Chapter - 3

Cultural Ethos

* Hinduism
* Religious Movements
Culture is one of the main aspects of society suffered the most ups-and-downs in all languages. Culture can only flourish, find its best expression and become secure in a free society. A society is free in which the integrity of the individual is recognized and respected as a primary ethical value, with all the guarantees of social justice, including equality of opportunity which this principle implies. All spiritual pursuits and attainments arising from culture are rooted in this fundamental principle. Culture has both an individual and a social content. It is an all embracing word which includes all significant aspects of man's life beginning from philosophy and religion and ending with social institutions and manners.

Indian culture is distinguished by its possession of a number of important qualities. In the first place, our culture is characterized by tolerance. All sorts of races and creeds have found their habitation in India. Our culture is characterized by harmony or rhythm, things happen not fortuitously or accidentally, but according to certain order and in a certain continuity. Another quality of our culture has been ceaseless search after truth which has been characterized by the word 'Abhaya', fearlessness; a spirit of adventure and as we know very few items of speculation in whatever fields of life have escaped the investigation and analysis of the Indian thinkers. The culture (philosophical, religious and other) of the pre-British Indian Society was predominantly mystical in character. This mystical outlook determined the character and content of most of its creation in the philosophical, artistic and social organizational sphere.
In the words of Sir Aurobindo, "India's constant effort has been to find a basis of living in the higher spiritual truth and to live from the spirit outwards as the old Vedic seers would put it, our divine foundation is above with its rays reaching downwards, presenting our inner being." The Indian culture, therefore, seeks a wider harmony reconciling spirit with matter, preserving the truth of material science and its real utility but at the same time keeping intact the spirit as the keystone of the arch of our culture. Modern Indian Culture is a unique social phenomenon from every point of view. If culture is the whole social process, the proper study of its development is possible on sociological lines. A sociological point of view reveals the silent process of social change going on beneath our prominent behaviours. The nature of Indian Society, which is the context of this culture, is neither the nature of the root nor the nature of the flower, neither the actuality of recorded history nor the potentiality of fulfillment. Indian culture represents certain common traditions that have given rise to a number of general attitudes.

Indian culture was primarily and fundamentally religious. India presents a land of great contrasts and of bewildering variety. Yet there is unity in our culture, that it is a plethora of conflicting beliefs and ideas, multiplicity of forms and formulas, presenting a great variety of languages, manners, dress and food, among other things. Deep down fundamentally and essentially India has always possessed great unity and continuity of culture.

Cultural differences might have followed provincial, linguistic or racial lines but they have ultimately merged in Indian culture resulting in a real unity of all the cultures. The close affiliation of
culture with religion has an important bearing on the question of the unification of culture in India. Unity in culture is really an important step forward to political and social unity. Culture has a twofold aspect just as man has a dual personality. It partakes of both the material and the spiritual. On the material side it fosters the growth of individuality which endows man with faith in himself and drives him to seek his own profit and pleasure regardless of the right of others. In strange contrast with material culture is the culture of the spirit. It releases the soul of man from domination of the self and awakens sympathy with every form of human life. It teaches how we may enter the kingdom of God on earth and enjoy the treasures of earth as well as of heaven. Culture is never static. It is always dynamic and assimilates or should assimilate the best in every epoch or age. Culture is pre-eminently a product of the interaction of environment and man. The fundamental thing about culture is its intimate association with historic development. In the early stages of the Indian culture, we can see a symbolic mentality pervading thought, customs and institutions. The symbol is representative of something occult mysterious, divine or unfathomable.

