanged, also changing their religions and parentage. M. Keith Booker says: “One of the most vivid representations of this theme of unstable identity involves Saleem Sinai in Midnight’s Children, who is physically (or at least so he believes) cracking and fragmenting into pieces. Saleem also serves as a particularly apt figure of the instability of identity because he is literally not himself. Secretly switched at birth with the infant who grows up to become the sinister Major Shiva, he is brought up by parents who are not his own” (982-983). The successful interchange of Saleem and Shiva, as infants, reflects clearly that religion and religious identity are not biologically determined. They are social phenomenon and hence volatile and unstable like social structures themselves. Rushdie, thus, deals with various religious perspectives and unstable identities emerging from them in Midnight’s Children.
The treatment of religion and identity by Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* evokes variable reactions and by and large, the reaction to his texts has not been favorable in religious circles. Tim Brennan asserts: "To betray a religion one has first to be a real part of it....Rushdie, then, is a renegade only in the sense that Muhammad was to the pagan Meccans and the Jews of Medina..." (273). Does Rushdie betray Islam being a Muslim and assume the status of a ‘renegade’ in representing religion and Islam thus?

Looking at *Midnight's Children*, one finds the presence of multiple Islams, much against the orthodox monotheistic Islam. Syed Amannuddin defends Rushdie with his own words. He says, “In his interview, Rushdie said 'I don't think that migration, the process of being up-rooted, necessarily leads to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It's not the traditional identity crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many places. The problems are of excess rather than of absence... What I have is a feeling of overcrowding. It's not that there are pulls in too many directions so much as too many voices speaking at the same time’” (43). The presence of multiple voices of Islam in *Midnight's Children*, then, is an outcome of ‘the excess’ and this multiplicity of perspectives comes from Rushdie’s ‘existence’ as an expatriate.

The religious portrayal, thus, emerges as a counter narrative to the traditional and orthodox representations of religion and identity. In “The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie's *Shame*”, Samir Dayal opines, “Rushdie is suspicious of (received) history, which is why after all he is interested in a Third World counter-narrative, or what I began by calling a (sub)version” (“The Liminalities of Nation” 42). His narrative questions the orthodox portrayals of religion by calling forth a modified version of Islam objecting to the inadequacies of the orthodox one. Rushdie’s polyphony of religion, Islam here, is an effort to challenge the standard judgements and values attached to religion, stressing on the point that excessive obsession with them shall lead to a destructive outcome. Syed Amanuddin says in defence of Rushdie’s *Midnight's Children* that it “implies the danger to the child of the subcontinent's independence if religious fanaticism and emotional unreason were to reign supreme in the streets of India” (44). But, at the same time, Rushdie suggests that a complete overturning of the traditional order is neither feasible nor necessary.

M. Keith Booker asserts, “There is a character (Aadam Aziz) in *Midnight's Children*
who, having lost his religious faith, experiences the sensation of a hole at the heart of his very self" (993-994). The ‘hole’ in Aadam, thus, symbolizes the non-feasibility and non-requirement of the overhaul.

Rushdie’s text questions the traditional notion of stable identities as welll as religion in talking about various Islams, the changing identities in partition and politically motivated identities during the emergency. Rushdie, the Post-colonial writer, also insists on the presence and assertion of the ‘self’, the subjective, in all frames of life, including religion. But, opines M. Keith Booker, “Rushdie's contention, then, is not that we should not have faith, but that each of us should have the freedom and opportunity to explore and enact his or her own faith in his or her own way. Rushdie is an apostle of freedom, proclaiming the creed that none of us can be truly free as long as any of us remain oppressed” (994). The text represents an alternative power structure wherein the various voices and opinions have substantial space rather than one ideology prevailing over the others. Much unlike A Passage to India where Islam and religion do not come across as satisfying and colonial legacy prevails over the rest, Midnight’s Children delves into a polyphony of voices. Ian Almond asserts, “If novels like Midnight's Children and The Moor's Last Sigh present an interrogation of these different vocabularies within Islam, it is primarily because these texts resent the kind of power structures which establish centers and peripheries, mainstreams and margins, prophets and heretics. Such a struggle against the idea of a central signifier for Islam, something which Islam must necessarily mean…” (1148).

However, Sikhism does not occupy a space in the narrative and there is only a brief reference to it through a Sikh in a bicycle repair shop whose turban is pushed off his head and a few more hints here and there. Sikhs, who suffered in partition, with their Punjab divided into two, one each to India and Pakistan, are not present in the narrative.

But, the treatment of religion by Rushdie in Midnight’s Children creates an image of heterogeneity, the simultaneous existence of several differences in a country, and the capability of the country to imbibe these differences. The Hindus, Muslims and the Christians, with their individual and group identities indicate a heteroglossia in the narrative. This is precisely why James Harrison considers Midnight’s Children a ‘pluralistic novel’.
Rushdie’s effort is a post-colonial attempt at imbibing multiplicity but without abandoning the traditional stance. Ian Almond says, “One African writer has defined the postcolonial as the ‘space-clearing gesture ... concerned with going beyond, with transcending coloniality.’ What Rushdie’s texts may be searching for, in many ways, is a Muslim space beyond Islam but one which does not dispense with Islam: to reinvoke a tradition that can accommodate plurality without strangling it,...” (1150). Rushdie, in his attempt does not betray religion and Islam but explores and disseminates the heterogeneity in them. However, the problem lies in its acceptance because it is against the orthodox notions. Rushdie’s post-coloniality does not augur well for the traditional concepts of religion. Almond adds:

...texts such as *Shame, Midnight’s Children, and The Satanic Verses* remain (to quote Sara Suleri), "deeply Islamic," in form and reference, if not in content. The doubly relevant question of whether Rushdie's oeuvre can accommodate Islam-and whether, one day, Islam will accommodate Rushdie will, perhaps, have to be reformulated as we discover, with the passage of years, what kind of writer Rushdie will have been...” (1150).

The India represented by Rushdie emerges as one that is more inclined towards Islam and the reason for this could probably be that Rushdie is a Muslim himself. However, it does not mean that Rushdie's India is only Islamic. The fact that Saleem is a Hindu by birth and his juxtaposing with Shiva; and the reference to Christianity ascertain the presence of different religious faiths in India. What is pertinent is that no religious order overshadows the other, even though the space offered to Islam is more. Islam, too does not emerge as a monotheistic Islam but a polyphony much like the different religions in India. Islam is discussed as an Oriental’s religion, Categorial, as a majority and as a minority, reflecting its various facets. India, then, emerges as polyphony of various religious voices.

Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*, like *Midnight’s Children*, belongs to the post-colonial era and explores India of the pre- and post-independence times through a story. In case of *Midnight’s Children* it is through the story of Saleem Sinai that India is represented while in *The Great Indian Novel* the representation is done against the backdrop of *The Mahabharata*, the great Indian epic.
Conventionally, the critics see the novel as one that represents the politics and history of India. In an interview, Shashi Tharoor himself says: "[The Mahabharata] struck me as a work of such contemporary resonance, it helped crystallize my own inchoate ideas about issues. I wanted a vehicle to transmit some of my political and historical interests in the evolution of modern India." (Interview 44). The statement reflects the authorial frame of mind while composing the novel. His was an attempt to produce a text that reflects the "political and historical interests" of India over a period of time.

Starting with pre-independence times, the text moves on encompassing the freedom struggle; independence accompanied with partition; and finally goes up to the proclamation of emergency under the iron fist of Priya Duryodhini. Several political events that India experienced during the period are referred to in the text. Secondly, owing to the time period covered in the narrative, the text assumes the status of a historical novel, one in which recent history has been depicted. His is an attempt to, as Kanishka Chowdhury opines, "recover a ‘national past’" (42).

Thus, by and large, critics have seen The Great Indian Novel as a political history of India. In his review of The Great Indian Novel, G. R. Taneja asserts, "In his first fictional attempt Shashi Tharoor, in The Great Indian Novel, uses the plot and characters from the Mahabharata to reinterpret, much like Rushdie in Midnight's Children, the political history of modern India" (770). The critics see the text as a representation of historical and political interests of India with little or no interest in India’s religious identity. They point out that religion, or ‘dharma’, is conspicuous by its inability to deal with the emerging crisis. In other words, if at all there is dharma and religion, then it fails to cope with the degenerated India of today. G. R. Taneja adds, “…dharma, offers no way to deal with the disillusionment generated by the darkening present" (771).

