

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

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## **Religion and Fiction**

**What Can We Learn from Willa Cather's**

***Death Comes for the Archbishop***

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# RELIGION AND FICTION

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## **Religion in Indian Fiction**

This article is about an American novelist and about how religion is embedded in creative fiction in American literature. Indian writing in English, or for that matter, fiction in Indian languages, largely ignores the value religion plays in moulding the character and events in life. Here and there, religion plays a very important function of identity of characters, and, at times, even forms part of the reflection of the characters in fiction. Like caste markers, religious identity is often used to bring in an aura of realism. The roles of fate and the noble deeds, and the thoughts of elders, of course, continue to have their function in Indian fiction.

## **Religion in American Literature**

Religion is sought to perform a different set of functions in characterization in American literature. Dominated by the writers of the Caucasian race, whose specific ethnic identities are now almost lost in the stream of the White populace as a distinct group within the United States, religion in American literature imbibes a sense of history, social markers, and socialization processes. While secularism is the dominant stream, religion plays a very important role in terms of metaphors and messages even in secular fiction. Religion plays the part of something noble and something edifying even in current American literature. And if a particular novel focuses on a region, then, religion becomes part of the community, its history and civilization.

## **Importance of Reading Fiction from Various Sources**

In this essay, we would like to present some aspects of the writing of a well-known American author, Willa Cather, and to show how religion plays a part in her story and characters.

Learning the art of story telling and story construction is a continuing process for every one, including seasoned writers. We do believe that by reading fiction from a variety of sources will enable Indian writers to revisit the role of religion and religious traditions while weaving their own stories.

## **Willa Cather – Focus on the Particular and the Universal**

Willa Cather is a splendid example of a writer whose work is deeply rooted in a sense of place and at the same time universal in its treatment of theme and character. Cather combined a regional knowledge of Nebraska with an artistic expertise reminiscent of the

nineteenth-century literary masters to create one of the most distinguished achievements of twentieth-century American literature.

Willa Cather, a novelist, short story writer, poet and journalist was born in Gore, Virginia, in 1873. When she was nine years old her family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska. The desolate Nebraskan prairie and the diversely cultured European settlers that Cather encountered strongly engaged her youthful imagination. Years later, her early experiences were reproduced in the settings and the characters of her fiction. Specific incidents recollected in her fiction often became the basis of her stories.

### **The Call of the Prairie**

Cather's family moved to Nebraska when she was ten, where they lived on an isolated farm and then in a raw frontier settlement in Red Cloud. She encountered immigrants, especially German and Scandinavian, upon whom many of the characters were based. She understood virtues and vices of the frontier life. On the one hand, the sturdy dignified strength of simple people struggling to establish their lives, homes and communities on new soil, and on the other, the crude materialism and intolerance, which was so evident in the frontier towns.

### **Ethical Goals and Cather's Place in American Literature**

Willa Cather aspired toward the ethical goals of the great tradition, consequently becoming the twentieth-century successor of the nineteenth-century novelists. More notably than Cooper and with a moral intensity comparable to that of Hawthorne, Melville, and James, Cather represented the tensions of American existence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Like her predecessors, she is a commentator on the prevailing American condition. Sometimes urgent in her fears, but always ardent in her faith, she constantly held before herself the vision of realizable ideals.

### **Courage, Idealism and Modern Materialistic Values**

In her Nebraskan novels, courage and idealism are juxtaposed with modern materialistic values. Cather's sensibility and her high regard for the artist and European culture in her later novels link her with Gustave Flaubert and Henry James. Her vision of the wasteland and her alienation from modern American society link her to the lost generation of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

### **A Prolific Woman Writer**

Willa Cather was a prolific writer especially as a woman. By the time her first novel was published when she was thirty-eight, she had written more than forty short stories, at least five hundred columns and reviews, numerous magazines and articles and essays, and a volume of poetry. Cather's will forbid the publication of her letters.

The whole work of Willa Cather embodies passion, which is the vital principle of her art. She brings home the significance of the solitary human spirit, in its will and its struggle to survive. Her protagonists succeed at the great cost of suffering. Better than any of the contemporaries, she represented the force of tradition in twentieth-century America—the tradition of the artist, the tradition of the pioneer, the tradition, eventually, of the universal church.