The salient feature of culture is its flexibility by which it maintains its relevance to the present perspective. Simultaneously, it rotates on two planes of time i.e. the past and the present. Though it takes birth in the past time yet it surpasses the spatio-temporal dimensions. The cultural moments palpable presence can be perceived even in future in its particular form. Basically, it is creative because from the primitive time to the present one, there is a continuous reinterpretation.
In the stage of evolution, its relationship can be with the primitive mind that solders the past with the present. In the cultural process, the experience does never eclipse because every race tries to recognize its collective ego. As a matter of fact culture reveals not only how the world can be periodically regenerated, and how consequently, man can participate in this universal renewal, it is a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, even practical requirements. Finally, it is a statement of primeval, greater and more relevant reality by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined. Culture is an expression of man's deepest concern about himself and his place in the scheme of the universe, his relationship with man, nature and god. Man's nature and destiny, which are explored in literature, thus forming a structure of ideas, images, beliefs, hopes and fears, love and hate. In other word, culture interpret man's place in the universe. They are like mirrors that reflect man's inner self; they touch the dazzling heights of transcendence; they explore the depths of the unconscious.

The first landmark, the basis of our Indian culture is the Vedic age including in the term the periods of Upanisads, Ramayan and Mahabharata. Then we have the classical stage beginning with Buddhism and ending with Harsha. After this, we have the medieval age beginning with the Rajput culture and ending with the Indo-Muslim culture. Then follows the modern age, the impact of the west on the Indian culture and the beginning of the Indian Renaissance. Indian cultural evolution, therefore, can be best understood in psychological terms. Beginning with the symbolic age, passing through the typol, the conventional age and the age of reason, we seem to have arrived at the
subjective age. It is hoped that an Indian cultural revolution in the near future will lead to the dawn of a spiritual age when man will have transcended himself through self realisation, by becoming one with the universe and with God. Indian culture is primarily and fundamentally religious, and the name which got prominently associated with the religion of this land was called Hinduism.

HINDUISM

Hinduism is not a religions but a way of life. The beauty of Hinduism lies in its all embracing inclusiveness. Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his own faith or dharma, and so it lives at peace with all the religions.

Hinduism ‘is the most sceptical and the most believing of all, the most sceptical because it has questioned and experimented the most, the most believing because it has the deepest experience and the most varied and positive spiritual knowledge.

Hinduism grew like a rambling mansion, housing varied beliefs ranging from the worship of trees and serpents to the worship of the great and gracious gods like Siva and Vishnu and Isvara, the supreme one, in whom all these merged; and all of these conceptions were incorporated in Hindu art. Thus varying lower orders of faiths were used as steps to arrive at the zenith of the highest. This vast pyramidal structure represented the collective expression of the Indian mind.

According to Hindu ethics, the instrumental values are not ignored, but subordinated to the higher values of life, rather to the Absolute value, which is the Absolute self. Hinduism is a way of ordering the world about and around the individual; the
amorphousness of its beliefs and practices centre the religion in the individual himself rather than in an overbearing clergy or the tenets of faiths. Hinduism as compared to Islam or Christianity is more individually based and permits an easier process of evolution and involution. The evolutionary aspect of Hinduism can be demonstrated by the fact that sacred texts and mantras are even being coined today. The involutionary aspects of Hinduism can be shown by the change in the iconography of Shiva over the last fifty years. The evolution of the vigorous vedic religion was far different. Its optimistic and energetic techniques became pessimistic and invertebrate in the later days. The work, like the living subject it deals with, is therefore naturally a blend of the past and present practices of Hinduism. The stock in trade of Hinduism is a wide variety of multicoloured, multidimensional gods and godmen: from Vishnu, who preserves social order to the ascetic Shiva pursued by Parvati in an erotic mood; to Krishna making violent love with Radha the milkmaid, lacerating her body and treating her, to the machiavellian Narad and the impotent Indra, God of rain and the ruler of heavens.

Hinduism is absolutely indefinite. It is really an Anthropological process to which, by a strange irony of fate, the name of religion has been given. Starting from the vedas, embodying the customs and ideas of one or a few tribes, it has like a snow-ball gone on ever getting bigger and bigger in the course of ages, as it has steadily gone on absorbing from the customs and ideas of all peoples with whom it has come into contact, down even to the present day. The Hindu religion underwent the great ideological change in the early 19th century. This was brought about by the various religious movements.
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The course of Indian History through the ages is replete with numerous instances of social reform movements. All religious moments has social reform as their ultimate object. Indian society, particularly the Hindu society, accepted measures of social reform as state in its evolution because of all religious preachers and social reformers of this century laid strong emphasis on continuity, order, preservation of ancient virtues and moral values, and harmonious social change by peaceful means. These movements increasingly tended to have a national scope and programme of reconstruction in the social and religious spheres. In the social sphere, these were movements of caste reform or caste abolition, equal rights for women, a campaign against child marriage and a ban on widow remarriage, a crusade against social and legal inequalities.