However, religion performs a much more critical role in the text. It is present as a force in the novel that guides not only the themes but the characters as well in the course of the representation of India. To start with the role of religion in The Great Indian Novel, the characters are bound within its framework. A prime example of this is Eklavya, the son of a maidservant in the palace. Eklavya learns all that Drona offers to the Pandavas without their knowledge. He cannot ask for being trained because ‘he does not belong there’. As Drona says, “You have intruded where you do not belong”
(The Great Indian Novel 198). Eklavya, by virtue of being a ‘low born’ in the religious hierarchy is a minority and this determines his identity. ‘His area’ of work and duty does not include what he learns. The “immediate reality of caste, namely the diversity of particular jatis with specific characteristics” (Chaterjee 175) determines the ‘area of work’ of an individual. The penalty for being an intruder or for stepping outside the ‘specific characteristics’ is “the thumb of your right hand” (The Great Indian Novel 198). Times have changed since The Mahabharata, so have the genres; and so has the way of representing society, but a low-born still remains a minority, struggling for an identity.

Maybe because the text is modeled on The Mahabharata, Eklavya has to be this way, but there is a major deviation, “I...I’m sorry, sir, but I cannot destroy my life and my mother’s to pay your fee” (The Great Indian Novel 199). The Eklavya of The Mahabharata had chopped off his thumb at the feet of Dronacharaya, but the Eklavya of the text does not. So the text only models on The Mahabharata but portrays the present times through it. Preeti S. Pathak also states that the “legend of Eklavya has been turned upside down” (240) in the novel. However, when Yudhisthir asks Drona how he would have reacted had Eklavya acceded to cut his thumb, Drona, “laughs shortly, waving the question away. ‘Study’, he says, ‘study your epics, young man’ (The Great Indian Novel 199). This reaction of Drona and his reference to the Epics raises certain questions about the treatment of the issue of identity and minority. Why does Drona laugh and ask them to read the Epics?

The fact that Drona asks for the thumb so easily is clear when he says, “Good. My fee, Eklavya, is the thumb of your right hand” (The Great Indian Novel 198). He is so sure of himself and clear while asking, he in fact “bellows” (198), “You come first in class boy, and you don’t understand? You promised me my fee, if you can pay it. And I want the thumb of your right hand” (198). The ease and confidence with which Drona asks for his ‘fee’ either reflects that Eklavya has no option but to accede to his demand or that Drona is firm and convinced of his superior status as a high caste. In either case he almost takes it for granted that Eklavya will have to give his thumb to him without any ‘hassles’. He still sees the entire concept as heavily biased in favour of the ‘high and elite’ and so demands his ‘fee’. 

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However, the statement, “...if you can pay it” (198), leaves some gap for Eklavya to escape. Why does Drona do that? To add to this, he laughs when Yudhisthir asks him what he would have done if Eklavya would have readily agreed to give the ‘fee’. This suggests that Drona is well aware that Eklavya will refuse his demand. This implies that either the classical Hindu structure has degenerated with the passage of time or that Eklavya, since The Mahabharata, has covered some distance and is willing to assert his right.

But, “Next time, Arjuna stands first in the examinations – alone” (The Great Indian Novel 199). This means that the ‘elite-low’ status and division on the basis of religion, caste and class stills prevails. Eklavya may be marginally forward but is still beneath the elites. Preeti S. Pathak says: “The parody ends with Drona expelling Eklavya” (240). Eklavya does not ‘dare’ defy the social ‘order’ and hence is relegated into oblivion. He finds the spotlight later as Priya’s candidate for Presidency. He wins the elections but his tenure as the First Citizen of the country is sealed even before it begins. Priya says when his candidature is discussed, “Not really’, she said. ‘Not exactly. Well, yes’” (The Great Indian Novel 349) to the question, “...you want him to agree in advance to sign every bill you submit to him?” (349). Eklavya is the ‘hand picked’ President under the Prime Ministership of Priya Duryodhini. Even as the President of the country he still has no freedom and authority of his own. His apparent authority is just a veil to hide his centuries old status as the ‘outcaste Eklavya’ in the religious hierarchy. His growth then, whatever it has been, appears individual, while the social strata is the same where the likes of him still “do not belong” (The Great Indian Novel 198). The legend of Eklavya then, is one that is subservient to the traditional Hindu order of caste.

It also remains questionable as to whether Eklavya has improved so much as to defy orders or is it that orthodox Hinduism does not assert the same authority it once did. The portrayal of Eklavya also reflects on the relationship of religion and minority with identity. Eklavya’s religion and his status as the marginal in the caste hierarchy as well as class set up define his identity and he has little option but to abide by that. His relegation into oblivion with his inability to pay the ‘fee’ of his Guru even thousands of years after it first happened to him speaks for his status as the ‘helpless’. He can refuse the ‘fee’ but cannot still emerge from the stranglehold of caste and
class, something too much for him to handle. Eklavya cannot overrule the decision of his 'superior' Drona as he is still not beyond the boundaries of caste which strongly hold him in its chains of hierarchy, “the core value behind the caste system…” (Dirks, 4).

Religion also surrounds the central character in *The Great Indian Novel*, Gangaji. When Pandu stands for the Presidentship of the Kaurava Party against Dhritrashtra, Gangaji comes out with the idea, “There will, of course, be another candidate. Not you. Not, in fact, anyone particularly well-known in the country. Perhaps an Untouchable – I mean a Child of God. He will be more appropriate symbol for the party than another former princeling. And I shall let it be known that that is my view”. He adds, “…But should it fail, it will [be the] protégé who will have been defeated”. And in case he wins, “we shall have just the sort of president we need, a symbol. What, after all, is the presidency? It is a title that confers a degree of presumed authority on the holder. The British King, too, has such a title. But he is not the most powerful man in England” (*The Great Indian Novel* 167).

Gangaji’s intentions are clear from his statements. Just like Priya nominated Eklavya for the post of President of India, he plans to nominate a ‘Son of God’ for the presidency of Kaurava Party. Gangaji intends giving no authority to the Harijan to be nominated as the President in case he wins the election. It becomes a ‘classic example’ of attempting to kill two birds with one shot. If he wins, the power still remains with him and at the same time Pandu is relegated into oblivion. Though the Harijan loses, but Gangaji makes it so difficult for Pandu to work as the President that he resigns after losing a self-initiated vote of confidence. Gangaji’s candidate is made the ‘Acting President’ and in the subsequent elections he is elected to the post.

Gangaji, through an ‘outcaste’ for President is aiming at keeping the power with the high caste people, namely himself and Dhritrashtra, and appeasing the low castes at the same time by having one amongst them as the President. This will ensure their participation in the independence movement under him through the Kaurava Party. The underlying principle behind the actions of Gangaji appears to be the Hindu caste structure where he and Dhritrashtra stand at the pedestal while others like the Harijan below them.
Gangaji, in the text emerges as a character who desires to be greater than the institutions themselves. Kanishka Chowdhury opines: “The all pervasive figure of Gandhi/Gangaji, the so called enigmatic individual genius, is a diversion from the collective social forces that shape any age” (44). Gangaji insists on having things done *his* own way and this is the reason why he is against Pandu’s candidature for the Presidency of the Kaurava Party. Pandu, the ‘extremist’, allegorizing Bose, believes in “ends justify the means’ but for Gandhi ‘means were equally important’ in that they should follow *his* path. Mazhar Kibriya asserts: “In fact, Gandhi ji, by joining any organization in India wanted to affect its policies and programmes along the lines of *his* [Italics mine] theory of non-violence” (201).

Here Tharoor seems to endorse the point of view of the major section of Dalit writings. Dalit writings see Gandhi as a schemer, someone whose major aim was to keep the national movement in the hands of the Caste Hindus led by him and the Dalits were incorporated into it for fear of missing the nationalistic feature. However, this is where the affiliation ends. In the entire episode, the “Son of God” is merely used as a means to achieve desired ends. There is no more of him in the text as his ‘role’ is over there and then. The ‘untouchable’ still stands at the margins, a ready tool to be used as and when required by the caste people. He is still voiceless and inconsequential as an individual and assumes significance only when ‘required’. Gangaji’s use of the words like ‘untouchable’, ‘symbol’, ‘confers’ and ‘presumed’ clearly reflects his opinion of the ‘untouchables’, the Harijans. They are symbols having presumed powers to be operated by caste people. This reminds one strongly of the Dalit aversion to the word *Harijan* as a mere conferring of a milder name to appease them and keep them with the ‘nation’ thereby sustaining its national and secular status. The designation actually gives them no ‘practical’ advantage but offers a lot of positives to the caste people as it keeps the untouchables appeased and ‘with them’, and this is what counts. The text, hence, seems to assume a high caste Hindu attitude.

