Religion plays a prominent role in the life of the Indian as he is tenacious in clinging on to his religious beliefs. In India, religion has a tremendous hold over people as it influences life crucially by conditioning an individual’s outlook, values ideas, stance, reactions and responses. Being a perceptive writer portraying the Indian milieu, one of the chief thematic concern of Sahgal has been religion and religions attitudes. Nayantara Sahgal, herself has acknowledged the paramount significance of the religion and religions attitude, which she feels go a long way to explain political and emotional stances and also personal relationships. In a soul searching article, the sensitive writer poignantly questions.

In considering why we behave as we do, an examination of the religion, philosophy or belief most Indians prefers of people it does... what a Hindu believes in, what credentials he acts or evils to act are no longer merely points for idle speculation or academic debate. They are vital for our progress and well being.

"Writers of fiction", says E.M. Chapman, "are bound to take account of Religion, partly upon general principles, because of the place which religious views and institutions hold in the life of all ages and races, and partly because each new generation has its own religious experiences and problems which often seem of transcendent importance to its day". Nayantara Sahgal's deep concern regarding the religion has been duly and consistently reflected in her novels. She has been consistently portraying, probing and analyzing religion and religious attitudes from her first novel Happy to her last novel Identity. Critics, such as Jasbir Jain and T.K. Thomas have acknowledged her deep concern with religion.

Nayantara Sahgal not only depicts, but also evaluates perceptively the role of Hinduism and religious consciousness in the social and political context. Tradition in India is mainly a religious one, for Hinduism which is the religion of the majority, is not confined to temples or other places of worship, it is a way of life and has a sprawling hold over the lives of the people. Religion, to the Hindu, cannot be separated from social attitudes and acts and has more to do with prescribed actions and with relationships of humanity to the universe, than with belief or faith as the Westerner
conceives it. The ancient tradition of Hinduism, Nayantara Sahgal points out is presently clouded by a number of contradictions, anomalies, mis-interpretations and a superficial adherence to rituals and religious orthodoxy and obscurantism. The principal causes of the country's current degradation as well as an individual's personal plight, are seriously contemplated and analyzed by Sahgal. She forcefully and repeatedly argues that one of the principal causes of are the fossilization of its thought processes as a direct consequence of India's medieval insularity, superstition and obscurantism.

A brief exposition of the basic ideas and values of Hinduism is necessary to comprehend fully the tremendous influence it yields over the social and the political life of the Indians. Islam and Christianity are doctrinal religions as their religions tenets and commandments are codified in the holy Koran and Bible respectively. Hinduism however lacks such a particularized and absolute centre of authority, as in this ancient religion the religious truths and beliefs were realized and expressed through a gradual process of meditation by many individuals spanning over centuries. A few major relics which collectively put forward the fundamental concepts of Hinduism are Manu Simriti, the Upanishads, the Vedas, and Shri Bhagwad Geeta. A large number of varieties of belief from polytheism to monotheism have taken shelter under the umbrella of Hinduism.

Certain key concepts of Hinduism can be comprehended despite its doctrinal vagueness and the complex variety of its various sects and clans. At the root of Hindu metaphysics lies the idea of Brahman, i.e., and eternal, infinite, immanent and transcendent cosmic reality which embraces the forms of the abundant variety of beings in the universe. God, manifest in different forms - Avatars such Vishnu, Shiv, Ram Krishan and others. The phenomenal world is illusion. Our ignorance of the identity of the self with Brahman causes samsara or rebirth, but this too is an illusion, part of the Maya of the phenomenal world. The key to salvation lives in knowledge of the identity of the soul with God. Once this is thoroughly realised, Moksha or release from illusion is achieved. Final and real freedom from illusion can only come by renunciation or sacrifice and union with the Brahma by the higher knowledge - Advita vedanta realization of non-dualism. Moksha also means rising from a state of ignorance (avidya) to knowledge (vidya) and realization of the Infinite and the Eternal.

The Bhagavadgita is the most significant relic of Hinduism as it is an amalgam of the many currents of thought from the Vedas, and Upanishads. The Bhagavadgita shows to men a path of acceptance of worldly duties and relationships and does not deny them as an illusion. It treats them as opportunities for the attainment and accomplishment of spiritual freedom. It proclaims with vehement fervour the fact of the immortality
of the soul. The most remarkable teaching of the Bhagavadgita is the doctrine of Nishkam Karma which means doing the duty devotedly and wholeheartedly, unmindful of fruits and consequences. It propagates the path of action. According to the Gita one's sole search in life should be directed towards understanding the real reality of one's spiritual potential, inner power and true identity and for spiritual progression the best means, and the method is the observance of one's duty in life. 'Rebirth' is a phenomenon that has been accepted and stated by various sages, scholars and philosophers of the Hindu religion. The body is a mere outfit, or apparel that is sported for sometime by the soul and then changed. In this cycle of births and rebirths lies the key to salvation, to nirwana, to union with the Absolute. The various life or lives are pilferages for the salvation and release of the soul as it is an opportunity to redeem his 'self'.

However, the pristine core of the Hinduism was gradually infected with the malaise of misinterpretation, orthodoxy, obscurantism and superstitions. As the scriptures were in Sanskrit, the language of the educated Brahmins, the priests misinterpreted the religion for the unlettered masses. To promote their interests and to protect their gains, the priests perpetuated a very rigid caste system and hordes of superstitions and malpractices for centuries. They soiled the pristine purity of Hinduism and led to the all-round degeneration of the nation. Debased religion provided the germs which infected the culture and civilization as whole.

The real core of the Hinduism as it emerges from its scriptures, relics epics and the writing of saints, differs tremendously from the sham Hinduism popularised by the priest with its overemphasis on the rituals and rites. The tremendous difference between the two has led Milton Singer to organize the diversity found in Hinduism along a continuum ranging from "Sanskritic Hinduism" to 'popular Hinduism'. S.C. Dube in his pioneering anthropological work on the actual practices of the faith too corroborates Milton Singer's viewpoint.

Gradually the degenerated religion found expression as fatalism, escapism, inaction, smug acquiescence, patient wait for an avatar to cure the world of its ill, other worldliness and caste-discrimination. Even heinous practices such as sati, child marriage, savage exploitation of widows, the tremendous economic burden of large number of rituals and ceremonies were perpetuated in the name of religion. The adverse and inhibiting effect of Hinduism on the adherents' political, personal, social and economic life, has been pointed out by many perceptive observers. According to Max Weber, 'the spirit' of Hindu concepts of Samsara, dharma and moksha inhibited entrepreneurship and endeavour. Many sociologists have time and again confirmed Max Webber's opinion in their studies of the Indian scene and society. Elder points out that the
fatalistic attitude incapacitates the Hindus and loosens their grip over the empirical and social events of their lives. Fatalism, however limited in scope, affects an individual's inherent ability to act.

Hinduism as a crucial factor conditioning the responses of the people has attracted the attention of a number of Indian English novelists. Mulk Raj Anand is indignantly critical of the deadwood of the hoary religious traditions - its obscurantism and fossilization. Anand's Untouchable (1935) is a scathing attack on the pernicious grip of casteist orthodoxy which stifles individual potential. The Road (1961) is another novel by him which shows Anand's continued preoccupation with the abominable stratification of society on the basis of caste. Religion is not dealt with at length in any particular novel but there is hardly any novel that lacks a reference to God or religion along these lines. In his novels, Anand lays bare the inherent passivity of the Indians which makes them vulnerable to economic, social, political exploitation but there is no focusing on Hinduism as such Counterfeit sainthood is a ubiquitous phenomenon in our hoary land and Anand covers the priests of different religions with contempt and crushes them beyond redemption because they have reduced religion to rank religiosity and crass communalism. As Prof Verma observes in The Sword and the Sickle (1965) religion is "as widespread as small pox in the lands watered by Ganges". Mulk Raj Anand categorically rejects "the dead ideas of traditional philosophies, the ritual of the old religions or by the tame words of the classics".

R.K. Narayan, too explores the subtle influence of religion as in his novels "human character is tried and tested by a world arrayed between Karmic necessity and Dharmic Responsibility". In their different ways the protagonist in Mr Sampath (1965), The Financial Expert (1952), Guide (1958), In Waiting For the Mahatma (1955), are "all engaged in the trials of the self" and their eventual movement is in the direction of Moksha, which is the ultimate Purushartha, and as Raghavacharyulu points out that these novels may be viewed as "an allegory of Purusharthas". In The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961), The Vendor of Sweets (1967), The Painter of Signs (1976), Gods, demons and others appear emphasizing the archetypal nature of human experience and revealing the mythic design that underlies the patterns of existence. Drawing attention to the "consistent use of Myth in his novels" Shyam Asnani comments that Narayan "has endeavoured to relieve India's hoary past to our contemporary reality". Mr Sampath not only refers to India's hoary antiquity, it also introduces characters and stories from Indian epics and Puranas alive in the twentieth century Malgudi. In fact, Malgudi is microcosm of 'Hindu' India. In The English Teacher (1946), Krishnan's relentless efforts to establish a psychological contact with the spirit of his dead wife Susila one can easily discover links with the story of Savitri's efforts to win back her Satyavan from
the God of Death (Yama) though the roles of husband and wife are reversed. In *The Dark Room* (1938), in the story of Savitri’s passive endurance, Narayan seems to be enacting the ancient Tamil baldric story of Kovalan and Kaunaki.21 The allegorical significance in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, is noticeable as, the novel closely recreates the old Hindu myth of Bhasmasura in modern form. But his novels offers no treatment of the sociology of faith.

Raja Rao, strikes an altogether different note as he chooses to concentrate on an intense exploration of the metaphysics and the spiritual aspect of the Hinduism. In *Kanthapura* (1938) he brilliantly and sensitively records the renaissance of Indian spiritual life under the inspiring influence of Gandhi. *Kanthapura* as a work of fiction is also deeply concerned with exploration of Truth and Reality.22 The novel bristles with ideas of the Hindu ways of life. Critics have pointed out that the essence, the very soul of *Kanthapura*, lies in its pervasive strand of selfless action, a kind of *Nishkama Karma - Yoga* derived from that great classic of the *Bhagvad Gita*.23 In this novel Raja Rao captures and portrays the complex inter relation of the religion and the socio-political life of the simple rural Indians. He depicts Kanthapura with its superstitions, its caste system, its sincerity, deep religiosity and the gradual awakening against orthodoxy. Raja Rao effectively exploits religious, ritual, rites, myths and legends to convey the turmoil of the freedom struggle. The rural folks are aroused out of their complacency as they are convinced by Murthi that it is their religious duty to fight the wrong and injustice. In the next novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), however Raja Rao concentrates on the metaphysical and the philosophical and the spiritual as it explores the profound philosophical implications of the Hinduism. The non-dualistic philosophy of Sankara (9th century A.D) which maintains that the world is *Maya* (illusion) is one of the chief motifs of the novel. The critics of Raja Rao have already commented upon the connection between his novels and the three pathways to God in Hindu religious thought. M.K. Naik24 points out that *Kanthapura* projects the concept of action, or *Karma - Yoga*, that the *Serpent and the Rope* presents the doctrine of knowledge or Jnana Yoga unfolds the mystery of Govindan Nair' self-surrender, the cosmic principle of obedience to the divine power - the Mother *Cat* - in *The Cat and Shakespeare*. It is the pristine faith in all its hoary glory that Raja Rao reveals.