In the religious sphere, there sprang movements which combated religious superstitions and attacked idolatry, polytheism and hereditary priesthood. These movements, in varying degrees, emphasized and fought for the principles of individual liberty and social equality. The reform movements represented the striving of the conscious and progressive sections of the Indian people to democratize social institutions and remodel old religious outlooks to suit the new social needs. Thus, the renaissance and the beginning of a social revolution in the first half of the 19th century were the result of a movement for religious and social reform largely indigenous in character and leadership, thriving in a society in which the leaven of western ideas had begun to work. The first contacts of the west with Indian cultural life led to the adoption of the western ways of life,
rejection of what were called the dogmas and rituals of Indian religions on the part of some Indians but there were at the same time many religious movements aiming at the revitalization of the Indian religious and social life, like Bramho Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society, the Ramakrishna Mission and others.

**Bramho Samaj**: The founder of Brahmo Samaj was Raja Ram Mohan Ray who may well be called the father of the modern Indian Renaissance. He engaged in religious bouts both with the Christian missionaries. He advocated the abolition of the cruel rites of Sati. He was a zealous advocate of the adoption of the western scientific studies in our educational institutions. He was also a great patriot with a penchant for politic and publicity. He represented the cause of Indian liberty both at home and abroad. Finally, on 20th August 1828 he established the Brahmo Samaj. The Saraj was to aim at the propagation of true Hinduism as Ram Mohan Roy understood it, purged of social evils and idol worship. He attacked the idol worship of the Hindus as degrading and expounded the conception of 'One God of all religions and humanity'. Raja Ram Mohan Roy stood for a rational approach to religion. The individual should study the scriptures directly, without the priest as the intermediary, and assess the rational character of a religious doctrine. The Brahmo Samaj crusaded against Sati and child marriage. It stood for the freedom of the widow to remarry and equal rights of man and woman. The Samaj would be a place of public meeting for all persons without any distinction, no form of idol, image, statue, painting or portrait to be admitted within the Samaj; and no sacrifice or religious rituals to be permitted in the Samaj. The worship was performed through prayers, meditation and
readings. Thus Brahmo Samaj inaugurated a new era for the Indian people by proclaiming the principles of individual freedom, national unity, solidarity and collaboration, and the democratization of all social institutions and social relations.

**Prarthana Samaj**: The Prarthana Samaj was founded in 1867 in Bombay by M.G. Ranade. It had a programme of religious and social reforms on the same lines as those of the Brahmo Samaj.

**The Arya Samaj**: The Arya Samaj founded in Bombay in 1875 by Dayanand Saraswati, was a movement of quite different type. It had a more revivalist character. It declared the Vedas infallible and, further, an inexhaustible reservoir of all knowledge, past, present, and future. The Arya Samaj, by postulating the infallibility of the Vedas, did not and could not permit the individual judgment to override the divine text. Thus the Arya Samaj, while freeing the individual from the tyranny and tutelage of the Brahmin, demanded of him implicit faith in the divine Vedas. The Arya Samaj stood for equal rights of man and woman in social and educational matters. The Arya Samaj organized a network of schools and colleges, in the country, both for boys and girls, where education was imparted in the mother tongue like every reform movement, the Arya Samaj set itself first to purge the Hindu society of its rampant evils. The worship of one God, the abolition of castes to be replaced by true Varna-Vyavastha based on character, performance of religious ceremonies as enjoined in the Vedas, freedom of women, abolition of untouchability, were some of the principles of Arya Samaj.