Gangaji covers up his personal motive behind the popular motive of placing a Harijan at the helm. Religion, then, becomes a tool for Gangaji. Gangaji’s nomination of an untouchable for presidency of the party is based on his perfect calculation of the social situation. He knows that the untouchable will not be able to assert himself in *his*
presence and that by making him president he will garner the goodwill of the low-castes and the masses. Kibriya says: “Gandhi as a shrewd leader knew that the foundation of his leadership could be laid by mobilizing the masses of the rural areas” (225).

Moreover, some critics argue that Gandhi was an arch antisecularist because he “claimed that his religion was his politics and his politics was his religion” (Dirks 299). Gangaji emerges as a politician and schemer in the narrative. To add to this is the fact that Gangaji dies with the words, “I have failed”, on his lips. The reasons for the failure may be twofold. First, Gangaji ‘succeeding’ in the end cannot be a possibility owing to the model taken by Tharoor for his novel, The Mahabharata. The roots from where the characters and the plot have been drawn have to reflect in the novel, and Gangaji, as a result, assumes the status of a schemer, looking forward to the independence of the country at all costs through his ‘great war’ and trying to consolidate the outcastes with him for the same. Tharoor, in his portrayal of Gangaji, the great ‘sage’, draws on the character of Bhishma and just like Bhishma had his ‘limitations’ and hence could not avert the great war, similarly Gangaji has to be the politician ‘sage’ with his own ‘limitations’. Secondly, Gangaji assumes a status greater than the institution, in this case, Hinduism. Religion is used by him as a tool to further his own ideology and principles. However, this superiority of an individual over Hinduism is not comprehensible and hence his ‘grand plans are destroyed’ with partition and he is killed by Shikhandin, glorified in his brief moments of visibility during the killing of Gandhi.

In the characters of Eklavya and Gangaji, one thing that emerges common is the caste structure of Hinduism. It is the Hindu system that identifies the two characters and its superiority over the individual prevails. In other words, the text seems to be reflecting a high caste Hindu ideology. Neither Eklavya, the low caste, nor Gangaji, the high caste, can escape it. Tharoor, a Hindu himself, appears to assert a monotheistic Hinduism in the text, one that is governed by caste distinctions and emphasizes its supremacy. Kanishka Chowdhury opines, “As a Westernized, middle-class Hindu, he is unable to get beyond the habitual preoccupations of his class” (44).

Secondly, with the character of Eklavya and the comparison of Bhishma of The Mahabharata and Gangaji, it emerges that there are two distinct Indias. The old one
where Hinduism was at its peak is the golden period of religion. It was the time when *The Mahabharata* was composed and hence, structurally, the text derives from the epic. It was the time when Eklavya willingly conceded to his guru's demand and Bhishma could afford to be the warrior saint. In contrast is the present age, a corrupt and decayed era when the golden period of Hinduism is over giving way to a deteriorated and degraded form of the religion. Eklavya, in the present age, dares defy the orders of his guru and Gangaji tries to be above religion itself. Kanishka Chowdhury's remark is apt in this context: "Such historical versions [of the Golden Age] further 'the great men' myth of history and erase the politics of the people" (44).

The dominance of the Hindu ideology is asserted in another incident. Partition finds space in the text and historically it is known to be a political event with religious roots: the very basis of partition was religion. The Muslim dominated region was Karnistan while the Hindu dominated area was India. The text places the entire blame for partition on the Muslim League and its leader Kama Ali Jinnah. "It was better to give Kama what he wanted and build the India of our dreams in peace and freedom without him" (*The Great Indian Novel* 233). This indicates a desire on the part of Kama to have a separate country for himself.

The novel does not talk of the Muslim cause but emphasizes the Kama cause. Karna, the unproclaimed son of Kunti, brought up by a Muslim family, is so overwhelmingly at the centre of the partition scenario that it is difficult to tell whether it is the Muslim League or the individual himself [Karna] who wants a separate country. Prakash Almedia says, "No wonder, after the creation of Pakistan, and while leaving for Karachi, he [Jinnah] told Iskandar Mirza that 'it was not the Muslim League that brought in Pakistan, but it was he who brought in Pakistan with his stenographer" (129). However, Karna still fails to emerge as a dominant 'voice' in the narrative. It is more through other characters that his desire for a separate nation is revealed.

This desire for a separate country by Karna Ali Jinnah can be attributed to the textual tendency to see the Muslims in India as the 'other', the outsiders. This is reflected largely in the character of Karna through the Muslim League. In fact, Tharoor does not delineate a clear image of this idea. What is known for sure is that Karnistan is being given a shape in the narrative and the underlying reasons attributed to it are the 'otherness' of the Muslims in a Hindu dominated country. Nicholas B. Dirks affirms
the otherness of the Muslims when he says that the Hindus are “the majority group in India, with “Muslims” as the dominant minority” (255).

What, however, is missing from the delineation of the ‘facts’ by Tharoor, is the role played by the Indian National Congress, the Kaurava party in the text and Gandhi, allegorized by Gangaji, in bringing about the trauma of partition on the nation. Several writers and critics assert that it was in fact Gandhi who sowed the seeds of this ‘otherness’, another reflection on the character of the political Gandhi, Gangaji. Prakash Almedia refers to an incident which shows that the creation of Pakistan was the result of the power struggle between Gandhi and Jinnah:

The Gujjar Sabha had hosted a garden party to welcome Gandhi...Jinnah was present to welcome Gandhi. Here...Gandhi made a mistake of calling Jinnah Mohammedan...How could he ignore the pre-eminent stature of Jinnah in the Congress and national politics? Or was it a signal to Jinnah that now...there would be a clash for supremacy? Later, this shrewdness of Gandhi became amply evident in many instances of power struggle...Gandhi vs Jinnah that was to conclude in creation of Pakistan (59-60).

The downplaying of this aspect and laying the blame for partition on Karna and Muslim League is of critical significance: it tends to make the Kaurava Party, Gangaji and their Hindu ideology blameless in the entire partition fiasco.

Tharoor, even in politicizing the religious aspect of Gangaji does not so much as suggest that Gangaji, too, could be seen as being responsible for partition. The reason again rests in the identity of Gangaji as a Caste Hindu: being a Hindu, he cannot be blamed for the partition. Shikhandin, when he kills Gangaji, does not do so because of partition but to settle personal scores. Gangaji, thus, emerges victorious and virtuous as one attempting to avert partition.

The Muslim and the Muslim League ‘voice’ is missing from the narrative and they are solely blamed for partition. However, there is another perspective to partition in the text. The entire scenario is seen by the narrator as follows:
You must not think, Ganapathi, that the trauma of Partition represented a disruption of this constant process (of evolution), a side step away from a flowing dance of creation and evolution. On the contrary, it was a part of it, for the world is not made by a tranquilizing wave of smoothly predictable occurrences but by sudden events, unexpected happenings, dramas, crises, accidents, emergencies...We are all in a state of continual disturbance...And in the process, we are all making something of ourselves, building a life, a character, a tradition that emerges from and sustains us in each succeeding crisis. This is our dharma (The Great Indian Novel 225).

A long quote, but pertinent as it reflects the narratorial perspective on the entire trauma of partition, a perspective which does not, in the least, turn out to be an empathetic one. Partition, for the author, is an ‘unexpected happening’ which helps build ‘a life, a character’ and more importantly ‘a tradition’ to sustain one in ‘each succeeding crisis’.

A major politico-religious event in The Great Indian Novel, the partition of the country into India and Karnistan is seen as a ‘positive’ event in the history of “The Great India”: a process of creation and evolution. All the massacre and carnage that takes place is justified on Nietzschean lines of the ‘superhero’ who must not suffer though the masses may. The ‘superhero’ here is the upper class which is less affected owing to its affluence and influence. This throws light on the dominant perspective in the text. Tharoor misses out on the identity created by forced mass immigration, motivated by religion. Migration, as a result of religion, brings in its train hatred and bloodshed immediately, and a broken and infirm identity in the long run. Those who personally experienced partition are still experiencing its aftereffects and those who witnessed it happen continue to remain affected by it. Tharoor does not belong to either category. He conceives of ‘identity’ as something attributed to immigration and diaspora but not ‘forced migration’ at the peril of life. That is probably why, the text manages to stay non-committal with reference to partition: The ‘voice’ is entirely with the narrator who sees the entire thing as carnage that is a part of tradition.