Bhabhani Bhattacharya is another novelist whose novels reflect the influence of religion over the social, economic and political life in India. He portrays the passivity and vulnerability induced by religions, faith and inadequate creed. In *He Who Rides Tiger* (1954) Bhattacharya depicts the commercialisation of religion by the greedy priests who prosper at the expense of superstitious believers. Kalo plans to make "a milch-cow of religion".25 In *Tiger* Bhattacharaya uses religion as an instrument of social
revenge. Kalo, becomes Managal Adbikare and "is transformed from a rebel to an exploiter who sides with his erst while tormentors to defeat them at their own game". In *Shadow From Ladakh* (1966), Bhattacharaya depicts how religious beliefs make people lackadaisical, uninvolved and uninterested in what happens to them or to those around them. "A zest for living that was vice" (emphasis in original) (*Ladakh* p.57). Jhanak in *Ladakh* and Kalo in *Tiger* feel the sordidness of the rigid stratification along caste lines, religion facilitates discrimination and the exploitation of those lower down the hierarchical order. Bhattacharaya records the tendency to resign to one's fate, breeding passivity, apathy and unconcern in *So Many Hunger* (1964) and *Music For Mohini* (1984). In the novels of Bhattacharaya, though the presentation is realistic yet there is no diagnosis as there is no prep into the malaise as such.

Sahgal takes over the legacy of Bhattacharya and M.R. Anand. Moving a step ahead, she supplements the realistic portrayal with an indepth analysis, as she subjects the religion and its influence to an intensive critical scrutiny. Nayantara Sahgal's treatment of religions is unlike that of Raja Rao least encumbered by the metaphysical burden. Nayantara Sahgal is forthrightly concerned with influence of the religion over an individual's social, personal, political and economic life. She herself, probes the effect of the Hinduism in a thought provoking article:

Is Hinduism, in terms of daily life, merely a vast framework of obedience, or does it encourage and equip to make the choices and value judgements that human beings have to make nearly every day of their lives, and certainly in times of crisis? Does it recognize corporate action? Does the Hindu think literally or metaphorically in terms of his fellow man, his "neighbour", the person or cause outside him and his family, towards whom he has some responsibility, or only in terms of his individual need and salvation? And if he is not responsible to anyone except himself and his god, can he ever act objectively, in circumstances that do not involve him personally, for the good of society? These and other questions should deeply concern a people who have not been able to bring about the transformation, and flowering they had hoped for after independence.

Sahgal presents a view point largely shared by Bhattacharya. Through their novels, they both project a scenario, in which Hinduism no doubt is an ally of exploiters-social, political economic and personal - as it breeds a non-critical stance and an other worldly indifference to the harsh and unpleasant realities. They both insists that though Hinduism is the cause of the malaise inflicting the Indians Hinduism is the only cure of the malaise. Bhattacharya's is a strong plea for rediscovering the true essence of ways rooted in our tradition and employing them in a constructive manner, moulding the method, if need be, to sharpen its efficacy. Sahgal too, is of the conviction that only
a vitalized version of Hinduism can infuse life in the passive masses. As a novelist she creates in each of her novels, sensitive characters who feel on their pulse the inhibiting influence of Hinduism in their personal and well as political life. She argues that a lop sided interpretation of Hinduism saps initiative, makes one passive and fatalistic as an individual and slavish as a citizen, and unresisting and meek victim. As one of the characters, Raj, a Christian, is exasperated by the paralyzing passivity of Simrit, a Hindu woman. She unresistingly and unprotestingly accepts the terrible exploitation inflicted by her husband. Raj wonders:

Did Hindus have any feelings that were personal and private, unconnected with institutions like the family, caste and the beaten tracks of these past 2000, years and more? (Shadow, p.128)

Ram Krishan, in the same novel, examines the Hindu belief and tries to find a way, that will make it,

descend from its heights to become a source of strength and hope in the hut and the factory... That was the miracle Hinduism must perform today, touch and transform to lives of millions and give them a basis for action, not merely a scripture and a ritual. (Shadow, p.152).

Nayantara Sahgal, unlike Nirad C. Chaudhuri and V.S. Naipaul firmly believes that the mis-interpreted religion must be re-examined to serve the needs of the modern Indians. The Hindu religion can certainly be re-adapted to become a living creed highly relevant to the modern times. Nayantara Sahgal does not deny or bypass religion, she only rejects dogma, superficiality, obscurantism and orthodoxy of religion. She values immensely the ancient tradition of Hinduism. She consistently and forcefully stresses the terrible urgency of revitalizing Hinduism. Nayantara Sahgal has stressed that rejuvenated and positively interpreted Hinduism is the only way out: "I see it [Hinduism] as fettering as far as emotional and spiritual and intellectual growth are concerned by only because people had misinterpreted it and its messages. She elaborates "I think we still have to define what Hinduism means, what is scope and limits are and only then will we draw strength from it in the way that a Christian, Muslim or Sikh draws strength from his religious heritage." There is need for action and fresh thought on almost every religious issue. Nayantara pleads in an article entitled "Fresh Air on Hinduism" that the religious leaders had shown attendency to concentration on the superfluities and exploit religious sentiment on issues like cow-slaughter and caste. They were also guilty of deliberately trying to confuse issues by equating caste with Karma. By saying that man's position in society was governed by the fact of his birth, they ignored the temporal origins of the caste system and invested it with a moral significance which it was never supposed to have. This attitude was a negative one while Nayantara
thinks that the theory of Karma is one of aspiration and is "the very heart of the Hindu view of evolutionary development with the good life, constructively lived as its central purpose". The issue of religion concerns Nayantara deeply and is reflected in each of her novels. She has written many perceptive articles in newspapers also. Particularly mentionable are "Conscience and the Hindu", "Religion and its Travesty", and "What does Hinduism stand for today". In her novels, characters, Hindus as well as non-Hindus, present discerning analysis and seething criticism of Hinduism. At the same time characters like Ram Krishan and Vishal project a concept of religion which is essentially Hindu, incorporating several features of Christianity as well. The ambivalence of Hinduism is responsible for a great deal that is happening in the present Indian society. It is answerable for both the apathy and the violence in it and a great deal more.

In her novels too Nayantara Sahgal presents a discerning and analytical portrayal of Hinduism. From the very first novel Happy to her latest Identity, Sahgal explores the various Hindu traditions, customs rituals and attitudes. She particularly and discernibly analyses the influence of the Hindu philosophy over an individual's attitude and response to the personal problems and the socio-political issues. She presents vivid characters who reflect the influence of deep seated Hindu beliefs on their personal relations as well as the public life. The narrator in Happy, Rakesh and Kalyan Sinha in Morning, Vishal Dubey and Trivedi in Storm, Ram Krishan in Shadow, Sonali in Rich, Tilak in Plans and Bhushan Singh in Identity are the "critical insiders" who expose the malaise infecting Hinduism; and she also depicts the non-Hindu Indians "objective outsiders" such as Raj Garg a Christian in Shadow and Usman Ali a Muslim in Situation who present an objective view. Sahgal also portrays the intense curiosity and interest of the Europeans in the mysterious Oriental religion. McIvor in Happy, Neil in Morning, Rose in Rich and Anna in Plans are the curious Europeans fascinated and strangely influenced by it. Her novels abound in both liberal and fanatic Hindus, Christians and Muslims. McIvor in Happy, Raj in Shadow, Michael in Situation and Rose in Rich are liberal Christians. Saleem and Saira in Morning and Usman in Situation are humanist Muslims. On the other hand the Granges in Happy and in Situation, Rose's parent in Rich, Bhushan Singh's father in Identity represent fanaticism and obscurantism. In each of her novels from Happy to Identity Nayantara Sahgal traces the pernicious influence of the Hindu beliefs and attitudes towards women over the man-woman relationship in Indian society. The inhibiting influence of the fatalistic and escapist postures of the Hinduism casts it baneful shadows over the political climate of the nation. Fatalistic
and stoic acceptance of the corruption and injustice and exploitation inflicted whether by the unscrupulous politicians or husbands makes the people unwitting ally of their exploiters.

Religiously, marriage is supposed to be the holy union of two souls and bodies. Despite the idealized concepts of marriage, women in reality is essentially a subservient partner in marriage. In India, traditionally the holy matrimonial ties are considered irrevocable. The Hindu dharma expects from wife complete obedience and devotion to her husband. She is expected to completely merge her ego with her husband and to strictly follow the ideal of pativrata. Religion as an institutionalized power structure perpetuates the myth of female subjugation and wreaks havoc in the personal life, effecting particularly the women. An extremely insidious psychological process, begins to work upon the woman, from the moment of her birth, through the agency of her family and other social structures, inculcates rigid notion of values, codes of behaviour. With religious sanction these structures communicate to her notions of good and bad, right and wrong, truth and falsehood which shape her identity at an instinctual and unconscious level. The "good" woman, therefore has to be "pure" and sexually inhibited, passive, obedient, submissive, hard working, self-sacrificing. The bad woman is the adulteress willful, self-assertive, disobedient. These norms and values are seen to be 'absolute truth' and glorified as the world of God Any digression from the glorified 'virtue' is branded as a "sin" and guilt. Hence they rigidly condition women, and influence tremendously their reactions and responses since the norms such as chastity and male superiority derive sanction from religions scriptures and relics they serve male interests. These norms breed powerlessness and inferiority in woman vis-a-vis men and hence become a tool of exploitation and suppression in the hands of men. Sita, in the sacred Ramayana typifies the traditional and extremely popular perceptions regarding a Hindu wife. The Hindu scriptures perpetuate forcefully the cult of male dominance. The woman is glorified as to be capable of great heights of self-control and self denial. The mystified ideal of womanhood doles out self-suppression, and abnegation as the supreme virtues for the women. Such heinous practices as sati-burning alive of the widow on her husband's pyre reflects the nadir of the pernicious influence of religion. The sati is perpetuated as a sacred and religions rite supposed to earn divine blessing and a place in the heaven.

In her novels, Nayantara Sahgal depicts sensitively the baleful influence of the Hindu notions and out look over the man-woman relationship in India. She captures graphically the subtle conditioning of the Indian women by the Hindu ideals and rigid code of behaviour. She highlights how religion spins out a complex apparatus of rules, rituals taboos which regulate behaviour and codify relationship. Her novels articulate
with great force the anger against all religions fundamentalism which sanctions male superiority. In each of her novel, from Happy to Identity she explores the various facets of the tenacious grip of the religion over the personal lives and behaviour of its adherents. Significantly Nayantara Sahgal depicts the changes induced by the western notions such as equality of man and woman, and laws such as divorce over the centuries old religions views regarding marriage as an unbreakable sacred bond. Nayantara Sahgal explores the meek acceptance of husband's second marriage (Happy); contemplation for divorce (Morning and Storm); the volatile issue of chastity and 'sin' in Storm; a courageous struggle of a Hindu woman against the feeling of sin and guilt over divorce in Shadow, the heinous crime if sati, perpetuated in the name of religion in Rich, and the rigid orthodoxy and the vehemence even violence meted out to inter caste personal relationship in Identity.

In her first novel Happy, Nayantara Sahgal portrays a devout Hindu wife Prabha Mathur in the pre-independence India. She calmly accepts the second marriage of her husband, as she has not been able to produce a male heir for him. It is a deep seated faith that only the last rites performed by the male heir can lead to mukti or freedom of the soul. And it is the privilege of a man to seek second marriage for a male heir for his spiritual salvation. This religious belief and custom, provides the excuse to a large number of Hindu men to marry again. Far from protesting or resisting the second marriage, Prabha Mathur accepts it as 'honhar' - the evil of the providence interpreted as "what must be will be". In the same novel. Maya, wife of an anglicized I.C.S. Harish, has to suffer the agony of a sterile and unhappy marriage, as the matrimonial ties are sacred and indissoluble for a Hindu couple. Maya's intimacy with the narrator is nipped in the bud as both of them realize and accept the finality of the Hindu marriage, Ragubir a clerk in Sanad's office is limited by his Brahmin origins and a hypocritical sense of social prestige. He refuses the job of a salesman as it is and insulting to the dignity of an educated Brahmin and would seriously affect his chances of a good matrimonial alliance.