Cather celebrates not the success of fame and fortune, but the success of spiritual and emotional fulfillment experienced by the Archbishop Bishop Latour and his friend Joseph Vaillant in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

A sacred place in Willa Cather's fiction is a spot in which an individual recognizes connection with the transcendent.

### **An Epic Adventure Of Religious Devotion**

*Death Comes for the Archbishop* is both a journey toward self-understanding and an epic adventure of religious devotion. Willa Cather illustrates her feeling that religion is the best thing that life has to offer mankind. “*Death Comes for the Archbishop* is like a gallery of brilliantly lit dioramas in a historical museum illustrating life in the American Southwest a century ago” (Auchincloss 107).

It is the chronicle of two French priests, Bishop Latour and Joseph Vaillant, who are assigned to set up an apostolic vicariate in the territory of New Mexico, a work that could be accomplished only by long, arduous travels and devotion to their commitment.

The novel deals with the struggles of Father Latour and his beloved friend Joseph Vaillant to nurture and build a faith amongst the primitive people of the Southwest at the time when New Mexico was taken over from the Old Mexico. The two experienced Catholic missionaries are sent there to bring order out of the mixture of Indian and Mexican superstitions.

### **Woven From The Life Story Of Two Real Priests**

The real story of the southwest is the story of the missionary priests who come from France with cultivated minds, large vision, and a noble purpose. Based on the life of Father Lamy, first Archbishop of New Mexico, she has created Father Latour. He is a sensitive individual caught in an alien world, and Cather focuses on “the daily life of such a man in a crude frontier society” as he sets out into an uncharted country. From the life of Joseph P. Machebeuf, she has mainly captured the mood and the spirit of the Father “in which they accepted the accidents and hardships of a desert country, the joyful energy that kept them going” (Lewis 139).

Father Jean Latour is on a pilgrimage. He is both an introvert and an intellectual. He is loved and admired for his quiet courage and for his courtesy. His vicar, Father Joseph Valliant, is practical, companionable, unswerving in his faith in God's providence and is devoted in his

mission. Knowing pain and terror, they decide to leave their native France for missionary work in the New World.

Missionary Ferrand describes such challenges of Latour.

Beginnings,” murmured the Venetian, “there have been so many. But nothing ever comes from over there but trouble and appeals for money.” And again,

This country was evangelized in fifteen hundred, by the Franciscan Fathers. It has been allowed to drift for nearly three hundred years and is not yet dead. It still pitifully calls itself a Catholic country, and tried to keep the forms of religion without instruction. The old mission churches are in ruins. The few priests are without guidance or discipline. They are lax in religious observance, and some of them in open concubinage. If this Augean stable is not cleansed, now that the territory has been taken over by a progressive government, it will prejudice the interests of the Church in the whole of North America. (DCA 5)

The Cardinal further comments

The new Vicar must be a young man, of strong constitution, full of zeal, and above all, intelligent. He will have to deal with savagery and ignorance, with dissolute priests and political intrigue. He must be a man to whom order is necessary, as dear as life. (DCA 8)

Bishop makes his way through an unknown territory against the physical world.

A young priest, at his devotions; and a priest in a thousand, one new at a glance. His bowed head was not that of an ordinary man, - it was built for the seat of a fine intelligence. His brow was open, generous, reflective, his features handsome and somewhat sever. There was a singular elegance about the hands below the fringed cuffs of the buckskin jacket. Everything showed him to be a man of gentle birth – brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He has a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and the God whom he was addressing. (DCA 19)

### **The Cross – A Juniper Becomes the Cross**

During this journey, he orients himself spiritually by a symbol, a juniper shaped in the form of a cross.

To Bishop, it is neither an oddity nor merely a sign, which reminds him of his religious faith, but a clear revelation of the sacred in a natural object. The universe to him, is not opaque and meaningless, but transparent to ultimate reality. His simple actions are charged with power and meaning because they not only spring from him but also have reference to the sacred model. His actions contradict rational calculations. He dismounts before the tree, bares his

head, and kneels, further exposing himself and his mare to the murderous desert sun. Yet “when he rose he looked refreshed” (DCA 19).