Theosophy introduced in India by Madame Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott in 1879 and mainly popularized by Mrs. Annie
The uniqueness of this movement consisted in the fact that it was inaugurated by a non-Indian who was a great admirer of Hinduism. Theosophy subscribed to the spiritual philosophy of ancient Hinduism and recognized its doctrine of the transmigration of the soul. It reached universal brotherhood of men irrespective of distinctions of caste, creed, race or sex. Theosophy stood for making a comparative study of all oriental religions. However, it considered ancient Hinduism as the most profoundly spiritual religion in the world. That means the Theosophist holds that all religions are derived from one source, and that, therefore, there is no one religion which is the exclusive road to salvation. Thus the theosophist is characterised by a profound belief in the existence of a divine wisdom and by a determination to be an agent in God's plan for men. He, therefore, serves all men regardless of their colour, caste or creed. The theosophists have also helped in the spread of the Indian culture. It stood for the development of a national spirit among the Indians.

The awakening of the Indian people found expression in the movement inspired by Ramakrishana, the great Hindu saint. It primarily based itself on the principle of Devotion or Bhakti. The Ramakrishana Mission aimed at protecting India from 'the materialist' influences of western civilization. It idealized Hinduism including its practice of idol worship and polytheism. It aimed at the spiritual conquest of the world for revived Hinduism. The Ramakrishana Mission has branches all over the world. It trains aspirants for spiritual progress and puts them for service to man in various fields of life, for educational, missionary, social and philanthropic purposes.
Thus the motif of these movements was freed from dogmatism. These are the movements which change entire society. Indian people took part in these movements. These movements was also begun national advance. This awakening deepened and broadened in subsequent decades and found increasingly secular forms. We find that religious movements have not been purely orthodox. They have developed critical outlook, have laid emphasis both on individual and social developments, stressed liberty of thought and instead of devoting attention to paraphernalia of religion have directed attention to practice of morality and spirituality. All the social reformers and religious movements of the period were convinced that mere official enactments and ceremonial breaking of existing local customs would not bring about social change. They, therefore, established schools, formed public associations, organised public meetings and started newspapers to focus public attention to the need for social reform. The social reform movement from the beginning gained momentum and wide publicity quickly. Thus the seed of reform is always buried under the social structure of a country, and with the change of time and sense of values that seed germinates and grows demolishing the existing corrupt and degenerated social practices and institutions. The essence of all the reform movements in India from the earliest times down to the present era has been that all these had started from within the society and that the reformers wanted to uphold the intrinsic values of man, morality and modes of daily life in society on the standard of pristine Indian qualities, and to reshape the existing social institutions according to the need of the hour.

Tradition says that the early Musalman raiders into India used the word Hindu as a synonyms for slave. Since Hinduism itself is a
philosophy of Varnasrama dharma, it cannot bring any social cohesion among the Hindus themselves. "Broadly speaking, religion can work only through social institutions, and it has been the misfortune of Hinduism that the institutions through which it had to work, and with which it came to be identified represented not the living social conscience orthodoxy which fights social reform in the mistaken belief that it defending Hinduism and opposing something which aims to undermine Sanatan Dharma is, therefore, doing its own cause the gravest possible harm". In this popular Hinduism the dominant not was that of the Bhakti cult in which devotion was offered to some personal God whose worship, it was thought, will lead to salvation.

R.K. Narayan writes: "The impact of life, the material and substance of our thoughts are the same everywhere in any state. Traditionally India is the Ramayana, The Mahabharata and the Purans. The value remains the same in every village, town or city". Generally, the middle class people of the conservative Hindu society that Narayan presents in his novels, are hardly ever ready to bring about reformatory change. Nor do they seem to receive with interest any alien influence. They are just complacent with what they posses and are absorbed in glorifying the culture to which they belong. Some have gone to the extent of revolting against the established customs and traditions. But, they are firmly rooted in them from their very childhood. Narayan doesn't attack on Hinduism but he talks about Hindu myths, legends and Hindu mythology.