In Morning, Rashmi, after a very unhappy marriage has returned to her father's house. She contemplates divorce. However his mother is deeply shocked even by the contemplation of divorce, as her reactions and responses are conditioned rigidly by the Hindu myth of 'divine' matrimonial bonds. Profoundly shocked, Rashmi's mother Mira is unable to accept the sacrilegious notion of breaking the marriage bond:

What reason under heaven could sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstances, to brutal insensitive husbands, to lunatics and lepers. (p.146)
Though Mira puts it down to a "tasteless parody of a transplanted modernity" (p.146), this is not applicable to Rashini. However Rashmi's father Kailas Vrind comprehends the winds of the change. He is able to accept Rashmi's decision as a sign of evolution and change. He interprets Rashmi's decision as a "torrential release from ancient grooves and bonds, ancient pain and suppression" (p.214). Rashmi, unlike the traditional Hindu wife is no longer willing to accept the pain and the torture of a mismatched marriage, as her fate. Rashmi's behaviour is the result of a natural process of growth-changed social conditions had brought about a change in expectations and the aware individual could no longer be stifled. Religious taboos and regulation can no longer women like Rashmi to seek happiness and self-realization and fulfillment.

In *Storm*, Nayantara depicts sensitively and graphically a marriage poisoned but the conflict between the modern and the orthodox Hindu views about chastity and male dominance. Saroj who has been brought up in a liberated atmosphere of freedom and trust, expects her marriage to be based on equality, respect and honesty. Saroj's husband Inder, however is rigidly orthodox with firm faith in male-superiority. Inder, derives his idea of male superiority from religious sources. He reacts violently to Saroj pre-marital relationship. He views it as an unpardonable moral lapse and brands her as a "sinner" (p.97) he shaken to the core of his beliefs, feels cheated:

> It had no place in an order that clearly demarcated the roles of men and women, unless that venerable order were breached, bramble and mocked. (*Storm* p.98)

Saroj is deeply distressed and burdened by Inder's constant intimidation. Vishal Dubey, a liberated Hindu, is outraged by Saroj's miserable condition and orthodox views held by Inder. Vishal, the author surrogate, expresses his wrath at acquiescence in the face of such exportation:

> Dubey had no use for martyrdom in any form but the kind bred into women outraged him. It was even elevated to a mystical importance, glorifying their acts of self effacement and never more than when it demanded the sacrifice of their essential selves. (p.104)

Vishal emphatically stresses the essential difference between "chastity" of woman and the "purity". Finally Saroj decides to leave Inder and leaves for Delhi. Saroj's departure is a rejection of the restrictions imposed by the cult of male dominance mystifying female subjugation and self-effacement and hypocritial and discriminatory notion of chastity.

*Shadow* captures the intense turmoil and trauma and the violent reaction towards divorce in the Hindu society. Nayantara Sahgal, herself writes in a stirring article "Divorce and Hindu Woman":

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... divorce for woman nature is like a sin, and in explanation of her share of guilt she stays mute and acquiescent over the settlement, willing to accept it as a part of her Karma.41

Despite the constitutional gains, the subordination of women preached by religion and perpetuated by the conventions is the rule of the day. The painful experience of Simrit categorically reflects that the deep seated religious and social doctrines cannot be uprooted instantaneously. The reason for the divorce is once again depicted as mismatching and marital discorded and incompatibility. Som just like Inder, belongs to the "he-man school", expects Simrit to conform unquestioningly to the cult of male-superiority. Moreover, caught up in "a spiralling mania for influence" Som has least regard for humane values such as tender emotions, warm involvement, interest, affection and care for his wife. Grieved by suppression and neglect, Simrit realizes she wants "a world whose texture is kindly".

Som justifies his relentless pursuit of wealth on the basis of the Hindu belief in the four ashrams of life—there is time for everything, for making money too in the Grahastashram. In Som's case however his excessive concentration on the material aspect makes him entirely oblivious of the other and non-attachment deteriorates into indifference and brutality. So much so that he threatens his wife either to mould herself to suit Som's demands or to finish the farce. The Hindu Code Bill comes to her help whereby she gets release but legal provisions are no solace nor compensation for cruelty sanctioned by religion. Simrit, therefore feels "Uprooted and abandoned in a husband centered world". (p.2) Simrit, herself, too feels guilty of "offendering against something old and ordained" (p.137). Som manages to penalize her even after the divorce, as he manages to inflict heavy tax payment of Simrit resulting in a virtual monetary killing. The consent terms are tilted finally and fully against Simrit, yoking her till the day she died to a load of tax that would cripple her capacity to earn. Simrit however becomes almost paralysed. With her passivity she is reduced to sitting and suffering instead of resisting and fighting the brutal injustice. The spectacle exasperates her Christian friend and makes him wonder:

Whether a Hindu ever tackled a problem as an individual. Did Hindus have any feelings that were and private, unconnected with institutions like the family, cast and the beaten track of these past 2000 years and more? (Shadow, p.103).

He traces the stoic passivity to Simrit's "Hindu origins". To him it looked more and more the mirror of a whole culture, people—especially women—forever taking things lying down. (p.104). Ram Krishan, Raj's mentor and friend, points out:
The Hindu woman traditionally has no rights apart from what her father or her husband choose to bestow on her the law has changed some of that, but attitudes haven't changed much, which is clear from the husband's attitude in this case and the court's acceptance of such a document (Shadow p.168).

The reaction of Raj Garg's friend Mr Shah illustrates typical Indian attitude to divorce. Mr Shah points out that divorce is not part of our tradition (p.146) and he is least touched by the brutality of the consent terms. Raj Garg, is infuriated by the callous indifference of otherwise god fearing people like Mr Shah the reaction. Even "god-fearing" devout Hindus like Shah are insensitive to the plight of the exploited women (p.146). In the beginning even Simrit accepts it "as it was her fate and she had to take it lying down" (p.140). Raj Garg and Ram Krishan exhort Simrit to fight against the "naked brand of exploitation" and the plain denial of justice (p.178). Raj's sincere concern and genially deep love nurtures Simrit back to life finally, she is not only able to get rid of her "guilt" but only feels a strong, positive feeling (p.208). Ram Krishan, the chief exponent of Sahgal, exhorts Simrit:

To fight wrong, a man has to believe it is terribly important to fight it might be in eternity or a hundred years hence, it has to matter today. That is the point to dig out of the Hindu approach and move it out of the universal into the present. We have to dig them up, highlight them, make it known that this too is Hinduism. It's this that will provide the stamina the sticking point, the boiling point we need to resist what we don't believe in and give us the will to act. (p.234)

Simrit, no longer willing to accept her "fate" resists Som's victimization and refuses his terms for shares arrangement.

Another promising personal relationship marred by the typical Hindu attitude of evasion and passivity, is that of Raj Garg and Sheila. In his early youth Raj Garg had been deeply and "devouringly" in love four years. However their plans were wiped clear by her parent choice of a husband for her. Shaila had not been able to face her family, with the announcement that she wanted to marry a Christian. Shaila had disowned Raj completely and had left Raj grief-stricken. Raj Garg traced her "the death-dealing incapacity that had paralyzed her at the moment of decision", the her Hindu attitude of evasion (p.105). She had let herself to believe that

The whole thing had never happened. It had been an illusion. But then so was the while tumultuous actual world according to the Hindu. Even your hand was not our hand your pain was not your pain in that indisputable, flawless, monstrous logic. (Shadow, p.105)
Raj's "equilibrium returned with painful stoutness" and he had dedicated himself to the politics and social service.

The heinous custom of sati-burning of the widow on her husband's pyre is a shameful blot on the Hinduism. The barbaric custom, was practiced with religious sanction. In Rich, Nayantara Sahgal captures the barbaric custom graphically as she exposes poignantly the religions superstition and obscurantism. She records sensitively the plight of the ignorant Hindu widows, intimidated by the greedy relative to commit sati or misguided by the religious fanaticism and superstitions. The detailed accounts record the barbaric custom as well as the zealous efforts of the educated Indians to fight to menace. Sonali's grand father records the stirring influence of the Hindu Reformation Movement, "churning up a tidal wave in Hinduism". (p.121) He, reflects the spirit of the educated Indians of the era as he condemns bitterly, the burning of widows and he spearheads a campaign to stop the barbaric custom.

Nayantara Sahgal, depicts two vivid and detailed account of the tragic event (p.124). The women, the victims of the heinous religious site themselves, too were bogged down by the deep-rooted superstitions. The women, were led to firmly believe, by the priests that the self-immolation or sati earned heavenly bliss for the next lives. The touching account from the "List of Hindu Widows Immolated" dated December 1882, illustrates the deep influence of the relations obduracy and superstition. A widow Comor, willing ascends the funeral pyer of her husband, strongly refusing the magistrate's repeated endeavours to dissuade and rescue her (p.125). The magistrate dejectedly remarks:

This victim of superstition appeared firmly impressed with the idea of the present being the third time of her soul's incarnation (p.126).

Sahgal highlights the crucial role played by priests in instigating superstitious rural folks in perpetuating Sati. In Sonali's grand father's own village an old man "with an apocalyptic vision" suddenly appears and declares. The calamities are their "punishment for abandoning old traditions" (p.128). The old seer's priest leads them to believe that all would be well if the old ways are embraced again. Soon a woman is burned by her relatives and the people are in "an ecstasy of revival" (p.128). He senses that in the "charged atmosphere", the village seems to be waiting for its next victim. The "grotesque" event deeply depresses him and becomes "the material of his nightmare" (p.128). He leads the vociferous protest against the sati. The old seer predicts his death and surprisingly he dies the as the same moment arrives.
Nayantara Sahgal gives a vivid description of the hair-raising episode of Sonali's grand mother's Sati witnessed by her son Keshav. Though his father had spear headed the campaign against the Sati, he himself condemns vociferously Sati, and yet he cannot rescue his mother. She is burnt alive as he fights his relatives. The gruesome tragedy, haunts him for the whole of his life. He bemoans:

Yet the question remains what kind of society is it that demands human sacrifice to appease the blood thirst of what kind of gods? (Rich p.128).

The tragic experience leads him to question some of the very fundamentals of Hinduism:

So I cannot believe in Hinduism, whatever Hinduism might be not because of such evils as sati, but because evil is not explained. If the universe is an illusion and eternity is a split second, and there are eternities of life after life to come, then in terms of the cosmos my mothers agony is nothing. And all suffering is nothing. But it is that twitch of time in the cosmos when I saw her there, when I would have given my life to drag her out of fire, and killed those about me who had consigned her to it, that I want explained. And if evil has had upto where we stand then the ground beneath our feet, as my father used to say, is far from firm. (Rich, p.136)

Religious support to perpetuate such heinous crimes exposes the priest who misinterpreted religion. Keshav, questions the unholy nexus of the priests and autocratic husbands and relatives. While talking to Ram and Rose, he points out indignantly the instances of injustice and victimization of women with tactic religious support. He cites the famous instance of the victimization of Sita by her husband Ram, in the holy relic Ramayana:

We are doomed for reasons like Rama's cruelty. We revere the Ramayana and worship a man who turned his wife out alone and pregnant into the forest. Not even ordeal by fire providing her purity saved her. (Rich 167)

The Hindu are bogged down by doubt and indecision as "even what we worship needs second thought", however he can hardly be said to have fulfilled his duty towards his wife. He declares "That is plain suicide couched in poetic language". As Keshav indignantly points out:

Or was murdered by society.... for how voluntary are voluntary deaths, and was it bliss hereafter or earthly hell that drove satis to climb their husband's funeral pyres and be burned alive? (Rich, 197)

Rose, a British woman married to an Indian Ram, wonders, "If that's what happens to princess what about ordinary people" (Rich, p.68).
The second marriage of Ram to Rose, also illustrates the influence of religion over personal relations in India. Ram, though already married to Mona, proposes to Rose in London, as his "religion lets a man have more than one wife" (Rich, p.38). Rose decides to marry Ram, despite her parents' strong objection to Ram being a Hindu and not a Christian. Though Rose is married to Ram by the Hindu rites and not the Christian rites, still she is not bothered by their marriage not being Christian legal. She realizes:

The sanctity of hoary tradition had not kept Ram attached to his first wife. (Rich, p.40)

Ram and Mona's marriage had been performed exactly according to the Hindu rites and rituals, after elaborate matching of the horoscope on an auspicious day, time and date. Still the marriage had not been a success, so Rose questions: "If all that hadn't been proof against failure what good was it anyway" (Rich, p.40). Rose pleads with Ram to divorce Mona, his first wife, but Ram informs Rose about the inviolable sanctity of the Hindu marriage, as

....there is no divorce. Hindu marriage is not a contract, it's a sacrament. (Rich, p.54)

The Hindu religion and its scriptures, do not allow divorce even in extreme cases. Mona, the first wife, reacts in a typically fatalistic view Hindus view life as a part of a continuum - the deeds of the past life effect the course of events in the present as well as shaping the future. Rather than blaming her husband Ram for neglecting her and marrying again, Mona resorts to, "Calling upon the Almighty to spell out what she had done in this or past lives to deserve such outrageous treatment" (p.125).