Having become disoriented by the heat, he doesn't exert himself. After his devotion at the foot of the cruciform tree, he suffers excruciatingly from thirst. Remembering Christ, “I thirst!” he “empowered by long training, the young priest blotted himself out of his own consciousness and meditated upon the anguish on his Lord. The passion of Jesus became for him the only reality; the need of his own body was but a part of that conception” (DCA 20).

### **Acculturation and Contextualization**

The experience of Bishop Latour in Acoma, their next destination is noteworthy. He and his Indian guide Jacinto visit the pueblo at Acoma on the top of a barren mesa southwest of Albuquerque. The visit of the priest to this barren mesa is a challenging experience. Father Gallegos, the priest of Acoma never goes to this place because it is too remote and too difficult to reach. The Mesa has been identified with the Rock which is stark, grim and enduring”. Here, Cather's hero has lost the first mystical exaltation, the sense of a final and absolute freedom of a communion with space and solitude in a world above the world” (Geismar 192)

From Europe and its great past, Latour comes to “a country, which had no written histories” (DCA 152). He reflects on the appearance.

This mesa plain had an appearance of great antiquity and incompleteness; as if, with all the materials for world-making assembled, the Creator has desisted, gone away and left everything on the point of being brought together, on the eve of being arranged into mountain, plain, plateau. The country was still waiting to be made into a landscape. (DCA 95)

### **A Redemptive Mission**

Latour's mission in Acoma becomes redemptive since he brings into existence, by slow degrees, discipline, beauty and order. Bishop Latour passes the enchanted mesa, an isolated flat-topped hill with steep sides, which once had a village on it, and ponders the Indian instinct to build villages on the nearly inaccessible tops of the mesa. The bishop gathers that

The rock of Acoma had never been taken by a foe but once, - by Spaniards in armour. It was very different from a mountain fastness; more lonely, more stark and grim, more appealing to the imagination. The rock, when one came to think of it, was the utmost expression of human need; even mere feeling yearned for it; it was the highest comparison of loyalty in love and friendship. Christ Himself had used that comparison for the disciple to whom He gave the keys of His Church. And the Hebrews of the Old Testament, always being carried captive into foreign lands, - their

rock was an idea of God, the only thing their conquerors could not take from them. (DCA 98)

### **Symbolism in Aid of Stability and Safety**

Bishop Latour feels that man yearns for stability and safety. Though, he seeks through symbolic and ritual behavior to reestablish contact with the timeless and the sacred, he must not refuse to move forward with time and accomplish his evolutionary destiny. Conditioned by Europe where the traces of humanity are deep and ubiquitous, his mind catches immediately the different sound and shape of a rough, young world nearly untouched by man. After saying mass for the Acomas, he retires to a rock in the desert and homesickness condenses into a meditation on being out of his own epoch and back in his stone age. He begins to long for the comfort of his own tradition.

He watched the sun go down; watched the desert become dark, the shadows creep upward. Abroad in the plain the scattered mesa tops, red with the afterglow, one by one lost their light, like candles going out. He was on a naked rock in the desert, in the stone age, a prey to homesickness for his history of desire and dreams. Through all the centuries that his own part of the world had been changing like the sky at a break, this people had been fixed, increasing neither in numbers nor desires, rock-turtles on their rock. Something reptilian he felt here, something that had endured by immobility, a kind of life out of reach, like the crustaceans in their armour. (DCA 103)

### **Nameless Horror**

In Acoma, Latour and his Pecos guide Jacinto seek refuge in a huge stone cavern where, according to Indian legend, children had been sacrificed in a ceremonial cave. The cave offers him safety from the storm and probably saves his life. He seems to sense that he is in the presence of some nameless and formless horror. This is the horror Cather includes of the world of powers of darkness, which taunt the believer, tempting him to abandon faith. The unseen snake symbolizes this.

### **Jacinto Cave and Its Symbolism – Localizing Transcendence**

The bishop experiences a fear of darkness before he can envision the place of profound connection. Latour's time in the cave is his descent into the underworld, and he does return with a boon for himself and for his people. Cather's parable of Jacinto's cave is a way to understand the need to accommodate the demands of a culture and worship system other than one's own. In Cather's vision "the need for transcendence does not emerge from a vacuum but rather from a long continuum of human effort exercised upon a very real and complex world" (Schneider 60).