The material R.K. Narayan works with is also rich in Hindu myths and legends, but his technique is different from that of Nayantara Sahgal. His art expresses a genuine, formal as well as
contextual continuity with the best efforts of Indian literature. He also poured light on local legends, folklore, as well as primitive rituals like the ritual for rain, for harvest or ritual for fertility of land or for a woman. The Hindu society being traditional and fatalistic, the social values they (Indian people) cherish can not be otherwise. Narayan's men and women are God fearing folks, and whatever they do, they put themselves at the mercy of God. Their success and failure, happiness and sufferings are all what they think as God's Benediction. They are so dogged about the traditional ideas that they hardly come out of the social framework they have evolved from time immemorial. Religious ideology of ancient Indian epics had highly influenced many of Narayan's protagonist. Narayan writes: "the impact of life, the material and substance of our thoughts are the same everywhere in any state. Traditionally, India is the Ramayan, The Mahabharata and The Purans. The value remains the same in every village, town or city". The conservative Hindu society that Naryan presents in his novels, are hardly ever ready to brings about reformatory change; nor do they seem to receive with the interest any alien influence.

R.K. Narayan owes a great deal to Hindu philosophy of life. He simply brushes aside the subject other than the Hindu myths and legends around which his novels are usually woven. The Hindu epics and folklores are constantly referred to in his Malgudi circle showing Narayan in his true spirit. Hinduism is a modern term coined by him possibly because it would not then be totally confined to the Brahmin caste. It is "Old wine in new bottle", labelled as Hinduism. Narayan's is a realistic portrayal. God is supposed to be the infinite spirit whose presence is felt everywhere. Faith in God and faith in one-self run counter to eachother. Narayan consciously deals with the immortality
of soul and its ultimate merger with the divine spirit. Narayan's portrayal is realistic and authentic. The infounded beliefs and irrational attitudes have come down to us from generation, and there is nothing uncommon about views and philosophy of life, the Hindus follows in their life. He also touches the theory of Karma. Narayan, tries all along to maintain the religious moral order, upholding the old social values. Different customs, traditions, ways of thinking and living are very clearly depicted in Narayan's novels. His novels throw light on the Indian culture and tradition. The aura of Narayan's legend presents the novelist with different images, as a conformist in the time honoured dictums of the shastras, as a karma – conscious writer believing in the cycle of Janmas, as a humanist accepting the wholeness of life and pre-ordained scheme of things and as a comic-ironist watching the absurd drama of human existence with amused detachment. Saturation in tradition and depth of spiritual sensibility enables him to cut through the day-to-day realities of Malgudi to reach the truth of life, which is at once profound and enduring in transcendence of time and place.

"The Bachelor of Arts" (1965), the delineation of the four stages in Chandran's life has a close parallel with ancient Hindu tradition of four Ashramas – Sisya (Bramhacharya), Grahastha, Vanaprastha and Bhikshu (Sanyas). It tells the story of a Hindu household in south-India. In this novel, Narayan introduces his cyclical view of life which was the central idea of the story. It is the story of a south Indian college student named Chandran, the son of Venkatachela lyer, a retired District Judge of Malgudi. First part of the novel gives us a vivid account of the college life of the hero. Part II deals with the young man in search of a job, and suggestions coming from various sorts of
people regarding his career and his frustrations. Next part describes the aimless wanderings of Chandran in Madras. The last part deals with Chandran’s marriage and his setting down in life. He accepts a humble job, forgets Malthi marries another girl, Sushila. He now finds life interesting and worth living. Thus, Chandran who had lost all interest in life and had even thought of committing suicide had become a Sadhu renouncing the world and its luxuries, now comes back to the world and starts living his life without any memory of the old wounds. Thus this simple story is a story that could have happened to any young man in India. The novel gives true insight into the Hindu mind, manners and customs. All the characters are carefully drawn and are full of vitality.