In *Mistaken Identity*, Nayantara Sahgal takes up yet another area of the tenacious hold of religion: the intercaste - marriages and relations. Caste, like a phantom puppeteer has pulled the strings in most Indian families. In *Identity*, Sahgal portrays the vehemence, even violence, with which intercaste marriages or even relationships are confronted. In India, caste has been a very potent factor and intercaste marriages and relationships are met with virulent opposition. Caste, ostensibly, has the sanctity of religion and the intercaste marriages are taken to be as a direct attack on the religion itself, a sacrilege. Denouncing vociferously the virulent opposition and intolerance, she argues passionately for intercaste marriage, to achieve a truly secular social fabric. She exposes the atrocity and inhumanity of the communal riots, flaring up on the slightest and most flimsy pretext.

Bhushan Singh, a Hindu prince of a small state, falls in love with a Muslim girl Razia. They meet in the forest and the very knowledge of their names, Hindu and
Muslim, stops them "dead", as they realize "These names could not be linked by and (Identity, p.52). Bhushan passionately decides to ignore the identity branded on them by their religion:

.... There was nothing, least of all the names others had given us, to prevent us from embracing for ever. (Identity, p.52-53).

However their secret idyllic meetings are soon discovered and they are separated. The shocking discovery of the intercaste relationship sparks off frenzied communal riots. Bhushan Singh is deeply shocked. Ironically he comments:

It sounded the most inventive religious riot in years, each side spurred on by unmistakable signs from heaven. (Rich, p.57).

Parents of Bhushan and Razia feel "disgraced" and hold them responsible for the riot. The "catastrophe" has political fall out as well for Bhushan's father. At a time when he is backing the Muslims in their support for the Khilafat in Turkey, his son's "abduction" of a Muslim girl, is an embarrassment politically as well as socially. He rightly points out that "Muslim tenants are yelling Islam is in danger, when but for my lascivious son, it is nothing of the kind" (p.58). Even mere suggestion of Bhushan and Razia's marriage outrages Bhushan's father. Muslim imbecile's unintentional murder by Bhushan sparks off yet another communal riot. The two riots supposed to be "instigated" by Bhushan-Razia affair are declared to be "the two most barbaric" religions riots in forty years. (p.144). Bhushan's father has to send him to America to save him. Vijaygarh which has the ancient hatred between Hindu-Muslims is not the place for Bhushan. Bhushan vehemently argues with his father's American friend Goldberger and tries to explain to futility of the ancient hostility on basis of religions:

Who hasn't put who to the sword at one time or another? That's what ghastly old history is all about. And at this point what does it matter who killed who in the year? In any case, no one ever killed for religion. (Identity, p.110).

Deciding to search for Razia, Bhushan returns to India and settles in Bombay for some time. In Bombay, Bhushan is attracted to a Parsi girl, Sylla. Once again her religion contributes significantly towards their relationship. Bhushan ruminates:

It was true I wasn't having this lyrically passionate affair with zoroaster, but in a way I was. This particular affair might not have taken place without him. Women don't realize they are our states of mind Sylla was my peace, my heaven from the furies of Hinduism and Islam because she was a Parsee. With her I was never afraid of being swept off my feet, driven out of my mind. I was safe where I stood. I was allowed simply to be. (Identity p.121)

Bhushan is deeply impressed by the secular and simple outlook of the Parsee religion:
Peace be with you religions say. Only Sylla's means it. *(Identity, p.123)*

Untouched by fanaticism, the simple Parsee religion particularly appeals to the tormented soul of Bhushan Singh. In a meeting supporting the Khilafat cause, Bhushan Singh delivers a strong blow to the hypocritical Hindu-Muslim unity. Denouncing vehemently the dogma-Hindu as well as Muslim, Bhushan Singh issues a "clarion call for Hindu-Muslim marriage" (p.119). He argues passionately "sexual unity was the acid test of unity" (p.119) in a meeting called to declare support for the cause of Khilafat.

He condemns vociferously the tactic support of religions - Hindu as well as Muslim - to suppression and exploitation of women. Bhushan's earnest appeal, creates a pandemonium in the meeting. Pandit and Ulema get up as if they "were manacled together" and leave dais in "outraged protest" (p.119), as the audience roar for an "apology" (p.119). Bhushan Singh is denounced as a "raving lunatic" (p.119) and the meeting is automatically adjoined. The incident exposes effectively the hypocrisy of the Hindu priests as well as the Muslim ulemas. Ultimately Bhushan Singh marries a Muslim girl, daughter of his jail mate comrade Yusuf. Even Bhushan's mother - neglected and by her husband for years - too courageously decides to cast her lot with Yusuf.

The influence of religion and religious attitude can be perceived not only in personal lives of the individual but also in the political life of a nation. Hinduism Sahgal holds, casts an inhibitive negative influence over the individuals political life of the nation, It induces inertia, escapisms and fatalism. In each of her novels Sahgal traces the resigned tolerance and fatalistic acceptance of corruption and exploitation. She portrays Govind Narayan's smug complacency in *Happy*, Dhiraj Singh (*Shadow*), the sham ideologues, the "intellectuals in the cabinet (*Situation*) and the sycophant bureaucrats in *Rich* effectively illustrate the restrictive and paralyzing influence of the religion over the political life of the nation. *Identity* depicts the influence of communal disharmony and violence over the political state of the nation. All these political developments and corrupt politicians are exposed as inevitable products of the atmosphere generated by complex fatalistic attitudes, "born of philosophic insulation from the world of fact".[42]

Millions of Hindus have misinterpreted the lesson of non-attachment from *Shri Bhagwad Gita* as an unquestioning and total submission to fate. This fatalistic attitude induces paralyzing passivity and smug complacency. "Popular Hinduism breeds attitude which make one reconciled to the status quo. One comes across attitudes, which sap
This attitude and its influence over the political life of the nation have been amply illustrated in the novels of Sahgal.

In the very first novel Happy, Nayantara Sahgal portrays graphically the hedgehog mentality of the upper-class Hindus. Govind Narayan a rich upper class landlord is supremely unconcerned and untouched by the zealous political awakening all around him. Living in his ivory towers of wealth and luxury he clings "tenaciously to his comforts" (Happy p.15). Far from feeling guilty, he justifies his luxurious, peaceful life, as he says:

I must have accumulated merit in my previous incarnations or I should not have been born into the pleasant life I enjoy I should be a bad Hindu if I did not live as my birth and position intended me to do. (Happy, p.15)

He even brushes aside the painful incident of racial discrimination against his young daughter. To the narrator's protest, he complacently answers:

What are five thousands years of culture if they have not taught one to be polite? (Happy p.56).

Untouched and supremely indifferent to the zealous freedom struggle, Govind Narayan leads a leisurely, neutral life with an "unassailable calm (p.17). Thus many the rich upper-class Indians, are bogged down by political inertia induced by their religious belief. The same political paralysis, the same refusal to be provoked even by the greatest of the event is to be seen in Savitri, in Happy. She finds escapes in some vague pride in the traditional India:

They have taken our land ....But they have not penetrated the inner sanctum, the real temple that is India ...The realm of the spirit continues inviolate, roaring above the crushed hopes and the uniform dream. (p.188)

This vague pride in the religion, encourages her, and many more like her, to escape the political awakening. They thus glide past the most tumultuous political events. Even the callous murder of her innocent and dearest son Sahdev in his prime of youth by an English army man, fails to arouse her. Her only comment is fatalistic:

Each man can live only up to his appointed hour. (p.192)

Such fatalistic acceptance of exploitation and victimization restricts an individual's rightful claim for justice and freedom. Hence inducing political paralysis, leaving the vast potential of the people untapped.
In *Morning*, Nayantara Sahgal illustrates very effectively the use of religion as a tool to be used for political exploitation and self-promotion rather than for personal salvation. *Morning* records the re-emergence of religion as a major factor in Indian politics, despite Nehru's efforts to establish India as a secular democracy. Hari Mohan, an unscrupulous businessman, fired with intense political ambition, exploits religion for personal ends. Hari Mohan consciously becomes the 'rallying point for all the rigid orthodox Hindu elements'. He unhesitatingly inflames communal hatred and violence for his own political gains. He even, goes to the extent of using the Muslim tenants in his locality, as political hostages in order to get a Congress ticket for election. Kailas, the veteran Gandhian leader, intelligently cautions the other congressmen that Hari Mohan's "approach is medieval" as he has is a rally point for all the rigidly orthodox Hindu elements in the state (p.200). Being a perceptive analyst, Kailas, understands the crucial influence of the religion over politics. In the place of pilgrimage such as Allahabad, this influence assumed tremendous significance as people are "touchy about things they consider sacred" (p.200). In a near by constituency, the candidate of the secular Congress party, had won only by "slenderest margin" against the rival who had fought the election on the issue of anti-cow slaughter. The election, had exposed the vulnerability of the politics to religious orthodoxy.

The religious theme, which Kailas felt was no longer religion but the difference between the modern and the medieval mind, lay close to the surface of people's most explosive reactions. (p.200)

Prudently Kailas analyses that with the approaching partition, would bring these "fervid reactions into play, highlight fanaticism and reverse the progress of three decades. With remarkable foresight and sincerity, he resolutely decides that he

Would not deliver his party into the hands of fanatics. The Congress, he believed, must stand by its first principle, that religion was man's private concern, that every religion belonged and could claim nourishment from this soil, or India itself would have no meaning. (Morning p.200)

Kailas's prophetic comments have tremendous relevance and abiding significance for the political life of a multi religious nation like India. Kailas, upholding the secular basis of Indian politics, firmly refuses a congress ticket for Hari Mohan. Hari Mohan, retaliates by holding his Muslim tenants "to ransom". Secular in his outlook, and zealously committed to the security and welfare of the people-Hindu as well as Muslim Kailas works tirelessly and sincerely to maintain communal peace and harmony.
Self-centered and orthodox politician Somnath is presented as a foil to secular Kailas. Rebuffed by Kailas, Harmohan is eagerly welcomed by another congressman, Somnath, who lacks the secular and perceptive vision of Kailas. They both belong to the same type of category of narrow orthodox religious fanatics. When Kailas joins the Centre Government as Minister for Industry, Hari Mohan and Som Nath are able to corner power. However as both of them are power hungry and greedy politicians they both fall out and finally Kailas is brought back to stem the rot set in by the two unscrupulous ministers. Return of Kailas reinforces novelists vision of secular edifice of the national politics.