Also, Tharoor’s Westernized ideology emerges in the narrative as follows:
The differences were simply a fact of Indian life...We tend to label people easily, and in a country the size of ours that is perhaps inevitable, for labels are the only way out of the confusion of sheer numbers. To categorize people is to help identify them...the application of such labels uplifts each individual, for he knows there is no danger of him being lost in the national morass, that there are distinctive aspects to his personal identity which he shares only with a small group, and this specialness is advertised by the label others apply to him...And yes, when there are such differences, we do discriminate (The Great Indian Novel 134).

The quote seems to indulge in propaganda of Indian diversity: religious, cultural, ethnic, etc., in highly commercial terms. What Tharoor is trying to point is that the religious and cultural diversifications are ‘labels’ and such labels ‘advertise’ the specialness of the product under that label. Tharoor seems to be distinguishing commodities rather than people here, a Western approach of looking at the world through glasses of ‘class’ and capitalism making them view everything, including humans, as products with specific labels to advertise specialness. S. Radhakrishnan asserts, “Emphasis on logical reason, humanist ideals, social solidarity, and national efficiency are the characteristic marks of the Western attitude to life” (57). Tharoor seems to be trying to create a ‘social solidarity’ by ‘labeling’ the Indians categorically in terms of religion. His vocabulary reflects the Westernized perspective and he has no apprehensions about it. Kanishka Chowdhury, in “Revisioning History: Shashi Tharoor’s Great Indian Novel” opines, “These scholarly views are undoubtedly damaging, but they are further reinforced by Western capital’s control over marketing techniques which prelude the “normal” circulation of any text written originally in or translated into a European language” (41).

He takes ‘labeling’ as the normal order of Indian life forgetting that Indian life was never centred on the West’s class-based ideology. Moreover, commercializing religion, he reflects at his status of an ‘insider-outsider’ one with fragmented identity but refusing to accept it, unlike Rushdie. Tharoor is stuck between the western Capitalist set up and the ancient Indian hierarchical strata and finds no way out of the ‘morass’ he finds here in terms of diversity and variety of cultures and religions.
Hence, he adopts the Western principles of identifying and applies them to Indian standards. Tharoor either does not understand or his Westernized ideologies do not allow him to understand the basic difference between the West and India and any attempt to impose Westernized experiences on Indian life is merely commercializing the entire Indian living style.

The Indian life has always revolved around religious hierarchization and culture has also adapted to it, but the West looks at India from its own perspective which is ‘class’ based. This, while on one hand amounts to hegemony, on the other it projects an unreliable and misleading picture of India to the West. Tharoor tends to reflect the Westerners’ perspective of India to a reader who is global, beyond India, and hence relies on descriptions to generate an image of the country in his mind. His selection of language, English, also throws light on the readers, who certainly are not the average Indians, versed in local dialect, but uncomfortable with English. It is directed at the ‘intelligentsia’ and the English speaking West. Makarand Paranjape asserts: “...they (diasporic representations of India) may contribute to a continuing “colonization” of the Indian psyche by pandering to Western market-tastes which prefer to see India in a negative light” (11). Aadam, in Midnight’s Children is stuck in such a situation and this made ‘a hole’ in him but for Tharoor it is “simply a fact of Indian life”.

Moreover, the text offers negligible space to the ‘other’ voices (religious) in the narrative. A conspicuous absence is of Bhim Rao Ambedkar and his conversion to Buddhism. “Ambedkar threatened the unity of nationalist purpose by pressing his case for separate electorates for Scheduled Castes in a heroic struggle with Gandhiji in 1932” (Dirks 16). Tharoor, in his representation of “Great India” surprisingly misses out on Dr Ambedkar’s demand for a separate electorate for the untouchables. He only has a partially emancipated Eklavya who later gets hand picked for Presidentship of India by Priya Duryodhini. Ambedkar and his ‘struggle’ for the Indian outcastes and the untouchables is largely missing and negated by Tharoor.

This marginalization is quite surprising but it falls in place if seen from the nationalistic perspective of Gangaji who wanted everyone to fight for independence, irrespective of their religion and caste. The digression, in the form of Ambedkar, would have interfered with the ideology of Gangaji. The novel constructs nothing and
cannot construct anything of the conflict that ensued between Gandhi and Ambedkar, post 1931-32, when Gandhi sat on a hunger strike against a separate electorate for the untouchables. Harold Coward says, "...Gandhi criticized the practice of untouchability not in its own right but rather on the grounds that its continued existence obstructed national unity and thus harmed the fight for independence" (44).

Another aspect of religion that is missing is the possibility of conversion. This, though difficult, is an option, a historical proof seen in the conversion of Bhim Rao Ambedkar into Buddhism, thereby moving out of the Hindu caste hierarchy.

The text, thus, negates the 'other' opinion, the alternative viewpoint. Gary Saul Morson asserts, "In a monologic work, only the author, as the "ultimate semantic authority", retains the power to express a truth directly" (238). Tharoor, in The Great Indian Novel seems to be voicing only one perspective and all the characters are measured against this one perspective rather than being seen as independent 'voices'.

Caryl Emerson asserts, "The goal [is] to free up the hero from "plot"...from all those epic-like story lines...and thus "imprisoned outcomes"..." (127-128) but Tharoor’s characters, rather, act in accordance with religion which moves in the direction of caste Hinduism and explores no alternatives in religion.

The central concern here is that this monotheistic Hinduism is the elitist Hinduism, one that has been promoted through the centuries as valid by the Brahmins and the high castes but losing its sheen in the present times. Tharoor is critical of this because of his "nostalgia for the past, a past when India was the 'land of Rama...' the land where truth and honor and valor and dharma were worshipped as the cardinal principles of existence" (Chowdhury 44). The representation of religion in The Great Indian Novel may be summed up in the following words:

Thus to say, 'I have been on the whole a good Hindu in my story' or to regret 'how far we have travelled from the glory and splendour of our adventurous mythological heroes'(Chowdhury 47).

The text is a reflection of the loss of Hinduism of the ancient times in a secular and modern, but rotten India.

In addition to this is the Western ideology of Tharoor which is evident in his commoditization of religion. "...postcolonial writers, such as Tharoor, are themselves
the victims of divided allegiances and ambivalent loyalties; their class position among largely illiterate populations, the material and discursive attractions of metropolitan centres, and the lure of recognition and publication offers from London and New York, among other factors, contribute to their unavoidable involvement in Western cultural systems” (Chowdhury 42). This Westernized portrayal of religion adds to the Hindu representation of religion in The Great Indian Novel and creates a picture of a highly decayed, commoditized and rotten Hindu religion, in contrast to the ideal Hinduism of the ancient times. Secularism, it seems, has played havoc with India of the 20th century.

It is then, the Westernized Hindu at work in the text. Kanishka Chowdhury opines that “it is important to recognize that literary texts emerge from a complex set of historical circumstances and ‘competing ideological and cultural clusters’” (42). The Great Indian Novel, then, is a product of a caste Hindu who has been westernized by his expatriate existence. And keeping in view the intended audience, the English literate West, it presents a picture of India that evokes no positive reaction but rather goes on to strengthen the Orient’s image in their mind.

However, it is not a colonial text in the traditional sense, which reinforces the ‘images’ of India created by the colonizers. The Great Indian Novel, rather, asserts that the British dominated a depleted India, hence justifying their “White man’s burden”. Chowdhury adds, “An analysis of the historical legacy of colonialism,...does display a certain degree of uniformity in the post-colonial condition...Thus Tharoor’s project may well be close to other rewritings...” (42). His post-colonialism is a longing for that lost tradition of Hinduism, the golden age of the ancient times, when the Dronas dominated over the Eklavyas as a matter of right. It is this monotheistic Hinduism that The Great Indian Novel is based on and longs for.