Latour desires to bring harmony and order to the Acoma and Pecos Indians from the slovenly condition of Padre Martinez's household in Taos. The disorder of Padre Martinez's house is

more than his fastidious nature could bear, but Latour recognizes he “had never heard the Mass more impressively sung than by Father Martinez” (DCA 150).

### **Lawless Personal Power of Clergy**

Padre Martinez, the native priest belongs to an age of lawless personal power is completely unwilling to surrender his power. Bishop Latour senses that he is “really impotent, left over from the past” (DCA 141). The old reprobate Martinez is excommunicated and his parish, the last holdout under the old dispensation, is brought under Bishop’s control. He brings order and discipline to the diocese, suspends the dissolute clergy and to reward those who have been faithful to the office.

### **Regeneration, Art and Life**

After his experience in the cave, Latour returns to Virgin snow, where he wishes to build his Cathedral. It implies the regeneration and conquest of the world by consecrating it. Latour is ushering in a new age, a new beginning, and a new creation. Divine power creates life. Art and religion are joined and it is both a creative act to build a cathedral, motivated by worldly ambition, but at the same time it is religious act of piety growing out of faith. “As he cherished this wish and meditated upon it, he came to feel that such a building might be a continuation of himself and his purpose, a physical body full of his aspirations after he had passed from the scene” (DCA 195).

### **Garden Becomes a Symbol of a Healthy Community, Not Any More a Place Where Curse Dominated and Where Pain Leads to Victory**

Cather also uses garden imagery to symbolize a healthy community. The priests’ own garden at Santa Fe is their personal joy as well as a symbol of the healthy spiritual community they build. The diocese, Latour’s great garden, develops from seed, to sprout, into bloom. It also represents the symbol of hope in the future.

The bishop goes through a crisis of faith, a dark night of the soul. Latour is lost spiritually rather than physically. He believes himself alien.

His prayers were empty words and brought him no refreshment. His soul had become a barren field. He had nothing within himself to give to his priests or his people. His work seemed superficial, a house built upon the sands. His great diocese was still a heathen country. The Indians traveled their old road of fear and darkness, battling with evil omens and ancient shadows. The Mexicans were children who played with their religion. (DCA 211)

Father Latour gets out of bed, goes to the church to pray. In the doorway he finds the old enslaved Mexican woman Sada weeping bitterly. Her clothes are in rags and the Bishop takes her to the church and they pray together. Despite her miserable condition the old woman has never lost her faith. Bishop defends his ambition by insisting that “the



Cathedral is not for us...we build for the future” (DCA 244). Vaillant cannot fully comprehend Latour’s burning desire and reminds the bishop of the worldliness of such a wish, “when everything about us is so poor” (DCA 241). But the Bishop replies that he is building for the people of the future.

### **Reconciliation with the Land**

Bishop Latour’s total reconciliation with the land is symbolized in the fulfillment of his dream to build a European-style cathedral out of the golden rock of New Mexico. In that building, the art of civilization merges gracefully with the soil of Western landscape, just as Jean Latour’s spirit had done. It speaks with reassuring directness, expressing the ideals of the people and offering the security of common values. “The large work of art and religion merge in the Bishop’s Cathedral, which is the Capstone of his career and his legacy to his diocese” (Elide 66).

### **Willing to Lose Companionship for Greater Good**

A greater sacrifice for Latour occurs when he lets Father Vaillant go for Colorado missions. He had recalled Vaillant from Tuscon because he wanted his companionship, but he suggests to his vicar the need for a priest at camp Denver. “He seemed to know, as if it had been revealed to him, that this was a final break; that their lives would part here, and that they would never work together again” (DCA 252).

Vaillant plants faith and establishes rapport with people. They feel free to place a confidence in his love, and their trust accounts for his apostolic success. He is warmer, active and popular. Latour is proud of his friend and praises his humility and his work. He requests Vaillant’s blessing before one of their separations. “Blanchet, . . . you are a better man than I. You have been a greater harvester of souls without pride and without shame – and I am always a little cold – *un pedant*, as you used to say. If hereafter we have stars in our crowns, yours will be a constellation. Give me your blessing” (DCA 261-262).