In Morning, Nayantara Sahgal, portrays yet another unpalatable feature of Indian political-the hypnotic spell of the astrologers and their prophecies over the Hindu politicians through Hari Mohan. It is his astrologer's job to determine whether the stars were auspicious, and if they were not, to clear obstructions through prayer and offering (p.197). All his moves and plans are based on the astrologer's advice. He is caught up in the spell of astrology and is vulnerably dependent on fore knowledge now before he could act, and on the ceremonies that followed each inauspicious signs and prediction. His wife and the pandit takes care to ward off the inauspicious stars by particular religious "rites" (p.213). Though he is a man decisive in thought and action that the pundit's predictions had introduced an element of hesitancy into his make up (p.213). Surprisingly, his prophecies through the years had been so exactly accurate, that Hari feels his own present position of power foretold step by step, was "a tribute to his astrologer's mastery over his science" (Morning, p.213). The reason for such blind faith is that "It was not superstition for there was too much continuing evidence to support its authenticity. What ever the pundit said would happen, did happen, and this was its hold on Hari. It has robbed him little by little of the power of decision". (p.213) The final denouement of the novel, beings significantly with this astrologers predictions of bad days for Hari Mohan and the advice to postpone party-election. This move brings Hari Mohan in direct clash with Somnath and eventually leads to the downfall of the ministry.

The fatalistic approach and inertia impedes a nation's progress. In Storm, Nayantara Sahgal captures sensitively and perceptively the catastrophic influence of apathy, inertia and stoic acceptance of violence, victimization induced by Hinduism. Such inhibitive and negative outlook causes havoc to the resilience of the political life of the nation. Vishal a Brahmin himself, confronts a peculiar political situation in Chandigarh, Violence, is engulfing they city as it is hardly resisted and rather stoically accepted. People seem to be paralysed by stoic resignation, which allows violence to
Mount and ebb like some tidal wave, waiting for it to engulf them. Passively waiting as they waited for the rains, for the harvest, for the birth of unwanted children, for death. (Storm 6)

Vishal is exasperated at the "paralysis" afflicting the common men (p.141). Passively, they wait, without any sense of responsibility or will to resist it accepting the violence, injury, death and destruction as their preordained fate.

Unscrupulous politicians like Gyan Singh, the chief Minister of Punjab, unabashed by exploit this passivity ruthlessly by perpetuating a cult of violence. The Indian political scene is plagued as much by the passivity of the sincere and good intentioned as by the vicious action of the corrupt politicians. Gyan Singh is adamant regarding his plan of crippling strike, as he calls it time for "action". Harpal Singh, the C.M. of Haryana, however is bogged down by a feeling of withdrawal and resignation. Vishal is dismayed at the contrast between the two.

Either we sit paralysed waiting for heaven to send us a sing, or we charge like bulls into the ring and call it action. (Storm, p.75)

Even the genuinely sincere and devoted ones have to be coaxed out of their limbo to resist the onslaught of the fissiparous forces. Vishal's earnestly pleads to face Gyan's strike, rather than to wait meekly and passively for Gyan Singh to strike. Harpal Singh plans elaborate strategy to meet the strike thread effectively, with Vishal's help Vishal waxes Harpal Singh to emerge out of his passivity and act and assert his inherent goodness to meet head on the challenge posed by Gyan's thereafter. Raj Garg, in Shadow a perceptive observer, bemoans the passivity, which sometimes breaks into impulsive action:

Hinduism couldn't be turned into action at all, worse, it could become inhuman action. (Shadow, p.13)

Shah, unprotestingly pays huge "donations" to political parties. Shah bears his victimization silently and unprotestingly. Simrit, another victim exploited by her ruthless husband, bears the exploitation unprotestingly. Raj's pained by their stoic acceptance:

What did people like Shah or Simrit believe in? What if anything would they fight to defend? (Shadow p.145)

Raj Garg, being a Christian, objectively analysis the root cause of the passivity:

The Hindu race:- mute, acquiescent letting things happen to it, from a country to the mind and body of a woman. (p.37)

Passively accepting even the harsh realities, any Hindu hardly ever strives for change. As Raj Garg points out:
It's because the Hindus have such a fully developed assurance that everything will always be as it was, forever and ever amen, (p.19).

Rishad in Situation, confronts the same paralyzing passivity in the quarry workers and the farmers though they are much exploited and victimized. Rishad, the revolutionary Naxalite firmly believes that circumstance make revolutions. He zealously tries to arouse them into some kind of protest or resistance but he rarely makes any impact over them. The farmers would wait "rooted to their patches of soil for the rain to come. Once it did, they would not care a fig for anything else" (p.68). Rishad traces the cause of this inertia to their deep seated religious belief that

good and evil are part of the cosmos and each man's destiny his own to work out with in that cosmic pattern all through eternity. (Situation, p.71)

Rishad, fired by a zeal for, reform rejects this ineffective "diet of philosophy" and desperately seeks "another easier-to-grasp prescription for change" (p.71). The zealous student revolutionary from Nehru University, the cell-mate of Kishori Lal in Rich, too had confronted the same stoic acceptance in the brutally exploited peasants in Bihar. To resist, to question and to demand an end to the atrocities, is beyond their cloistered horizons. Bhattacharya too observes the same reluctance in the striving destitutes in Too Many Hunger. He explains that the people have their "hands menacled with their antique moral traditions. The rich robber were safe from peril because of peasant's traditions (Hunger p.111).

The stoic and passive acceptance of exploitation and victimization breeds escapism and an inhibitive outlook to treat the harsh reality as an illusion. There is an overpowering instinct among Hindus to brush aside the real as illusory, especially if it happens to be unpalatable. "The whole tumultuous, actual world" according to Hindu is an illusion". Raj Garg is shocked that "Even your hand was not your hand, your pain was not your pain in that indisputable flawless monstrous logic" (Shadow p.105). Sonali in Rich comes to know how his grand father's faith Hinduism, received a rude shock, by the implicit logic of illusion. She reads in her grandfather's memories about the evasiveness the philosophy of illusion:

If the universe is an illusion, and eternity is a split second, and there are eternities of life to come, then in terms of the cosmos, my mother's agony is nothing. And all suffering is nothing. But it is that twitch of time in cosmos when I saw her there, when I would have given by life to drag her out of the fire, and killed those about me who had consigned her to it, that I want the ground beneath out feet... is far from firm. (Rich, p.136)
Despite its philosophic view of evil the basis of evil in its actual manifestation is not resolved in Hinduism. Keshav in Rich realizes low evil in the abstract engages the attention in Hindu thought whereas its manifestation in worldly frame where it afflicts the individual, is just brushed aside as insignificant in the context of the universal. This disregard of the personal and the social for the impersonal and the universal, of detail for a general theme, according to Keshav, makes Hinduism a debilitating faith. It fails to measure up to the diverse desperations of an individual. It can thus give one no sustenance in a crisis. The story Mona relates to Rose relating to the twofold concept of life, cosmic and temporal (pp 208-9) reveals one in built defence mechanism where by temporal distress can be made to look insignificance can against a cosmic background.

This sense of illusion breeds in the people a conspiracy of silence on the political plane. Sonali, herself witnesses the escapist reaction of the Indian to harsh realities. The repressive regime of Emergency is unprotestingly accepted and even the responsible bureaucracy plays along. Sonali searches for the "real explanation" of their insularity she finds that Hindu attitude of self-imposed myopia in the face of the terrible onslaught of the dictatorial forces. She analyses that

We are blind from birth, born of parents blind from birth. We do not see what we do not want to, and when we cannot avoid a nasty sight it still can’t do much to hurt us. (p.25)

The escapist attitude invests religious halo to the ideal of renunciation. Suren, Raj Garg's father and a rebel Hindu points out that

It is a hankering, and a noble one in the human process. But there are times when it is wrong... So you can’t simple make a virtue of renunciation as Hinduism does. That's what defeats this country. It makes a man draw back and do nothing in a situation when he should take more responsibility, face up to things and stand firm. (Shadow, p.171)

The escapist attitude hampers the individual's efforts face and fight the onslaught of corruption and injustice. It breeds an ostrich-like mentality and becomes an ally of the exploiters. Michael, an objective appraiser of the Indian scene in Situation, is baffled by the preoccupation with multiple, allegorical layers of meaning in even the most obvious things. He warns that "this trimurti business, three face to every action will be the ruin of the country" (p.79). Such ambiguous abstractions hamper on individual's decisive action and breed passivity and escapist attitude. In Rich Sahgal explains that fatalism comes to be the final answer to all the questions with its irrefutable iron logic. When Sonali's grand father explains to superstitious villagers that draught is caused not
by a curse but by lack of rain, pat came the question: "What makes lack of rain?" When it was explained that rainfall was dependent on certain atmospheric conditions, the query is still the same: "what causes those?" Until the smug fatalistic conclusion was unilaterally agreed upon: "there was definitely a Reason which chose to grant or to punish" (Rich, p.127).

Blind faith in Fate, instills in Hindu not only a paralyzing passivity but also a deep yearning and patient wait for some divine redressal and a divine incarnation of God, the avatara to set the things right. The excessive obsession for the divinity, renders them vulnerable to exploitation and fraud. As the narrator in the Happy, that "Any naked, bedraggled haired fraud of a sadhu covered with ashes could attract a formidable following and hypnotize it into obedience". (Happy, p.13). Blindly believing Krishana's prophecy of divine incarnation to stem the rot, in Bhagwad Gita, the Hindus have developed an outlook of passive acquiescence waiting for divine redressal. Influence by their tremendous faith in divine intervention for redressal, Hindus become "nostalgic for Kings, or charismatic leaders" (Situation, p.22). This attitude invests the political leaders with divine halo and charismatic hold. They may have visionaries like Shivraj with "an imperial touch" (Situation, p.48) or may be "the young idol on his white horse who had led Indians in a pledge of Independence on a river bank in Lahore" (Rich, p.157) or "the man in the lion-cloth who had urged, let's free, ourselves without the barrel of a gun" (Rich, p.57). In Identity, Sahgal portrays how Gandhi has been glorified as a Mahatma and the social workers identifying themselves as Gandhi-Bhakt. (p.128) Masses venerate Gandhi as an avatara, a divine halo. However the blind veneration of the leaders might as well breed tyrants. In Rich, Sahgal depicts the blind veneration leads to glorification of the P.M. as a "many armed goddess". She forms with "her father, and her son, a regular Holy Trinity" for the people (p.155). Indian psyche responds to this deification with traditional veneration for King-Empreror. The blind veneration for "divine" dispensation induces spineless conformism in masses. A significant cross-section of Indian society - teachers, lawyers, editors, professors and even bureaucrats succumb unprotestingly to "the dictatorship" (p.82), partly because they are rendered, spineless by their religions faith.

Nayantara Sahgal bemoans the fact that the Hindus are bogged by an outdated and static interpretation of the centuries old religion. Usman in Situation insists that the obdurate orthodoxy has made the Hindus "a frighteningly bored lot" (p.78). He explains:

What else could they be when nothing new had entered their mental or bit for hundreds of years? (p.78).
Raj Garg (Shadow) regrets that the Hindus are "out of step with modern life as they are content to draw their credentials from an old, deep source. Vishal Dubey in storm observes that the Hindus are obsessed with a backward looking tendency which makes them excessively dominated by post:

I think our great grandmother does have a formidable influence on what we do. In a number of ways she is still alive. Some times I think it will need a tearing up by the roots to get her out of way. (p.66)

Mara, in the same novel complains that the Hindu heritage is suffocating limited: "Its ours alright but some of it is rotten we'll die if we go on like this". (p.138) The dead weight of stagnant ideas seems to be a negation of real Hinduism.

Though criticizing vociferously the inadequacies and religions dogma, Nayantara Sahgal esteems very highly the vast spiritual resources of Hinduism and convincingly. Though the lopsided interpretation of Hinduism is the root cause of most of the political rot yet the only antidote to check the rot is the reappraisal of Hinduism vis-a-vis the changed context and environment. Nayantara Sahgal repeatedly points out the urgent need to re-examine the traditional tenets, values and ideas of Hinduism to meet the challenges faced by the modern man in his complex situation. In an article apply named "Fresh air on Hinduism", Sahgal ferociously argues for a critical scrutiny of the ancient creed. As Raj points out in Shadow "West has been in a decay a long ...but the root has a way of falling off and the rest renews itself because people are permitted to think" (p.154). Sahgal exhorts Hindus to "think" and critically scrutinize their creed. In each of her novel, we find a Hindu character who critically scrutinizes the various tenets and ideas of Hinduism. Nayantara Sahgal argues emphatically that Hindus must institute a radical self-appraisal in order to rid themselves of the accumulated of the accumulated deadwood of inane interpretations and practices. Nayantara Sahgal insists that Hinduism should be vigorously analysed to rediscover its poverty and wealth as well as its limitations and possibilities.