The India of Tharoor pushes towards a homogeneous religious order, marginalizing all the other religious beliefs, including Islam. It is evident in the treatment meted out to the Muslim League who along with Karna is held responsible for Partition. However, this homogeneous religious order strived for is not of the present times but nostalgically looks back at the Golden era of Indain religion, when The Mahabharata was composed, lost in the ‘secularism’ of the present times.
Kitne Pakistan also delves into the Indian religious history, much like The Great Indian Novel. It invokes the use of religion and the ‘power’ it offers to its proponents whose identity it determines. Religion cannot be evaded in any discussion involving Kitne Pakistan as everything else in the text stands in relation to it. Ameena Kazi Ansari, in the “Translator’s Note” to her translation of Kitne Pakistan into English, says, “It is a novel that fictionalizes mythologies and histories. All along, it underscores the unnatural division of a people and a land along lines of religion” (ix).

The discussion is not limited to India. In fact, the text initiates a dialogue of the religious systems prevalent in world civilizations since time immemorial. These religions are not merely the conventional religious beliefs of the world but the pagan beliefs too find space in the work. The text deals with the Mesopotamian, Sumerian and Babylonian religious and mythological structures.

Moreover, unlike The Great Indian Novel it does not draw on the reserves of the ‘rich Indian heritage’ like The Mahabharata. The setting of the novel is global and even cosmic, much like an epic. The stage of the novel and the court of the adeeb and the ardali are beyond the constraints of time and space. As a result there is no mortal hero, rather, he is nameless and present throughout. Ansari adds, “Giving the protagonist a name would perhaps limit him to specific confines of name and place, both of which…transcend in the course of the narrative” (ix). In this cosmic setting, religion stands at the pinnacle of events transcending the boundaries of time and space.

Ranging across time and space to explore the global religious and mythological beliefs, Kamleshwar narrows his focus and moves onto India. Religion has been at the centre of India since early times: starting from the Vedic era when the Hindu religious section was divided into four varnas and one avarna for functionality of the society till date, religion has been at the helm of affairs. Moreover, it has played variable roles in the lives of the people over the centuries. Kitne Pakistan attempts to reflect the various facets of religion.

One role that religion has played and continues to play is that of ‘facilitating’ the attainment of power, pelf or glory. It is projected as the primary motive for all actions, but actually it is only a means to hide the real motive of ‘power possession’.
Kamleshwar presents this aspect of religion in the text, “...Tabhi ek murda daudta hua aaya aur cheekhne laga---Adeebe alia! Islam ke naam par Afghanistan kabristan ban chukka hai...Yeh charon (Ghulam Rabbani, Ahmad Shah Masood, Gulabuddin Hikmatiyar and Mohammad Umar) to Islam ka taj pehankar besharmi se khade hain, par koi dekhe to hum aam Islamparaston ka kya haal hua hail... (Kitne Pakistan 149).

Religion, hence, has been used as a veil to hide the real desires of ‘power possession’, thereby politicizing it thoroughly. The power structure generated as a result of such actions leads to a biased interpretation of history and a new kind of colonialism, which Kamleshwar calls a new Pakistan, is generated. Any rebellious instincts are crushed severely, ensuing in death, and hence, Kamleshwar pulls out a corpse to put forward this perspective. Someone already dead cannot be killed any more and so a ‘murda’ is the ‘freest’ person to have a ‘voice’ against this misuse of religion.

Kamleshwar represents the political use of religion through Babur who says, “...Adeebe alia! Afghanistan mar gaya hai. Mera Kabul mar gaya hai...mere Kabul par yeh qahar Islam ke naam par barpa kiya gaya hai!’ ” (Kitne Pakistan 150). Babur as the defender of faith is a lesser known perspective that Kamleshwar brings to the fore when he says that his country has been destroyed in the name of ‘Islam’. He is revealing the use of religion to suit political motives and is visibly upset about it, but the popular notion sees him as the destroyer of religion. This popular notion appears through Rana Sanga, “‘Babur tum kis munh se yeh baat kar rahe ho! Tumne bhi to Islam ke naam par yeh qahar Hindustan par barpa kiya tha!’ Itihaas ki ek kitab ke pannon se nikalkar Rana Sanga ne Babur ko lalkara” (Kitne Pakistan 150). The two perspectives are juxtaposed here. The more popular one has been given through Rana Sanga while the ‘unknown’ one through Babur, questioning the politicization of religion.

Traditionally, the Mughals are treated to be invaders who came to India, became the rulers and ‘established’ Islam against Hinduism. Babur counters the popular perspective as, “Hindustan mere liye Hinduon ka mulk nahin, sone ka mulk tha...mera dushman Hindustan ka Hindu nahin balki Agra ka Musalmaan badshaah Ibrahim Lodhi tha” ” (Kitne Pakistan, 150). He adds, “...Ibrahim lodhi par hamla karne ke liye tumne (Rana Sanga) aur Ibrahim Lodhi ke chacha Panjab ke subedar Daulat Khan Lodhi ne mujhe sandesh bheja tha...” (Kitne Pakistan 150). This description
tallies with Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s about the Aryans in *The Continent of Circe*, “The Aryans had come to India in high hope as if to a promised land. At last they had moved into a country which offered them, not only virgin land, but as much of it as they could wish for” (153). He adds, “...Babur...came to India in search of a kingdom and founded the Mogul empire” (155). Babur asserts his purely political intentions for his invasion of India against the popular notion of his ‘religious’ motives for invading India.

Their arrival in search of the ‘sone ki chidiya’ was just like the Aryans’ arrival into India and the negative image of the Mughals portrayed by the Hindus is equivalent to the ‘hostility’ of the ‘true sons of the soil’ then. The Aryans had, by the time the Mughals came, promoted themselves as Hindus, the ‘true sons of the land’ and the Mughals became the ‘outsiders’. This ‘promotion’ was done on the basis of caste, as Kamleshwar says, “...har baccha maa ke pet se paida hota hai par tumhare brahmano aur unke granthon ne maa ki kokh ka apmaan karte hue manushya ko Brahma ke alag-alag angon se paida karne ka sidhant paida kiya...” (Kitne Pakistan 103). The Aryans prevailed over the land better and were more unified than the aborigines, hence their ‘voice’ remained dominant throughout history.

Kamleshwar provides the perspectives of both: the ‘insiders’, Rajputs, and the ‘outsiders’, Mughals. The beauty of this representation lies in the representatives chosen by the author. Rajputs stand at the higher order of the caste hierarchy and, to add to this, are the most immediately affected party in the wake of any external aggression. So the Mughal aggression is countered by Rana Sanga, a Rajput warrior. The Mughals, on the other hand, are represented through Babur, the first Mughal ruler in India.

The issue of religion that begins with Rana Sanga and Babur, continues into modern India. The Hindus blame the Mughals for the adoption of violent means against them. “…tabhi Kashi se aawazen aane lagi—Kashi Vishwanath mandir dwasth ho gaya! Dwasth ho gaya! Mughal badshah ne hum Hinduon par hamla kiya hai, hamari aastha aur dharma par hamla kiya hai…” (Kitne Pakistan 165). It appears that the Hindus blame the Mughals and their invasion for the rise of violent Hinduism, and the 20th century struggle for a Hindu *rashtra* also indicates the same. It is significant that, owing to their majority, the Rajputs and Hindus have justified bloodshed and wars
involving them in the name of religion: in a dominantly Hindu nation, history ascertains the same where Hindu warriors fighting Mughals are projected as heroes. On the other hand, Babur clearly asserts that he had come to India for a kingdom and for wielding power.

What is reflected is that the majority manipulated religion to continue with its domination, isolating any other point-of-view that emerged. Kitne Pakistan offers space to that ‘other’ point-of-view regarding religion and its use. While the Hindus assert their tradition, Kamleshwar offers space to the Muslims to present their side of history and story. As a result, there is a dialogue between Babur and Rana Sanga in which other characters from both sides participate. The entire debate takes place in the court of the adeeb and time but no final resolution is offered by the narrator or the author.

Rather, Kamleshwar explores a new aspect of religion that it is not about the victor-vanquished relationship and the misuse of religion, but how both, the victor and the vanquished, manipulate religion to suit their ends. He says, “Parajit paksh is tarah ki smrption ko sanchit karke ek doosra hi manovanchit itihaas likh dete hai aur usi mein jeena shuru kar dete hai. ! Adeeb ne kaha to sab uski or sehmati aur asehmati se dekhne lage -aur vijeta jab in sanchit smrption ke itihaas ka saamna karta hai to dharm uska sahayak hathiyar ban jaata hai. Tab woh dharma ko apne shastragar mein shamil karke nirankush hone ki had tak chala jaata hai...” (Kitne Pakistan 150-151).