However, Vaillant’s work depends upon Latour, for he was responsible for Vaillant coming to the New World, had “to forge a new will in that devout and exhausted priest” (DCA 299), and directed his missionary work, including Colorado. Later, Father vaillant becomes the bishop of Denver. The novel “is primarily a tribute to the transforming power of the disciplined intelligence of a Latour illuminated by his faith, assisted by the driving energy of that friend of his soul, Joseph Vaillant. They are in effect one complete personality, since each exists completely in the other by virtue of their common inspiration and culture” (Connolly 84).

### **France in the New World, But the Process of Losing French Identity Began Long Ago!**

After thirty years of Father Vaillant’s departure for Colorado, Bishop Latour has seen his cathedral completed and has retired to a little country estate that is four miles from Santa Fe. The Cathedral itself suggests France in the New World. While it is made from the stone of a local mountain, it is Midi Romanesque, as one would see in France. It is both organic, of the

region, and foreign, from Latour's native land. He speaks "only French to those about him" (DCA 269). He relaxes his long-standing rule to speak only in English or Spanish while in his mission. With the change of his long-held rules he begins his journey back to his origins.

The condition becomes so familiar that he is finally unable to return home. Instead of returning to France in his official retirement, he decides to remain in the New World. His country estate north of Santa Fe recalls a French orchard. His Midi Romanesque cathedral reflects the Old World in the New, and its gold rock reflects the desert country from which it was made.

### **A Journey Back to the Origins**

Thus the Archbishop leaves a more gratifying physical form of his success in the form of his cathedral. Father Latour's missionary excursion to the New Mexican territory is mythologically a journey back to the origins. With the enormous bell, the American frontier seems formally within the jurisdiction of historical record. The bell tolls the beginning of a new cultural order in New Mexico. His sense, which detected history in the bell, leads him to an understanding of the function of art, which contributes to the success of his mission.

Near the end of his life, Latour looks on "the Cathedral that had taken Father Vaillant's place in his life after that remarkable man went away" (DCA 271). The building of the structure, the creation of the perfect product, is a substitute for a missing loved one. He has chosen to live a life in the Southwest, which makes him awake like a boy again. He experiences the new creation and freedom.

Latour accepts the Indian way of religious traditions and believes that cultural individuality helps to maintain a healthy community. His respect for domestic custom implicitly encourages the people to be themselves. Cather emphasizes her view that groups of diverse background and belief can form a community and still maintain their distinct cultural identities. She makes the Archbishop's journey the spirit of her own.

During those last weeks of the Bishop's life he thought very little about death. It was the Past he was leaving. The future would take care of itself. But he had an intellectual curiosity about dying; about the changes that took place in a man's beliefs and scale of values. More and more life seemed to him an experience of Ego, in no sense the Ego itself. This conviction, he believed, was something apart from his religious life; it was an enlightenment that came to him as a man, a human creature. (DCA 292).

### **An Epic Quest and a Redemptive Mission**

The journey upon which Latour embarks has overtones of both an epic quest and redemptive mission. His piety is that of an Aeneas, who unlike Achilles or Odysseus, was destined to find a new civilization. Like Aeneas, Latour is haunted by memories of his homeland and childhood, and the refinements of a highly developed culture. He is sustained by an

unshakable faith in the protection and the guidance of a God deity who is personally involved with his fate.

Latour, like the hero of the Roman epic, found himself shipwrecked on the coast “of a dark continent” (DCA 18), wandering in a land which was much like the sea itself. Across the level, Father Latour could distinguish low brown shapes, like earthworks, lying at the base of wrinkled green mountains with bare tops, - wave-like mountains, resembling billows beaten up from a flat sea by a heavy gale . . . (DCA 19).

Like ancient hero, Father Latour is not alone in this unknown land but is accompanied by a faithful Achates, Father Joseph Vaillant, “ his boyhood friend, who had made this long pilgrimage with him and shared his dangers” (DCA 20). Vaillant stands in the same relationship to Latour, as did “fortis Achates to “pater Aeneas,” the valiant joined to the tower of strength.

Cather describes the quest for the inviolate place, the place that reconciles the literal landscape and the sacred place of memory. God is always the creator of that interior space, but Latour and Vaillant find a reflection of that place in the glory of God’s creation. As Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen describes

The Lord is at the center of all things and yet in such a quiet, unobtrusive, elusive way. He lives with us, even physically, but not in the same physical way that other elements are present to us. . . . God in Christ are really here, and yet his physical presence is not characterized by the same limitations of space and time that we now know. (76)

As a result of miracle, they see in the physical world a shadowy reflection of the interior, spiritual landscape. In this place of pause and rest, Latour “lay in comfort and safety, with love for his fellow creatures flowing like peace about his heart” (DCA 29).