Narayan is a typical Indian writer whose creative genius is deeply rooted in the ancient Indian religion which attaches great importance to self-discipline, renunciation, incarnation, doctrine of rebirth, law of Karma and non-violence. In almost all his major novels these Indian themes find their expression in some form or another. Sometimes they form the basic theme of the novels and sometimes they provide a mythical pattern or a framework for them. In the words of Professor William Walsh, "The religious sense of Indian myth is part of Narayan’s grip of reality, his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feeling and experience. What one can say about Narayan without qualification is that he embodies the pure spirit of Hinduism. In Narayan Hinduism appears at the natural sub-stratum of a sensibility pre-occupied with individuality, and with the specific, with particularisation. Not that he is concerned with a mere ticked collection of particulars. Each detail is seen and presented so as to imply an essential truth about its own
nature, just as the aggregate of details is raised from a simple
collection to an order or world or portrait. A detail in Narayan is not
only close to the essential object but in contributes its part to a
significant shole". The use of myth and legend in the novels of
Narayan does not make them mere illustrations of abstract ideologies
and beliefs. It rather emerges as the final vision of the present day
reality as visualized by the author. It reinforces and enhances its
appeal by linking the modern with the ancient Indian tradition. In this
respect Narayan is in the line of old Indian saints and prophets
interpreting the present-day human conditions in terms of ancient
myths, legends and fables. Narayan's view of life is incorporated in
and expressed through rich circumstantial details. The concrete
particulars are so accurate and convincing; the human actors so life-
like and vital and their motivations psychologically so true that the
presence of the central mythical idea never dominates or obscures or
obliterates the real life depicted by the author who is a social realist.
"The Hindu man drinks religiously, sleeps religiously, marries
religiously and robs religiously," writes Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah
with a sarcastic sharpness. The two most important time-honoured
categorical imperatives of Hindu society are Varna and Ashrama,
Popularly known as Varnashrama. They regulate the social and
spiritual aspirations of an average Indian. Even the most emancipated
and modernized Indians, who openly reject the traditional beliefs and
customs based on them, are unconsciously guided by them in their
life through this world, and they enshrine their hopes for the world to
come or their lives after death. This view of life is also present in
Narayan's novels. He presents all the traditional Hindu views of life
whether they are related to Hindu family life, Hindu marriage system
and Hindu concept of women. Cultural ambivalence is a marked characteristic of Narayan's fictional technique and he hovers between his Hindu faith and lack of it. He merely uses it as a landscape in his fiction. R.K. Narayan elaborately present religiosity and spirituality, the philosophy of rebirth and transmigration of the soul, implicit faith in the doctrine of Karma and the encounter between East and West and the Western influence on traditional Indian society. Narayan always presents existence of God and everybody faith in God. This faith in Gods and their powers to help a devotee in distress in pre-eminently an Indian phenomenon.

In his life Narayan attended a Lutheran Mission School, mainly meant for converts. Being converts, the teachers hated the non-Christian students and abused and made fun of the Hindu gods. This missionary zeal for Christianity and hatred of Hinduism on the part of the teachers led Narayan to the other extreme. He developed a deep faith in Hindu gods and goddesses. In his work we get to understand the relation of man's life to the cyclical universal order and his attachment to the wheel of existence. This view of the universe and existence is purely Indian. For Narayan, as for those who believe in Hindu philosophy; this mundane world is not the real world and hence is ultimately insignificant. The real world is the central world of the Absolute being called the truth, the Absolute, or the Brahman. Realizing this fact, the wise man views the maelstrom of time space with 'Serenity, detachment, tolerance, amusement and faintly pitying curiosity. Being essentially Hindu in his attitude, custom and practice, Narayan views every phenomenon as illusion (Maya), a fact corroborated by his various interviews. Narayan's faith in a divine scheme has remained unshaken throughout his life. Through
characterization Narayan filters his belief in the law of Karma, the unique Hindu philosophy. The lives of his major characters centre round a particular obsession which may be love as in Sriram of "Waiting for the Mahatma", or love of money as in Margayya of "The Financial Expert". The Hindu conception of Dharma insists upon the desirability of life, which properly integrates all the aspects of the soul. By concentrating upon purely earthly desires like acquisition of money, obsessive love for someone, we commit an error, fall a victim to the law of Karma and perpetuate the train of causes and effects.