The quote reflects how religion is misused by the victor and the vanquished alike. The words chosen by Kamleshwar—‘smrption’, ‘sanchit’, ‘doosra’ and ‘manovanchit’ for the ‘parajit paksh’—signify a manipulation of the facts and distortion of religion and history to suit personal ends and garner sympathy and goodwill. On the part of the ‘vijeta’, he uses words like ‘saamna’, ‘dharma’, ‘sahayak’ and ‘nirankush’. Whenever the victor faces manipulations in the name of religion from the defeated side, he too picks up a clue and starts using religion as a weapon to sustain his power over the vanquished.

Kamleshwar says’ “...Hindu kattarpanthion aur Hindutvavadion ko galat itihaas likhne ki choot...hai” (Kitne Pakistan, 167). This misrepresentation of history by the Hindus has largely been, as said earlier, a justification by the historically vanquished, Hindus defeated by the Mughals, creating a ‘voice’ for a Hindu nation. He also says,
“...Brahamano ne apna Pakistan bana liya...” (Kitne Pakistan 103). The caste Hindus developed a Hinduism of their own and propagated it as the correct version of the religion. This religion concealed the political motives of the Rajputs and the Hindus in terms of religion and dharma, making it the struggle of the peace loving Hindus against the cruel and brute Islamic conquerors. Nirad C. Chaudhuri says, “The current belief is that the Hindus are a peace loving and non-violent people, and this belief has been fortified by Gandhism. In reality, however, few human communities have been more warlike and fond of bloodshed. I know this will not be believed, for Hindu militarism lies buried under a mound of mythical notions about their ahimsa, non-violence,...” (107). The trend is reflected by Kamleshwar to be present today too when he talks about the members of the Vishwa Hindu parishad.

But this is not restricted to Hinduism only. He also presents the other perspective, “...Hamare Shibli Noami sahib ne Darashikoh ke khilaf Aurangzeb ke yudh ko ek kafir ke khilf ek namazi ke yudh ke roop mein pesh karke Hindustan ke itthaas ko Dharm ki baisakhion par khada karna chaha hai...” (Kitne Pakistan 228). Kamleshwar, then, reflects how Islam too used religion for political ends.

Kamleshwar, then, offers space and voices to the perspectives of the Hindus as well as the Muslims. Kamleshwar, represents Hinduism and Islam in all its glory and shame to the reader without in any way prioritizing one over the other. No resolution is offered by him as to which approach is ‘right’. What he explicitly indicates is that religion has been used by both Hindus and Muslims as a cover to hide their real motives. As a result, another well known perspective on India that she has been historically designated as ‘Sone ki chidiya’, and this is why she has been attacked time and again by external aggressors including the English, has been conveniently pushed into the background and the blame for the blood-stained history of India is laid at the door of religion.

Another perspective put forth by Kamleshwar is the actual role performed by religion in India, “...Hindustan mein Hindu bahusankhya mein the, unke rajya bhi the, lekin Hindustan kabhi bhi Hindu rashtra nahin tha!...Hindustan ka Pauranik aur Zamini itthaas gawah hai ki yahan hamesha satya aur sabhyata ke liye dharamyudh lade gaye lekin kisi dharm vishesh ki kendriyata aur varchasva ke liye koi mahayudh nahin lda gaya...” (Kitne Pakistan 228). Words like ‘Hindu rashtra nahin tha’, ‘Pauranik
aur zamini itihaas gawah hai’ and ‘dharamyudh’ reflect a negation of ‘political’ religion in India for a more comprehensive and polyphonic religion that believes in mutual co-existence of different faiths.

With religion arises the issue of identity and minority. The terms are inherently related to religion in that it defines the identity of an individual in India as a majority or a minority. The Hindus regard themselves as the ‘insiders’ and hence the majority having the power of representation. But this ‘insider’ ‘outsider’ status, especially regarding Mughals, has been historically challenged as the Mughals see themselves as ‘insiders’ too, while the Hindus saw and still see them as ‘outsiders’. But Kamleshwar has stayed largely away from this aspect of Indian history. He emphasizes on a different point in the narrative regarding Indian history. The reason for this absence largely may be that he does not indulge in any resolutions. Labelling Hindus and Muslims as the ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ would have closed the otherwise open ended text.

It is important here that a definitive resolution to Indian religion is evaded. The ‘voices’ engage in a dialogue with several historical figures and historians giving arguments and counter-arguments to support their point-of-view. The discussions strongly remind one of Socrates and Plato and the concept of a dialogue. One is also reminded of Republic wherein the utility of poetry in a republic is debated. Kitne Pakistan relies on opinions and counter opinions in abundance, centering on religion, but what is more important is the absence of a ‘definite reality’. There is a presence of what Bakhtin calls “Voice ideas” that “come to interact [and] produce a dialogic...giving rise to new insights and new dialogues” (Morson 237). Kamleshwar leaves it to the reader to create meanings out of his dialogue.

The ‘secularism’ being practiced by Kamleshwar in the narrative, by offering ‘voices’ to the Hindus and the Muslims, thus aims at a dialogic objectivity and polyphony. This secularism was the kind that was promoted after 1947 to Indians across the world. Rushdie says in Imaginary Homelands, “I am a member of that generation of Indians who were sold the secular ideal...I was not raised in a narrowly Muslim environment; I do not consider Hindu culture to be either alien from me or more important than the Islamic heritage” (16). Nehru and the nationalists also declared that
for India there is 'no going back to the past' as it indicated a move back to "Ram Rajya" rather than Mother India.

Kamleshwar, rather than rejecting the past tries to assert the significance of religion as a whole in shaping the country. But in the process he also presents how religion, tradition and identity have been misused by one and all. He does not hold anyone guilty but asserts that somewhere in history there occurs a transition from 'pauranik' to 'narrow secularism'. He leaves it to the reader to deduce interpretations and decide for himself. The reader is of critical importance in the representation of religion. Kamleshwar’s language is Hindi, the language of the Indian masses rather than the Western intelligentsia. Kamleshwar’s portrayal of religion in India is for the people who have been directly influenced by it. He does not write for the English speakers and the West, but for the Indian, who is an insider to all the events. Hence, the representation of religion is not propaganda before the audience. Rather, the reader is offered the liberty to frame a picture according to his subjectivity based on his first hand knowledge of the setting.

The text, then, emerges as a post-colonial voice offering not only an equal space to the ‘other’ but raising the so-called ‘other’ to a status in the text where it no longer remains the unwanted, but becomes an integral part of the narrative. The text, this way challenges the colonial conventions of religion and literature creating a niche for itself through its impartiality.

Kitne Pakistan, thus, represents religion polyphonically. Religion, in the text, is neither solely Hindu nor Muslim nor Pagan but is a comprehensive term that incorporates all the individualities and their principles. The various aspects of religion, positive and negative, are reflected by Kamleshwar and traced from history to the present times leaving it to the reader to deduce his own truth about religion in India and the world. The discussion of religion in Kitne Pakistan can be brought to a close with the following lines by Kamleshwar:

"...a composition always seeks its own possible truth"

(qtd in Ansari v)
Kamleshwar's India, hence, is a country that prides in its heterogeneity and the presence of different religions, though at certain times she faces problems in maintaining this stature due to religious fundamentalists. Kamleshwar, in his representation of India, also highlights how, in the past, religion has been used to veil the ‘political’ ambitions. But, the India of Kamleshwar shows its dogged determination to sustain its secular stature where all religions and religious beliefs co-exist. This is why, in the representation of India, Kamleshwar invokes Rana Sanga as well as Babur, to assert the presence of an India that is based on multiple religions.

Moving on from the Regional Novel Kitne Pakistan, the next one for discussion of religion is The Inheritance of Loss, which unlike the former, is composed in English by a diasporic writer Kiran Desai. The Inheritance of Loss also raises the question of religion, minority and identity, but the issue central to the novel is the political history of Kalimpong, the treatment of the Gorkhas and their retaliation to it. Religion gets incorporated in this basic narratorial structure.

