

**CRITICAL APPROACHES TO SACRED TEXTS: THE
IMPLICATIONS OF HERMENEUTICS AND INTERPRETATIONS
IN UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION**

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Abstract

This study explores critical approaches to sacred texts, transcending traditional boundaries by examining the multifaceted layers of meaning, historical context, and cultural implications within revered writings across diverse cultures and religions. Rooted in religious doctrines, traditional approaches often fall short in addressing broader cultural, historical, and ethical dimensions, necessitating a comprehensive guide incorporating critical methodologies. Drawing inspiration from influential scholars such as Smith, Said, and Frye, the study advocates for a critical lens that challenges assumptions, engages with socio-cultural contexts, and considers the impact of colonial histories on interpreting sacred texts. As a case study, the Bhagavad Gita, a cornerstone of Hindu philosophy, is analyzed to address conflicting interpretations arising from theological, philosophical, and cultural perspectives. The study critically evaluates the influence of societal shifts, cultural norms, and historical contexts on the scripture's understanding. Ethical dimensions, particularly concerning caste, gender, and the justification of war, are examined in the context of evolving ethical standards and contemporary socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts. Objectives include uncovering multidimensional interpretations, evaluating the impact of cultural and historical contexts, and assessing ethical implications and contemporary relevance. Research questions explore contributions of critical approaches, the influence of cultural and historical contexts on sacred texts, and ethical dimensions in their interpretations. Encompassing major world religions, the study's significance lies in bridging gaps in existing scholarship, fostering interfaith dialogue, addressing questions of morality and social justice, and serving as valuable educational resources. Using an interdisciplinary approach drawing from literary theory, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology, the analysis reveals narrative richness, symbolic motifs, and ethical implications within sacred texts. Integration of perspectives from historical-critical analysis, literary scrutiny, and comparative religion enriches the understanding of these texts. Ethical considerations are emphasized to ensure responsible scholarship and respectful engagement with religious beliefs. Implications extend beyond academia, fostering interfaith understanding and global citizenship by recognizing diverse interpretations, acknowledging ethical complexities, and promoting respectful dialogue. Critical approaches contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious world, serving as a pathway to deeper understanding and cultivating interconnectedness and shared humanity in exploring sacred texts.

Key words: Religion, Culture, Historical Contexts, Hermeneutics, Interpretation

Introduction

The study of sacred texts spans diverse cultures and religions, serving as repositories of spiritual wisdom, cultural heritage, and ethical guidance, sparking interdisciplinary debates in theology, philosophy, literature, and cultural studies, necessitating a nuanced, critical approach to unravel the multifaceted layers of meaning, historical context, and cultural implications embedded within these revered writings.

Sacred texts hold a central position in academic discourse, transcending disciplinary boundaries and encompassing fields as diverse as theology, literature, philosophy, and cultural studies, being revered as repositories of spiritual and moral wisdom, cultural heritage, and historical significance, thus, becoming the subject of scholarly inquiry, urging a more critical and interdisciplinary perspective than traditional approaches.

While traditional approaches provide insights into the spiritual dimensions of sacred texts, they may fall short in addressing broader cultural, historical, and ethical implications, necessitating a comprehensive journal writing guide incorporating critical methodologies and diverse perspectives to navigate the complex terrain of sacred texts.

To contextualize the significance of critical approaches, it's crucial to acknowledge influential scholars like Smith (1992), who challenges conventional approaches to religion, Doniger (2009), advocating for a pluralistic approach, Said (1978),