In "The Financial Expert", Margayya worships the Goddess of wealth and spends his entire savings on rituals. Having succeeded in making money by publishing and selling "Bed life or the Science of Marital Happiness," he begins to think of money more and more as an abstraction, unrelated to human needs. He is so much engrossed in making money that he does not even have time to call on his son and daughter-in-law who live in Lawley Extension and who now have a child. Margayya loses discrimination and hence life’s purpose. By concentrating exclusively on money, he sows the seeds of his ruin, and his fall becomes inevitable. Margayya’s passion for money grows intense; he goes through the elaborate puja so devotedly that it overawes his wife. According to "The Gita" when man loses the power of discrimination he loses his life’s purpose. The same thing happens to Margayya. Narayan presenting Hindu Philosophy of life. Narayan dwells at great length upon the details of the rituals which Margayya in "The Financial Expert" undergoes on the advice of the priest in order to become rich. He tells us how the "puja" has to be performed for forty days, with ash from red lotus mixed with 'ghee' made out of the milk drawn from a smoke coloured cow, and the Sanskrit mantra
inscribed on antelope skin. In every novel of Narayan the hero, after a purgatory experience, comes to accept life in a characteristic. Indian attitude, and in portraying such heroes the novelist gives expression to his deep faith in the cyclical order-creation-dissolution-rebirth-is put into the mouths of some of his characters. Narayan’s faith in the cyclical order of the universe is expressed not only in the life of his heroes, but also in the plots of his novels which, structurally speaking, conform to the Hindu view of life and follow a characteristic pattern of 'Creation-dissolution-rebirth'. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar rightly says: "In Narayan’s novels there is generally a flight, an uprooting, a disturbance of order – followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration of normalcy". The Puranas have been the greatest legacy of the Hindus. They have not only influenced Indian life and thought but also exerted tremendous influence on our creativity. To impress upon Margayya the efficacy of the 'Puja' the priest refers to the mythological story of Markandeya who defies death by offering 'Puja' to Shiva. When Margayya rejects milk, the priest admonishes him not to do so as it amounts to rejecting Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, and narrates the story of Kuber who had to undertake a long, arduous penance as atonement for spilling a drop of milk on the floor of his palace.

Our religious beliefs, superstitions, rituals, traditions and customs have shaped our mind as well as our behaviour pattern and general attitude to life. These rituals and traditions have still their sway on the Indian psyche despite the Western influence. Narayan comes of a family where religion is the most compulsive force. A product of the Hindu middle class, Narayan shares the beliefs, superstitions, traditions, customs and rituals in Indian life. An important aspect of his 'Indianness' in his portrayal of these customs and traditions in Indian milieu.
In "The Guide" Raju becomes Rosies's lovers, when Rosie is abandoned by her husband, Marco. She comes to live with Raju, who helps her become a famous dancer. She receives a letter from Marco's lawyer, asking for her signature to release a box of ornaments kept in a bank. Raju forges Rosies's signature, is arrested and jailed. Before being taken to jail, Raju informs her of the developments; the incident does not perturb her. She says:

"I felt all along you were not doing right thing. This is Karma. What can we do?"