In Nayantara Sahgal's novels many character - Hindus as well as non-Hindu - present thought-provoking and perceptive analysis of Hinduism. The narrator and Stand in Happy, Rakesh Kalyan and Kailas in Morning, Vishal, Trivedi and Mara in storm and Simrit, Ram Krishan in Shadow, Rishad and Devi in Situation, Keshav, his father and Sonali in Rich, Tilak in Plans and Bhushan Singh in Identity are the conscientious Hindus who critically analysis Hinduism. Sahgal also presents the view point of non-Hindus. Mclvor a Christian in Happy, Raj Garg and Suren, significantly are Hindus converted to Christianity in Shadow, Michael a Christian and Usman a Muslim in Situation, Rose in Rich and Anna in Plans are the Christians, who present an objective and outsider's view. In each novel, Sahgal makes one character or the other her
mouthpiece to denounce the unthinking and blind adherence to religion which saps individual endeavour and makes one subscribe to a preconceived notion of uniformity of response and behaviour.

One of the enigmatic aspect of Hinduism is its duality, which is the root cause many mis-inter predations and paradoxes. In her very first novel Happy, Nayantara Sahgal, throws some light on the duality of Hinduism. The narrator, a Hindu explains to McIvor a curios Christian:

...There are two opposite tendencies that create the pattern of Indian life a forth right sensuality existing side by side with a stark and stoic renunciation. (Happy 164)

The narrator elaborates that the paradox has been brilliantly resolved by division of life into four stages or ashrams: brahamcharya, grahasthashram, vanprasthshram and finally sanayas. He points out:

At heart the sensualist is as Indian as the ascetic. The difference between the two is usually a matter of time. It is ingrained in us from an early age that there is a time for every thing and everything is right in its own time. (Happy p.164)

The narrator explains to McIvor that according to Hindu philosophy the youth is the time for sensual enjoyment and the time for material progress, however the old age is the time for renouncing them. The ascetic is always regarded as the ideal of a fulfilled old age. Thus the narrator points out that if interpreted it can inspire one to lead a "full life" i.e "to the best of his ability and the limit of his personality in the position destiny has seen fit to place him" (p.165).

The "baffling uncertainty of Hinduism, puzzles Rakesh also in Morning. Being an inquisitive Hindu, he feels that-though the other major religions such as Christianity and Islam spell out clearly what they believe, yet Hinduism is vague Hinduism, he feels harbours many paradoxes and dualities. Kailas, the elderly Hindu, explains to him the essential duality of Hinduism:

It was a torpor that accepted maimed limbs, blind eyes and abject poverty as destiny, letting generations live and die in hopelessness, and at the same time it was the majesty of the mind engaged in a lifelong combat with the senses. You could not accept Hinduism in its entirety without harbouring ignorance and superstition too. You could not wholly reject it without destroying part of yourself, for it was the story of India. (Morning, p.42)
Kailas elucidates the duality of Hinduism which is "boundless enough to encompass the loftiest of metaphysics, rigid enough to despise the untouchable" (p.42). This duality offers two strikingly different choices, of either interpreting it constructively as a living faith or exploiting its ritualistic patterns for narrow selfish ends. Vrind and Swami Satyanand choose to interpret the religion as a source of spiritual strength, upliftment and enlightenment, whereas men like Hari exploit it for personal ends.

Vishal Dubey and Trevedi (Storm) reflect Nayantara Sahgal's zealous concern for an urgent and radical self-appraisal. Trevedi a Brahmin, himself bemoans that the great religion Hinduism has lost its vitality:

The most ancient tradition known to man has been dependent these many years on a sheep like adherence to ritual. Storm (p.78)

Trivedi points out that Brahmin has a special responsibility towards the society as "a priest, law-giver, adviser to sovereigns, custodian of the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the race" (Storm p.78). Trivedi, gifted with intense critical acumen, however rightly points out to Vishal that the "Brahmin are the custodians of something we have not a notion about" (p.79). He regrets deeply:

Where is the evidence now that those scriptures can inspire a people to live?" (Emphasis Novelist's, p.79)

Vishal Dubey, profoundly influenced by Trivedi's idea, is forced to examine thoroughly the crucial effect of religion over the personal and socio-political life of its adherents:

What use was this heritage to ordinary men? What did it create but quieted? Did it toughen fibre, give emotional satisfaction? Did it help the soldier to fight better, the businessman to do his job better?... Was it the spirit to? Was there some Intelligence to receive all that, or did the human cry fall unheard into a gaping. (Storm p.79)

Trivedi bemoans that the ancient heritage has been shorn of its uplifting and constructive influence instead its influence has been restrictive and negative. Years later, Vishal observes the stoic and fatalistic acceptance of violence in personal as well as political life. Vishal rightly analyses that a slow gradual decay is primarily due to medieval insularity and obscurantism:

We seem to have slipped into a kind of decay. One big upheaval might have had some meaning But this noiseless chaos...is uncanny. The Funeral march of Hinduism. (Storm p.88)

He argues passionately that to "survive modern times" the Hindu must muster up the "courage" for a critical self-appraisal and revitalisation of their religion. As he tells Saroj, a victim of the hypocritical and orthodox notions, that Hindu must strive vigorously for a radical change:
To change. To do what hasn’t been done before. To hold up what we call sacred to light and examine it, and to throw it away if necessary. (Storm, p.88)

Vishal Dubey, witnessing the pernicious effect of religion over the personal and political current of life, is alarmed:

A monolithic slab of antiquity had survived the ages. A way of life, wrongly called a religion, lay embedded in it. Against it the intellect founded and the emotions were reduced to insignificance. And somewhere beneath it a great vitality lay untapped, within to be excavated by the living, if the living cared enough. (Storm, p.88)

Significantly, despite his scathing criticism of the Hindu philosophy Vishal does appreciate the "great vitality" of the religion. Vishal’s emphasis is on a re-vitalization and critical appraises and not in the least on the rejection of the religion itself. Saroj, his companion conveys the essence of Vishal’s religiosity as she says that Indians are "the most religions of all people (p.89).

All of us. This land everyone in it. There’s sunlight and honey here for faith of any kind. Oh, we misuse it but it’s there. And it’s our strength. (Storm, p.89)

Vishal, who had "decided not to accept the established ideas about morality not to be bound hand and foot", concludes that there is "a higher morality than all that" (p.82). Vishal puts forth his own concept of "Higher Morality", as

It’s a search for value, and an attempt to chose the better value, the real value, in any situation, and not just do what’s done or what is expected", (Storm p.82)

Vishal’s firm faith in "Higher Morality" is put to test, as he confronts the explosive political scenario in Chandigarh and the intense turmoil in the personal lives of Saroj. With firm faith in the humane and "real values", rather the traditional and orthodox values, Vishal strives hard to check the malaise plaguing the personal as well as the political life.

It is in Shadow, that Nayantara Sahgal presents a perceptive and constructive re-interpretation of Hinduism. In Shadow, Ram Krishan, the novelist’s chosen exponent, puts forth her view of religion, assimilating a re-invigorated Hinduism, as well as some salient features of Christianity. Ram Krishan’s exposition is supplemented by Raj Garg, the son of a Hindu Suren converted to Christianity. These three characters - Ram Krishan, Raj Garg and Suren - present a perceptive critical analysis as well as a refurbished vision of Hinduism. Raj Garg, significantly is the son of a Hindu converted
to Christianity. He has given much thought to "his favourite quarreling point-the Hindus (p.13). He is baffled by "the enigma" of Hinduism. Comparing Christianity and Hinduism, he feels that:

Christianity was clear and classic in its simplicity, a belief that could be translated into life and action and give meaning to each day-if one believed. But Hinduism couldn't be turned into action at all, worse. (Shadow? 13)

Criticizing the inhibitive of the Hindu beliefs, Raj Garg emphasises the crucial significance of a "working philosophy for millions of ordinary people to solve the country's problems" (p.13). Provoked by the meek acceptance and restrained reaction to the tyranny of ruthless husband, and the corrupt politician Sumer. He admonishes vociferously at the "Hindu avidity for restraint". He insists that

It's compromise with everything outside the sanctum and sheer rigidity with in (Shadow, p.101).

Raj Garg, points out a serious lacunae in the Hindu philosophy:

What is absent from this Hindu civilization of yours is avidity, the positive desire for something positive. You have to unearth that, and if your principles don't help you to, find some that do. Restraint is a fine thing but at this particular juncture in our history when we have to act, and be responsible for our actions. I think passion and deeds would serve us better. (Shadow, p.102)

Bogged down by rigid values and the authoritarian hold of religion over every sphere of life, the individual initiative of a Hindu is suppressed. Raj Garg is exasperated and wonders

Whether a Hindu ever tackled a problem as an individual. Did Hindus have any feelings that were personal and private, unconnected with institutions like the family caste, and the beaten track of these past, 2000 years and more? (Shadow, p.103).

Lashing out at the Hindu apathy for change and resistance to new ideas Raj comments:

Like the rich with their riches the Hindu took his credentials for granted. It was an astonishing fraud of vested interest, this unshakeable assumption of superiority before which new ideas released away like wild creatures from the threat of harness. (Shadow, p.103)

As he belongs to minority, Raj feels that has gained an objective view as he looks at "things from outside" and keeps "sounding them out" (p.103). Despite his father's formidable fight against tradition and a scandalous conversion to Christianity, Raj "had been too conscious of the older heritage around them, the Hindu mainstream of the
country's life. Despite his father's conversion, he feels "intrigued" and "fascinated" by Hinduism. This keen interest draws him close to his father's friend Ram Krishan. On most of the issues he feels closer to Ram Krishan, than to his father.