The text deals with the Hindu-Muslim issue at the level of a dichotomy, “More Muslims in India than in Pakistan. They prefer to multiply over here...And five times a day burns up to God...With that Koran, who can be surprised? They have no option but to be two-faced” (The Inheritance of Loss 130). The characters are involved in a discussion about the living style of the members of the two most prominent religions in India. However, a duality is reflected. The Hindus are given the upper hand compared to the Muslims. “So strict was the Koran that its teachings were beyond human capability. Therefore Muslims were forced to pretend one thing, do another...Unlike Hindus, who needn’t deny” (The Inheritance of Loss 130). Muslims are also said to have come from outside, “they also came from somewhere else, Babar and all...And stayed here to breed” (130).

The text however, is not so uncharitable about Hinduism. Hinduism is ‘the religion’ to be followed: “We Hindus have a better system. You get what you deserve and you cannot escape your deeds. And at least our gods look like gods, no? Like Raja Rani. Not like this Buddha, Jesus—beggar types” (The Inheritance of Loss 200). The Mohammedans are represented as people with dual personalities due to their religious system, but Hindus do not find themselves in any such situation in the text. The Hindus enjoy a vital place in the narrative: the Judge, Sai and her family, who are at
the centrestage, are Hindus. There is no investigation of the religious background of these characters, in fact their characters are not built on religious grounds.

But there seems no direct link between the central theme and this religious portrayal. Why use the Hindu-Muslim duality in the narrative when it is not directly related to the theme of the novel? True, that the issue is not related to the theme of the novel but it does serve a very crucial purpose which has symbolic significance. India is a Hindu dominated nation with the Muslims often seen as the ‘other’, the minority and the marginalized. This religious definition resembles the marginalization of the Gurkhas in the East by the non-gurkhas. The viewpoint about the Muslims confirms the negativity of the minority (Gurkhas in the context of the novel) and the imposition of the point-of-view of the majority (Non-gurkhas) on them.

Looking at the Hindu-Muslim issue in the narrative, one finds the presence of Hindu characters against no Muslim characters. As a result, any discussion on religion is liable to go unquestioned by the latter because of their absence in the narrative. The text describes the Muslims as raising “bums up to God” and their presence in India for ‘breeding’. The Muslims in the narrative have been transposed into the Gurkhas as the minority. The Muslims are a religious minority while the Gurkhas are an ethnic minority. The Muslims and the Gurkhas are on a common platform and through the ‘justified’ negafion of Muslims, the negafion of the Gurkhas becomes automatically justified.

Secondly, both Muslims and Gurkhas have a set of principles that they don’t follow. Here, the Muslims are spared the harsh whip because their principles are impossible to follow. The Gurkhas, on the contrary, have no line of defence as they don’t follow their principles even though they are practical, and hence are relegated to the lowest rung in the hierarchy of status and identity. “We will build hospitals and schools. We will provide jobs for all our sons. We will give dignity to all our daughters carrying heavy loads…We will defend our own homeland. This is where we were born…we will run our own affairs in our own language…Jai Gorkha” (The Inheritance of Loss 159). These pious proclamations, however, are violated by the Gurkhas in practice. “Despite their mission and their clothes, they were unconvincing” (4). They indulge in looting and hooliganism in the name of GNLF struggle for Gorkhaland. The entire rebellion takes two directions, one, towards the demand for a Gorkhaland, seen
through the processions and the burning of the treaties, and the other, towards anti-social activities seen in the looting, damaging of public property and ill-treatment of the natives. They indulge in hooliganism as Mandira Sen points out: “The young unemployed men love the mobilization: ‘Money and guns in their pockets, they were living the movies...the new films would be based on them.’” (28). This puts them is a position inferior to the Muslims even and hence their rebellion stands completely unjustified.

Another symbolic affiliation between the Muslims and the Gurkhas arises in the Koran, that the Muslims cannot follow for its impossible principles, and English language, which cannot be used by the Gurkhas for their rebellion. Language is a critical tool of the Gurkhas and is also one of their underlying principles behind their struggle. However, the text, raises certain problems. One, the text itself is in English, hence, the entire concept of ‘Gorkhaland’ has to be in English, even though the mother tongue of these people is not English; and as a result, the Gurkhas lose their native voice. The text makes use of Hindi, too, at certain places, especially in situations of emotional outbursts, but Nepali, the language of the Gurkhas, is nowhere to be seen in the text. As a result, in spite of the fact that the GNLF want Nepali taught in the schools, the language they can use in and for the entire rebellion is English. The non-Gurkhas, then, question the use of English by the Gurkhas to downgrade their rebellion. “…why are they writing in English if they want to have Nepali taught in schools?” (The Inheritance of Loss 247). Language and its use, hence, has deep repercussions on the text and its ‘intentions’. The text is bilingual using English and Hindi, but misses out on the mother tongue of the people at the centre of the novel, Nepali. Alienating them from their mother tongue, the text immediately places them amongst the ‘marginal’, the ones whose intentions, desires, culture and values can be governed and manipulated by someone else. The language assumes a view-point and a voice in the novel. It ceases to remain a mere mediator between the text and the reader but carries a voice that plays a crucial role in determining the meaning of the text. Just as the Koran has repercussions on the life of the Muslims because of the rigor of its tenets, English has repercussions on the rebellion as it negates the validity of the rebellion. The impossibility of giving English as a language to the rebels is equivalent to the impossibility of following the Koran by the Muslims. The Gurkha rebellion, then, loses its validity for using a language they
are not entitled to use. The text does not allow them permission to use Nepali and their use of English is questioned by the characters. Language abandons the Gurkhas much like the Koran does its followers.

Both, the Muslims and the Gurkhas have been in India since a long time. The Muslims “came from somewhere else, Babar and all…” (The Inheritance of Loss 130) and the Gurkhas have been here prior to the British came to India as, “We fought on behalf of the British for two hundred years. We fought in World War One. We went to East Africa, to Egypt, to the Persian Gulf…We fought in World War Two…” (158). During the time period traversed by both in India, they have become minorities and reduced to ‘otherness’.

The Muslims and the Hindus are into a tussle in India just like the Gurkhas and the non-Gurkhas in Kalimpong. The Gurkhas have been treated as the minority and as a result their identity has always been marginalized over the years. This marginalization has had expected results on their lives: they are seen as the lowest in the social hierarchy and treated as laborers and fighters. The popular image is that a Gorkha is brave and sturdy and hence good for fighting and working as a laborer only. Their voice is drowned and unheard in other fields of life and professions, “Can we compete for jobs when they have already been promised to others” (The Inheritance of Loss 158-159). As a result the Gorkhas have been relegated to the background as intellectually worthless and physically powerful, fit for physical work, the ideal ‘other’. Nirad C. Chaudhuri asserts in The Continent of Circe, “all the non-Hindus, they are all minorities” (91).

But there is another perspective to this issue. There is a complete negation of the Muslims from the text but the Gurkhas are still rebelling and have space in the narrative. This implies two things in the narrative. First, that with time, just like the Muslims, the Gurkhas too will be completely negated and offered no space. This in fact, is another affinity. Neither the Muslims nor the Gurkhas have a voice in the narrative. The Muslims are altogether absent while the Gurkhas are largely reflected through the elites. The Gurkhas are not offered an independent voice in the text. Moreover, the bandhs, the looting and confiscation of property are revealed to be a part of their action plan but what purpose it will serve in the rebellion is not stated.
Desai fails to attribute any reason to the actions of the rebels just like the Koran fails to offer any practical principle to the Muslims.

Secondly, it directly refers to a situation where the Hindu ideology prevails over the others, who are a minority. Judge Jemubhai abandons his daughter when she marries a Parsi: he breaks all links with her as she marries outside her religion. Being a Hindu, he could not bear to see his daughter marrying a non-Hindu. His abandoning of his daughter indicates a Hinduism that does not tolerate any deviations from the standard order.

But Desai also revels in the libertarianism of Hinduism. She asserts that the Hindus too indulge in the same activities as the Muslims but their religion allows them to be honest in their dealings, unlike Islam. She says, “Therefore Muslims were forced to pretend one thing, do another; they drank, smoked, ate pork, visited prostitutes, and then denied it. Unlike Hindus, who needn’t deny” (The Inheritance of Loss 130). It seems to be directed at a Hindu system that religiously protects its ‘purity’. She refers to the ‘vices’ and faults of the followers but glorifies the religion, reminding one of Gandhi in Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, who sees the religion as good but its practitioners as defective. The text, thus, may also be seen to bear similarity with The Great Indian Novel and its affiliation to a glorious Hinduism.