### **Little Miracles Making Greater Things Possible**

Father Latour and Vaillant find that “their way through the wilderness...blossomed with little miracles”(DCA 279). Miracles are seen when Latour was lost and found a cruciform tree, and when he was near to death from thirst, he came upon hidden water. Bishop Latour comments on miracles which best reveal the aesthetic keenness of his mind but the Bishop does not misconstrue tangibility with the miraculous. For him, a miracle is a vigorous insight into an identity, an illumination. “Religion is the way of seeing the world. It is an aesthetic in the root meaning of the word, a perception” (Langer 124). To quote,

Where there is great love there are always miracles . . . One might almost say that an apparition is human vision corrected by divine love. I do not see you as you really are, Joseph; I see you through my affection for you. The miracles of the church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made

finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears hear what is there about us always. (DCA 50).

Bishop explains the moments when the grace of God overtakes the people and also his words could well speak for landscape, which provides access to the holy. The archbishop thus nurtures the distinct cultural communities in his diocese at the same time nurturing the spiritual community of the church.

### **Relationship to God**

Cather's landscape itself represents relation to God. In Willa Cather's fiction, identity is often connected with landscape. She saw "the land as symbolizing the reality and a yearning for the unknown, the ultimate, and the transcendent"(Schneider 62). Cather mixes the drama of the land with the drama of the worship. He remembers how he had helped his young friend Joseph Vaillant to take a courageous decision that was to take him away from home and family and begin his missionary life.

At Latour's death, Cather once again highlights his respect for the cultural distinctiveness of his people by enumerating the various communities who mourn for his loss. She also notes at Father Vaillant's death how he had won the love and loyalty of "red men and yellow men and white"(DCA 289). The author depicts the diverse responses to the archbishop's death. They are the legendary figures in the early history of their country.

### **To Serve God, Serve Humanity!**

Both priests find fulfillment by immersing themselves in the communities that they serve. They also attain a stature and fame that mark them as unique personalities, thus placing them above those communities. Bishop Latour is able to transform human beings into living saints. His work of art is not only represented only by the cathedral, but also by the lives he rescues, the lives that enrich his own. Though his death is the end of the life on earth, it is much less an end than a beginning. He is on a pilgrimage whose end is death and life.

"Religion is a gradual envisagement of the essential pattern of human life" to which "almost any object, act, of event may contribute," remarks Langer (155). Latour's mission becomes a redemptive one, to bring into existence, by slow degrees, discipline, beauty and order to the world of chaos. He assimilates the past, and reorders a fragmented world.

Cather creates an image of history free from the complication of modern life. The abiding faith and missionary zeal of Archbishop Lamy and his vicar leave a permanent imprint on the history of the Southwest. The Archbishop finds personal completion in religion.

### **This Novel is About Life, Not About Death!**

*The Death Comes for the Archbishop* is in reality not about death. It is about Archbishop Latour's courage and steadfastness, his gentleness and his worldly success. His death in exile is a triumph in which physical space and the sacred place are reconciled within the self

through prayer. It is a “novel of conquest, conquest alike of a new land and of the souls of men” (Edel 14).

### **Missions Among the Indian Peoples and Cultures**

The stories of early missionaries in India, not simply of the Christian faith, but of all great religions that have come to stay in India are full of episodes that bring the Transcendent to the Local. The oldest and earliest missionary religion is Buddhism. Novels that embrace the themes of Buddhism and Buddhist missionary efforts are rare, although glorification of Buddhism in politics and social movements continue with great energy. Likewise the peaceful spread of Islam through the Indian coastal lines and from the Indian coastal lines to Southeast Asia has not attracted the attention of our fiction writers. The stories of the pioneers such as Sankara, Basavanna, Narayana Guru, Nayanmars and Azhwars of South India and Kabir and other great saints of the North need to be re-visited and re-told with redemptive vigor. Religious symbolism is rather on a low key in Indian fiction. Hopefully models such as the *Death Comes for the Archbishop* will inspire our writers with vision to explore the religious subconscious of our cultures and their implication to modern civilization.

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