Ram Krishan, an editor, is a conscientious Hindu with a sharp critical mind unhinged by orthodox ideas. After his wife's death he withdraws into himself. Simrit's naked exploitation and her unresisting passive acceptance not only forces him to have a deep introspection but also to help Simrit. As he watches Simrit's reaction to the naked exploitation, Ram Krishan realises that it is resignation and acceptance and not resistance and protest which marks the typical Hindu's reaction to injustice. The Hindu ideal of non-attachment has been wrongly mis-interpreted as an unquestioning submission to fate. Moreover, the Hindu logic of viewing evil and tragedy as a part of illusion - "maya" facilitates the perpetuation of evil and tragedy. Such attitude encourages passivity on the part of its victims who do not question justice and rather accept it as a part of the illusionary world-the "maya". Ram Krishan however resolves to fight back this attitude, reflected in Simrit's response to the barbaric consent Terms inflicted on her. Analysing his own feeling of renunciation, he feels that it is nothing but "disuse" of one's capabilities and living "with out striving" (p.175). This attitude once again encourages futile waste of one's capabilities as:

It was a sadhu with his arms held above his head until they could never be cowered again. It was the eyes blindfolded until they lost their sight. (Shadow, p.175)

He decides to shake off the feeling of renunciation and confront the whole issue of religion thoroughly. Ram Krishan firmly believes that the panacea for the malaise inflicting the personal as well as the political fabric, "could still come from the way of life called religion". (p.195) He holds that

Hinduism must descend from its heights to become a source of strength and hope in the hut and the factory. Philosophy had no meaning unless it was a philosophy for the living. (p.196)

Rejecting mere rituals and regulations Ram Krishan insists that Hinduism must

Touch and transform the lives of millions and give them a basis for action, not merely a scripture and a rituals. (p.196)

Religions had a particularly vital role to play in a situation that had politically become impervious to reform. Ram Krishan however points out that "in India no single belief has the answer". (p.196) He points out that too many tides have crossed and blended here, produced mixtures in us that cannot now unmix. Ram Krishan puts forth the proposition that
If the irreconcilables of Hindu and Christian belief could be sorted out, a powerful answer and a new basis for action might be found for India. (Shadow, p.196)

Ram Krishan applies his keen critical mind to resolve the conflict between Hinduism and Christianity. He compares the Christian and Hindu philosophies particularly their attitude to certain basic questions such as evil, good, God and pain. Ram Krishan observes that the Christian believes a good God could not have created evil, so evil is entirely separate from the good, unaccounted for and inexplicable. But for Hindu God is the universe itself. Man, he says, mistakenly regards certain things as evil because of his incomplete knowledge of the whole universe. Hindus firmly believe in the Grand cosmic design, not revealed to the human mind. Evil, perceived as painful by human being is only illusion, and the Ultimate Reality known only to God or the Realized ones. Ram Krishan however rejects the Hindu philosophy of treating evil as illusions:

May be disease and poverty are illusions, but they still cause suffering. As far as I am concerned, my pain is pain and there no two ways about it. Illusions that have tremendous repercussions for the lives and outlooks of human beings cannot be lightly dismissed. In mortal eyes, evil is evil. Shadow (p.199)

The Christians differ remarkably as "Aspiration is a fundamental part of his philosophy, as he has a desire for improvement, for reform and great faith in human will and effort. Christians, unlike Hindus, do not "compromise with evil", he points out. The Hindu, however, have struck out unique compromise with evil. A Hindu accept evil along with good. Evil is not his own personal pain or sorrow but the working out of a larger plan of which he is only a small and insufficient part. (Shadow p.200)

Ram Krishan clarifies that "This is not cowardly resignation. It is adaptation" (p.201). Hinduism emphatically rejects the significance of the individual as compared with the universe Ram Krishan comments that a Hindu's attitude can be summed up: However much I suffer, my suffering is as nothing in the eyes of God. (Shadow p.201)

Emphatically rejecting the Hindu attitude to evil, he argues "In the mortal eye, evil is evil" as "Illusions that have tremendous repercussions for the lives and outlooks of human beings can not be lightly dismissed" (p.199).

Ram Krishan, the chosen exponent of the novelist, evolves his own concept of religion after much introspection:
The meaning of any religion was devotion to the good ....That awareness of good, of God, of the universe, whatever one called it, was pervasive and Supreme. It descended to the dust of the village. It was everywhere. It had to be made to yield results, to become a song on one’s lips, a great fighting strength—and it was not today. (Shadow, p.201)

Ram Krishan resolves to find the common philosophic ground between Hinduism and Christianity. He finds that there is "no real conflict" between the Christian and the Hindu as the former works for greater good in the universe and the later for a more complete view of the universe (p.202). Finally Ram Krishan is able to find a way out of the problem of religion suitable the modern man. He explain to Raj and Simrit.

The way out is a matter of perspective and proportion. (p.234)

Assimilating the Christian concern with the temporal welfare, with the Hinduism he opines that

To fight wrong a man has to believe it is terribly important to fight it. However unimportant it might be in eternity or a hundred years hence, it has to matter today. That is the point to dig out of the Hindu approach move it out of the universal into the present. (Shadow, p.234)

The renewed outlook will "provide the stamina, the striking point we need to resist what we don't believe in and will give as the will to act". (p.234) Ram Krishan illustrates his idea by the famous example of Gandhi’s adoption of non-violence - ahinsa, Hinduism’s oldest idea. Gandhi he points out had used religion as a source of the immense spiritual strength and will required to fight the Imperialism. Raj Garg expresses his reservations about the acceptance of the idea of non-violence particularly among the young. Ram Krishan dispells Raj Garg’s doubts and confirms that only a charismatic personality like Gandhi can promote the re-invigoration and renewal of Hinduism. He explains:

There has never been any touchstone except character and example. Any -ism under the sun needs that to enthuse and inspire. It takes a Christ, a Linen, a Mao. Unfortunately - or fortunately - humanity needs inspiration to move it even half a step out of the rut. (p.235)

Ram Krishan emphasises the critical need of the hour - the man of "character" who can inspire the humanity to put the things in proper perspective and proportion. Ram Krishan, strongly affirms the service of religion in sustaining the people in face of the onslaught of the fissiparous forces. Ram Krishan, thus elucidates lucidly and brilliantly Nayantara Sahgal’s secular and humane concept of religion.
Nayantara Sahgal presents Usman in *Situation* as the man of "character" with an intense spiritual awareness and immense moral strength to inspire others to fight the menace of the fascist tendencies of the political leaders. He illustrates Ram Krishan's approach to religion, incorporating deep concern for the temporal welfare, a zealous urge to fight the wrong and a firm commitment to non-violence. Prior to the independence, he had fought zealously for the freedom of the country. In the independent India, he is alarmed by the stagnant and extremely corrupt political institutions of the nation. He is shocked that a contagious disease spreading its tentacles into the very vitals of the system. He holds Hindus responsible for the stagnation, as they have responded only with apathy and stoic acceptance. He declares that

A Hindu remedy has to be found to all this. (*Situation*, p.79)

The Hindu remedy, Usman discovers, is the non-violent agitation as it's the only way most people in this country understand and will give their allegiance to (p.116). He explains to Michael that unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism makes "a virtue" of non-violence (p.79). Usman's prescription yields results as his call for non-violent agitation stirs to the core the complacent student community. Usman's call draws them out and ignites "the fire of righteousness about them demanding something inalienably their freedom" (p.116). The aroused student community only needs leadership, and Usman decides to provide it. Usman with his "exacting intellectual and moral standards and his austere insistence on them in his dealings with others" proves to be a sincere and charismatic leader.

To participate actively and responsibly in his crusade against the tyrannical and ailing Establishment, he resigns. Devi too resigns and joins his crusade for not only educational reforms only, but an "illness" inflicting the whole of the society. Usman decides to provide the leadership and "Inspiration" to the aroused students. His actions and decisions echo Ram Krishan word's to Raj Garg - humanity needs inspiration to move even half a step out of the rut" (*Shadow*, p.235). Usman provides the "touchstone of character and example" Ram Krishan envisions, (*Shadow*, p.235). Usman's call for peaceful non-violent agitation draws immense and spirited response from the student community as they collect in large numbers to listen to Usman. Usman exhorts them to pledge themselves to peaceful action (*Situation* p.159). The crying need for educational reforms fans out into the "waiting consciousness" and become exactly "a revolution from the ground, a hunger and thirst for justice in all its forms" (*Situation* (p.117)). Tremendous and enthusiastic response of the young students to Usman's call for non-violent agitation, dispels Raj Garg's doubts regarding the feasibility of acceptance of non-violence by the young. The large and committed gathering provides ample
evidence of Ram Krishan's theoretical assumptions that Hindu too can be "inspired" and "enthused" with a tremendous strong will to fight the wrong. Usman's character based on the legendary revolutionary leader Jai Prakash Narain who successfully led the Non - violent student's agitation to overthrow the tyrannical Congress regime. Thus efficacy of Usman's strategy thus has been proved historically too.

Untouchability has been a festering sore of the Hindu society. In Rich Nayantara Sahgal suggests a solution of the inhuman task performed by the untouchables. Mulk Raj Anand also hints about a similar solution in his Untouchable when he tentatively suggests the possibility of replacements of Bhakha's degrading profession by scientific machine. In Rich, Nayantara Sahgal depicts the problem of untouchable sweepers and their degrading task from a different angle—that of an educated Brahmin. Though a high caste Brahmin himself Kishore Lal forthrightly condemns the inhuman system of untouchability and the degrading mode of their profession. This intense empathy and zeal makes him open a shop of bathroom accessories. His profession of bathroom requirements is his "answer" the demeaning system of untouchability of the sweepers. He holds that

the age of flush toilets is yet and for ever to come so that ancient injustices can be put right meanwhile and balance restored. (Rich, p.172)

Thus Kishori Lal not only offers a theoretical answer to the age old problem of untouchability, but also translates his solution in action. By selling the paraphernalia needed for flush toilets he makes his little, yet very significant contribution towards significant contribution towards the eradication of the inhuman injustice meted out to the humble castes of the sweepers by the Hindu society.

Religious leaders used allegory shook in parables, why should not business? Flush toilets had completed the crusade against untouchability Mahatma Gandhi had started. (Rich, p.171)

Kishori Lal insists that "Revolution had many forms and faces, no doubt about it" (p.171). Those who had carried other people's stink for generations and been pariahs are given new names by Gandhi - Harijan - God's children. Kishori Lal is deeply influenced by Gandhi's crusade against untouchables. He explains to his Brahmin professor friend that he likes to think of himself "as an honorary, transmuted, transposed and transfigured Harijan. I am carrying out the commandments as it relates to our tie" (Rich, p.171).
B.G. Tilak strove tirelessly to revitalise and re-interpret the Hinduism to shake the complacent Hindus out of their self-imposed myopia and inertia. In *Plans*, set in the pre-Gandhian period, Nayantara Sahgal, present a brilliant portrayal of Tilak. Though Tilak himself is not directly presented, but his revolutionary personality and its charismatic effect over the people is subtly and veritably portrayed. Madhav Rao, a Brahmin in a remote hill station Himapur, too is deeply influenced by Tilak's appraisal of the ancient religion. Madhav Rao explains to Anna, a Danish woman visiting India, that Tilak has re-interpreted the sacred *Bhagvad Gita* as a source of tremendous spiritual strength and zeal to fight the injustice. Madhav Rao explains:

> According to his interpretation the split second when one jumped over one's mind and hit Realization was not the end of the story one had to hurry back from private bliss to public duty and spend the rest of one's life making the world a better place (*Plans*, p.123).

Tilak declares the "caves out of date" as he pointed out that the Hindu concept of salvation of soul by meditating in caves is no longer relevant to complex and urgent needs of the present. The "Realized" must shake off their parsimonious outlook and must contribute towards the onerous task of ameliorating the lot of mankind. Tilak exhorts the people to "fight for justice and righteousness "as their sacred duty, as commanded by Sri Krishna himself. Inspite by Sri Krishna's message, Tilak insists that Realized people must forget about sitting and meditating in caves. They must rise from the lotus position and carry on the fight. (*Plans* p.124)

Tilak, even utilizes the six years of solitary confinement to write a commentary on the *Bhagvad-Gita* called *Gita Rahasya*. Tilak's ideas have profound influence over people all over India. Even in such a remote corner as Himapur, his writings, articles and papers reach people and influence their thinking. Tilak's ideas add impetus to the tempo of political agitation and the situation is ripe for a charismatic leader like Gandhi to lead the struggle to its culmination. Tilak's reinterpretation however has abiding relevance and a universal significance.

Communal hatred and violence has been another extremely volatile and problematic feature of India. Hindu and Muslims have an ancient history of hatred antipathy and violence, relieved only by brief spells of amity. In her latest novel, *Mistaken Identity*, Nayantara Sahgal tentatively suggests a way out to counter the baleful influence of the communal tensions and antipathy. For a multi religions society like India, Sahgal insists secularism is the only violable option. She forcefully supports the efficacy of the inter-caste marriages to achieve a truly secular fabric or society well as to counter the festering sore of communalism. Bhushan Singh's his inter caste
relationship provokes extremely violent and barbaric communal riots, twice. Agonized by the traumatic experience Bhushan Singh gives much through to the issue. Bhushan Singh himself firmly "believe (s) in Hindu-Muslim unity" (p.91). He confesses to his lawyer Vacha that his "commitment" to his ideas has cost him "dear" as "People who practise what they preach get labelled lunatics" (p.91).