The negation of a polyphonic religion in The Inheritance of Loss promotes a monotheistic Hinduism. The Hinduism on offer is certainly not caste based but an affirmation of the superiority of the religion as a whole over the other religions which include Islam, whose followers ‘raise their bums up five times’, and a Parsi whose marriage to a Hindu is not acceptable. In fact, the text has no characters from Islam and the Parsi who marries the daughter of Jemubhai is already dead. This negation of a polyphonic religious belief in favour of a monotheistic belief of the powerful justifies the negation of the Gurkha rebellion in the narrative. The religious distinctions identify with the ethnic divisions dominant in the narrative through the Gurkha and the non-gurkha struggle. Just like the Hindus are powerful distinguishing themselves from the people of other religions, similarly the non-gurkhas see the gurkhas as encroachers upon their territory. The Gurkha and the non-gurkha duality, then, becomes an ethnic struggle based on power. As Mandira Sen opines, “...the class divide is also an ethnic divide...” (28).
Religion in *The Inheritance of Loss*, then, serves to strengthen the non-legitimacy of the Gurkha rebellion by drawing parallels to the religious minorities. Just as the religious minorities are ‘silenced’ by a dominant and powerful Hinduism, the gurkha rebellion is not offered a ‘voice’ to justify its legitimacy. As the Muslims have come from ‘outside’, the Gurkhas too have immigrated from Nepal and hence are outsiders having no right to space. As a result, the entire struggle of the gurkhas for a separate homeland becomes invalid.

Moreover, the portrayal of Hinduism in the narrative places it as superior to other religions, especially Islam. Hindus have been largely dominant while other religions have been relegated to the background. This has been partly successful for the sheer number of the Hindus in India. As the dominant section they have to possess a ‘better system’ against that of the minority. Religion in the text, hence, works at the level of identity, underlining the ‘correctness’ of the majority and ‘negativity’ of the minority. As Rushdie says, “The new element in Indian communalism is the emergence of a collective Hindu consciousness that transcends caste, and believes Hinduism to be under threat from other Indian minorities” (*Imaginary Homelands* 31). He adds, “…the idea of nationalism in India had grown more and more chauvinistic, had become narrower and narrower. The ideas of Hindu nationalism had infected it” (32).

Hinduism is portrayed as a liberal religion that accommodates its followers through its practical principles, unlike Islam which is too strict to be followed in spirit. The attempt here is to express the superiority of Hinduism as a liberal and feasible religion with real principles, as compared to Islam. However, in the attempt to showcase the superiority of Hinduism, Desai completely nullifies the ‘other’, offering it no space. Her narrative, then, appears to be of a Hindu, indifferent, not only to the polyphony in Hinduism, but to other religions as well.

The India of Desai, then, suggests the homogeneous religious order as the norm, with ‘other’ religions as intrusions into that normal order. The homogeneous order in India, represented by Desai, is Hinduism. There is no space for any other religion, even Islam, which is described as the religion of ‘outsiders’. This religious homogeneity, in her representation of India also delegitimizes the presence of any minority, ethnic in case of the Gurkhas, before the dominant homogenizing urge or impulse of the ‘self’.
The five texts then, give some critical insights into religion in India. The most primary aspect that the five texts reflect is that religion has a central place in the lives of the people and is one of the most vital factors governing their lives. In addition to this, each text reflects some or the other facet of religion in India. *A Passage to India* centrally deals with religion at the level of Indian Religion and religion in the West. The Indian Religion is represented through Hinduism and Islam while that of the West through Christianity. Forster portrays the religions as having their limitations, be it Hinduism that achieves ‘only a reconciliation’, Islam with its inability to decipher the Caves, or Christianity which loses its ‘light’ in the presence of the Indian religions making characters like Mrs Moore more and more stranger to Christ and God. In addition to this, he does not touch upon the ‘divide and rule policy’ of the British and ignores the role of the missionaries in a colonial India. *A Passage to India* is seen as an ambiguous novel by critics and religion only adds to the ambiguity of the narrative. But one thing that Forster clearly reflects is the dominance of Hinduism and Islam in India.

*Midnight’s Children* explores various facets of Islam. He explores the various facets of Islam, thereby creating a polyphony of various points-of-view from which Islam can be visualized. In addition, it also reflects upon Hinduism and its relationship with Islam, and the other religions like Christianity also find some space in the narrative. Rushdie opens up a religious scenario which is multiple, rich and heterogeneous, and has sustained itself in India through time and space. This polyphonic portrayal of Islam and other religions is pertinent as, to borrow words from Rukmini Bhaya Nair, “one’s empathy with one’s country, one’s religion, may be all the greater if one comes to know it part by part, imaginatively reconstructing the missing bits, than if one comes to grips at once with, the incomprehensible whole…” (996).

However, probably owing to his Islamic belief, the narrative delves more into Islam and its various aspects. But it is also pertinent here that in his emphasis on Islam, he does not downgrade Hinduism or treat it as the oppressor of the minority. Rather, his is an objective representation of religion as seen by an outsider, unlike *The Great Indian Novel* that reflects nostalgia for a past of Golden Hinduism, a time now lost to the forces of secularism. The narrative in *The Great Indian Novel* centers on high
caste Hinduism that does not allow any digressions or space for the minorities, either within itself or outside.

Completely different from the rest of the four novels is *Kitne Pakistan*, a narrative that offers space to the religious beliefs of not only India but of other global civilizations as well. Kamleshwar also offers equal space to the two most dominant Indian religions, Hinduism and Islam, with characters like Babur and Rana Sanga emerging from the pages of history to present their viewpoints. Most importantly, he does not give more space to any one religion at the cost of the other. He, in the real sense, creates polyphony of religions in his novel. One very critical aspect of religion is reflected upon by Kamleshwar in *Kitne Pakistan*: he represents how religion, just like gender and politics, becomes a victim of the ‘power of representation’. He showcases how even the ‘vanquished’ try to glorify their defeats by manipulation and if that ‘vanquished’ happens to dominate at a later stage then it negates the ‘truth’ of the ‘victor’ by asserting its own stories which then become the mythologies and folktales to be heard by one and all. The last novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* centers around the gurkha rebellion and religion fits in the larger perspective. However, religion is dealt with at the level of Hindu-Muslim duality and pride of place conferred on Hinduism.

How exactly does one then define Indian Religion on the basis of the representation of the five authors? From the representation of religion in the five texts, it becomes apparent that India is a centre of several religious faiths just as in an Interview Gayatri Spivak opines, “For me, religion is in fact always leaning towards varieties of totalitarianism” (Najmabadi 125) and Hindu and Muslim are the two most dominant sections amongst them. The works of the writers, in their own ways, reflect this multifacetedness of Indian religion. While for some this multiplicity is a quality, for others it is an excrescence on a Hindu India. However, one thing that stands out is the fact that India is the hub of several religious beliefs and faiths that have existed together for centuries, as *Kitne Pakistan* reveals. The texts reveal that in spite of what Salman Rushdie calls “communalism: the politics of religious hatred” (*Imaginary Homelands* 27) that has raised its ugly head at certain times, this heterogeneity has largely prevailed.
If we want to look for the essence of religion in India, it needs to be ascertained if, in the multitudes of religions, there is something that can be called as 'Indian Religion'? Looking at the five texts, it emerges that the very variety of religions in India is what makes the concept of Indian Religion possible. In case of a monotheistic religion, it would have been Indian Hindu Religion or Indian Muslim Religion, but it is the very polyphony of religions in India that validates the coinage Indian Religion. All the writers, irrespective of their time period, place of residing or religious ethnicities, acknowledge the existence of something greater, more comprehensive than the individual religions in their works, through assertion or negation.

How, then can ‘Indian Religion’ be defined?” India, the nation has always been known for two things: its multiple strains of traditions and its religious tolerance. Over the ages conquerors and raiders came, some plundered India and disappeared while others, like the Aryans and Mughals, stayed back. India adopted them and they became a part of what India is. The Aryans adopted the mantle of Hinduism while the Mughals stayed back with their Islamic religious beliefs, and India welcomed them with wide arms. None that came here and stayed remained an outsider, be it the Aryans, the Muslims, the Christians, or the Tibetans, or the Gurkhas—all became a part of this Continent of Circe, inherent and indispensable. A possible definition of Indian Religion and India, then, may be,

“My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed. To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once.” (Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands 32)