At a meeting called to support the cause of Turkey, having Hindu as well as Muslim audience and leader, Bhushan Singh publically issues the clarion call for Hindu-Muslim unity and harmony. He declares

Fate means the two of us for love, not war or separation. It means us to roast our dogmas in the same bonfire. (Identity, p.118)

Passionately he issues "the clarion call for Hindu-Muslim marriage". He insists

Sexual unity was the acid test of unity (Identity, p.119)

Bhushan’s speech however evokes very sharp very sharp reactions and he is branded as a "raving lunatic" (p.119). Though he could not marry Razia due to the very stiff resistance of his father, but after many years he marries another Muslims girl - daughter of his prison-mate Yusuf. As an adolescent he could not rebel successfully against the rigid caste stratification, but as a mature individual, he is able to cross the barrier with the strength of his convictions. He confesses to his wife that he had "never been able to resist a woman's beauty or the culture of Islam" (p.193). Thus he is able to practice" what he "preaches". As if to reinforce Bhushan Singh's idea of inter caste marriage his mother too walks out with Yusuf "to star in the most sensational scandal of the generation" (p.193). Bhushan and his mother, both are however impervious to the disapproval of the community as they translate their life-long dream and deep conviction into reality.

Significantly, Sahgal depicts the influence of christanity over the Indian people. She insists that an invigorated Hinduism must assimilate some Christian principles to serve the complex needs of the modern Indians. Though subtly hinted at in almost each of her novels, Sahgal's integral vision is clearly spelt by her chosen exponent Ram Krishan in Shadow. Sahgal, also appreciates the liberating influence of the Western people and education in combating the rigid orthodox and superstitious beliefs of the Hindus. The pioneers of Hindu Reformation in the 18th century were significantly the English educated Indian. Keshav's grand father in Rich., Reflects "the spirit of his generation". (p.120). He discusses the condition of the Hindu society with his British friend Timmons. Deeply moved by the barbarous practice of Sati, he passionately argues
for a "crusade with all its passion and fever" He accuses the British government of paying lip service to reform. Criticizing the British inactivity in curbing Sati in the territory ruled by Indian Kings, He accuses:

You are not paralyzed by the legalities when it suits you to set them aside. (p.122).

Rejecting the British policy of non-interference in religious sentiments, he vociferously exposes the hypocrisy of the British. He points out that Moghuls

were not on a civilizing mission. Yet they did, even so, try to interfere and they didn't have the advantage you do, of a public opinion ripe for reform. (p.123).

Despite the legislations, he realizes

that the only thing that rouses British wrath is a threat to British rule, which is based on no moral principle but superior arms. . . . so in the end you are no different from the Portuguese or the Dutch, crude conquerors, only you absolve yourself of your guilt - which you have and the other don't - by hanging your indifference to important issues on rational pegs. (p.123).

Gravity of the situation brought sharply in focus by the forced sati of Keshav's own grand mother which is witnessed by Keshav's father. Timmons nurse him back from semiconsciousness and arrange for his study in England.

In Plans too Sahgal portrays the British indifference to vital issues such as untouchability. Marlowe Croft is a deeply committed missionary who sincerely believes in his christianizing mission. Deeply moved by the brutal exploitation of the Indian workers by the British indigo planters, he protests strongly against them. Croft is obsessed with building a Church in Himapur. Croft firmly believes that he is here "to break new spiritual ground". (p.48) He pesters the District a site for the Church, least shaken by his indifference, he moves on his Christianizing mission with a crusading zeal. He starts a school for the native children and teaches them English and Christian songs also. Shocked by the brutal practice of untouchability, he encourages the untouchable boy in his class to sit with others and share the water from same bowl. He preaches passionately against the untouchability:

Until untouchability was rooted out, fiery speeches would get them no nearer freedom. They had to cleanse themselves first. The sinner must repent of his own deeds. (p.140)

The native Hindu community reacts strongly and they all sign and present a petition to Henry, the D.M. They also quote from Queen's proclamation of 1858:
We do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects on pain of our highest displeasure. (p.98).

Henry confronts Croft and points out that "government policy took no notice of untouchability" (p.100). Croft, points out that the government had taken notice of state and passed a law against it. Croft, cannot remain indifferent to the plight of the untouchables, passionately argues:

Well, while you're waiting for a demand, are you going to stand by and let these people be treated like pariahs?

Croft pleads with Henry to shed his indifference:

If you and I are not going to set an example, how is this ugly and undemocratic custom going to be uprooted? (p.100)

Henry's answer sums up the attitude of the British empire:

I am not here to set examples and quite definitely not to uproot customs. I am here to keep the peace and collect revenue.

Croft however finds untouchability against the principles of Christianity and believes firmly in his gospel of brotherhood and love. Henry cautions Croft that it would be "very unwise" of British to upset religious prejudices. Croft only postpones his lessons in Christianity, hoping to gather some "support" from the natives themselves. Croft is motivated by incurable and passionate zeal for Christianizing. He feels that the hill people have "no real religion" as they worship "nature spirits". (p.138) He feels he is "incredibly fortunate" to have the task of bringing them in to church. Even his wife Lulu gets tired of his unflagging obsession with the building of Church. Fired by a crusaders' zeal patience he warns Lulu:

The church will be built, and no mistake. I've staked my life my very soul on it. In time, this will be a Christian land.

Impressed by the zeal and patience of Marlowe Croft, even Henry feels Crofts looks "as fixed, immovable and unshakable as the Himalayas. England might leave but Croft was here to stay" (p.50). The zealous missionary like Croft practice what they preach. Croft too adopts his untouchable student as his son and renames him as George Jeremiah despite his wife's strong protests. Finally, the history has proved that the zealous crusade and patience of missionaries like Croft paid off and Christianity is today one of the major religions of India.
Sahgal's characters thus not only critically scrutinize the ancient creed of Hinduism they also interpret it positively and purposively. Significantly, Sahgal's character practice what they preach as they refuse to be frittered by a blind adherence to the ritualized faith. They rationally analysis and then translate their ideas into action to achieve concrete results. The Sohanbai and the Narrator in Happy devote themselves to the services of the people, as they firmly believe in the universal household of God - 'vasudhaiva but umbakam'. Rashmi in Morning decide to opt out of her unhappy marriage, whereas Kailas in the same novel, decides to accept the challenging offer of chief ministership to stem the rot. In Storm Vishal in Storm imbibes the lesson of Karma - the dynamic aspect of action from Gita and he turns to healthy and constructive action. Vishal advises Harpal, the Punjab C.M. to resist actively the threats of Gyan Singh and he himself plans and executes effectively a strategy to meet the challenge. At the personal level, he courageously helps Saroj to come out of her meek acceptance of her husband's victimisation. He not only preaches an end to orthodox view, but also accepts Saroj lovingly as a virtuous and pure woman. In Shadow, Ram Krishan snakes off his feeling of renunciation and helps Simrit actively to overcome her enormous problem of guilt and passive acceptance of exploitation. In Situation, Usman inspires students and builds up a non-violent agitation from the and provides effective leadership and guidance. In Rich Kishori Lal not only preaches against untouchability, but has also opened a shop selling the flush-his own answer for untouchability. In the same novel, the deep shock felt by Keshav's father on witnessing his own mother's Sati, is translated into strong feminist traits in the family. Keshav's father, Keshav and now Sonali are vociferous champions of the rights of women. In Plans Croft the missionary, preaches the villagers against untouchability. He himself proves his words when he adopts the untouchable student of his class, despite strong objections of his wife. In Identity, Bhushan Singh preaches vociferously in the favour of intercaste marriages. In the end he not only marries a Muslim girl himself but also accepts his mother's second marriage with Yusuf - a Muslim.

As Sahgal warns in Shadow only action and responsible action could see the people through.

Any Indian who had the capacity to think and act must use it in a high constructive way or a whole civilization would crumble under mould.
(Shadow, p.106)

Nayantara Sahgal suggests that the creative use of the best that both Hinduism and Christianity have to offer can be the panacea to the ills afflicting both the individual and the body politic. Ram Krishan in Shadow is the chief exponent of Nayantara Sahgal's vision of religion. It can offer the zealous crusaders like Kailas Vrind in Morning, Vishal
and Harpal in *Storm*, Raj Garg and Ram Krishan in *Shadow*, Usman in *Situation*, Keshav Rao and Sonali in *Rich*, Tilak in *Plans* and the Gandhian Bhaiji in *Identity*, they were with all to fight political exploitation. Complacent people like, Raghubir and Prabha Mathur in *Happy* and Kalyan's foster parents Nita and Sir Arjun Mitra in *Morning*, Jit in *Storm*, Devi in *Situation*, Mona and Nishi in *Rich*, Madhov Rao in *Plans*, Bhushan Singh's mother and Bhushan Singh in *Identity*, can be shaken out of their complacency and inactivity by the enlightened and constructive vision of the religion. The victims of social exploitation like Saroj and Vishal in *Storm*, Nita and Rashmi in *Morning*, Simrit in *Shadow*, Sonali's grandfather in *Rich*, Bhushan Singh in *Identity*, too can be inspired to strive for the change, and freedom and happiness. Despite the scathing expose of the inadequacies and the baleful influence of the religion, Nayantara Sahgal values tremendously the "all - encompassingness" imbued to the very core of Hinduism.

Nayantara Sahgal believes that religion is simultaneously the "despair" as well as the "hope" for the Indians. Nayantara's criticisms of Hinduism is in no way irreligious or vituperative she does not consider religions to be dispensable for it provides a significant base for progress. Nayantara is of the opinion that no worth while growth can take place without the religions yearning, which she identifies with the ethical impulse. Criticizing the superficial adherence to rituals and religious orthodoxy, Nayantara Sahgal expects the religion to incorporate and highlight virtues like initiative, responsibility, decisiveness, sense of duty and action. Ram Krishan in *Shadow* projects Nayantara's vision of religion identifying it with "good":

That awareness of good, whatever one called it was pervasive and supreme. It descended to the dust of the village. It was everywhere it had to be made to yield results, to become a song on one's lips, a great fighting strength... (Shadow p.201).

Nayantara Sahgal's criticism of Hinduism, is however accompanied by a firm faith that it can be interpreted positively as a living faith responding a liberal enlightened attitude. In her fictional world, Sahgal's characters do act and confront the reality to solve the issues constructive and creatively. They strive courageously to free themselves from the manacles of the unquestioning, putrid and restrictive religious ideas, notions and values. Finally they do emerge as persons with a secular and humane view of religion, propagating equality, freedom, honesty and significantly a firm faith in God. These characters reject orthodoxy, suppression, exploitation and superstitions but they do affirm the indispensable place of religion in human life. Humanistic concept of morality, Sahgal suggests, will enable the Indians not only to valiantly face the exploitation in both the personal and the political domains, but will also enable them to meet the challenging complexities of the modern life successfully.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


9. Ibid. p.79.


13. Kapp, Saran and Eisentadt attribute the lack enterprise among the Hindus to their traditional rejection of economic incentives as nothing more than materialistic, in their studies

18. Ibid. p.41
20. Ibid. p.29.
22. V.A. Shahane, *Perspectives of Indian Fiction in English*, ed M.K. Naik, p.60
23. Ibid. p.62.
39. Promila Kapur, *Marriage and the Working Women in India* (Delhi : Vikas, 1976), She elaborates the ideal of Pativrata: "As river merging itself in the ocean loses its identity, so a wife was supposed to merge her individuality with that of her husband. Her only concern in life was to see that all services needed by her husband were properly performed by her, the satisfaction of her husband being her sole joy in life... there was no question of raising a word against him even when he was found to be ill-tempered, vicious, diseased or a drunkard". (p.9.)
43. Ibid. p.145.
44. Girilal Jain, The veteran Indian journalist, has commented on the fascination of the Indians for a king-Emperor readily accepted as an avatar in *The Times of India,* Jan 7, 1987.
45. Ibid.
46. Jasbir Jain, *Nayantara Sahgal* op.cit. p.34.