Human beings caught in the coils of events following the law of karma have to pass through several rebirths in which they strive hard to achieve Moksha (Salvation). Since it is difficult to obtain Moksha, the best we can except of a man's everyday activity is that it should be in conformity with the law of righteousness (Dharma) and conducive to the freeing of the self from cravings. This involvement versus non-attachment situation is very important from the Hindu point of view. This is the situation in which most of Narayan's major characters find themselves. On his release from jail, Raju takes shelter in a descanted temple on the Bank of the river Sarayu, a few miles from Malgudi, and close to the village called Mangla. Here he in mistaken for a saint by the simple villagers. They begin to worship him and bring for him a lot of eatables as presents. Raju is quite comfortable and performs the new role of a saint to perfection. However, soon there is a severe famine and drought and the villagers expect Raju to undertake a fast to bring down the rains. Despite his best efforts to the contrary, Raju has to undertake the fast. The fast attracts much attention and people come to have 'darshan' of the Mahatma from far and wide. On the
twelfth day, he becomes too weak yet, he goes to the river and reaches the basin where he daily prays for rains. Then too weak and exhausted, he slumps down with these words, "Velen, its raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs". Thus the novel ends on a note of ambiguity. The death of Raju, the main character of "The Guide", also might be interpreted in symbolically traditional aspects: "The ending is very Indian too," – Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah writes – Raju's death viewed symbolically means that the individual by losing his life in water brings rain (and life) to his fellowmen, and his death is just "death by water" – which is really not death but a means of self-purification and self-realisation. It is the triumph of the traditional way of living over natural and man-made catastrophes. Religious ideology typical of ancient Indian epic influenced the creative works of Narayan, who is faithful to moral and ethical ideals of the Indian past. Thus we can see some didactism and inevitable patience, obedience, faith in reincarnation that all the hardships of this life will be compensated in the incarnation, etc. That is the gist of Karma. Narayan weaves the present and the historical past together very skillfully. The institution of Sannyasa, or the renunciation of worldly goods and attachments for the sake of spiritual pursuits, is an ideal that remains constant in Narayan's novels. "The Guide", is an inverted version of the myth of Shiva the ascetic bringing waters to earth. If Raju the sinner saint is the parody of the principle of Shiva, Rosie is the feminine principle, the Maya or the serpent power. Rosie's entry into the world of Raju disturbs the routine rhythm and if he awakens the artist in her, she awakens the eros in him – as Parvathi is supposed to have done with Shiva. Finally we can relate this to the Indian concept of action as Karma which is
only discovery of the role one is destined to play. When Raju is about to be arrested, Roise attributes it to Karma (p.193). But this Karma is only what he did here and now. All the time the emphasis is on a kind of a passivity which is also freedom, a negation as fulfillment. Right in the beginning Raju is defined only negatively (p.7), but by stripping of layers which are the disguise, he comes closer to his inmost self, and this is in harmony with the cosmic will symbolised by the believing people at one level and the rains, at another. This distorted myth of Shiva brings equilibrium and fertility to this wasteland for whose barrenness Raju's earlier Karma is also a cause and therefore he deserves to become its saintscapegoat. Narayan's mode of perception is both comic and serious and reality and unreality seem to often exchange places. If all reality is an illusion, that illusion can also become "really real" in a deeper sense.

The silent feature of his works is that they subtly juxtapose the classical doctrine of Karma and the theory of selfless action of The Gita. Moreover, we find the author himself creating a charm between action and consequences with the result that while telling the story he seems to treat them as two divorced categories. Action and consequences exist as two unrelated entities as if the author is delineating the story on the line of Karma, which guides action, and the consequences that are the results, are left at the gates of the knowledge of The Gita. Such a delineation is bound to cause a Schism is the characters as well. Basically he adopts the concept of Karma and the tenets of Hindu philosophy.

Narayan frequently draws on ancient Indian, religious themes, like renunciation, incarnation, rebirth, ahimsa and the law of Karma.
To him, the Indian myth is a reality. "The Guide" is based on the traditional Hindu belief that Gods can be propitiated and rains can be brought about through fasting and prayer. This is the Indian where the frustrated and the forlorn give up themselves to Sanyasa. Like, in "The Financial Expert", Margayya like any frustrated Indian, consults the astrologer. The astrologer advises Puja and Margayya goes through the rituals of the Puja for good luck and for the propitiation of the adverse stars and planets. This is how men prosper on Indian soil. Pujas and recitation of mantras and slokas becomes their magic wand for luck and prosperity. An aspect of Indian mysticism indeed in "Waiting for the Mahatma", is more suggestive in its portrayal of Indian reality.

The religious aspect of Indian reality is mirrored in the doings of Granny, who being a pious Hindu, refuses to touch the canvas chair, made out of the skin of dead animals. Similarly in "The Bachelor of Arts", the hero Chandran in distracted. He leaves home, has a bout of slightly hysterical, non-intoxicated dissipation. In Madras with the old, middle-aged Kailas he disappears in the role of a wandering holyman, which is for Chandran a form of mild and painless suicide fitted to his anguished, timid spirit : "He was different from the usual sanyasis. Others may renounce with a spiritual motive or purpose, but Chandran's renunciation was not of that kind. It was an alternative to suicide he would have committed but for its social stigma. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny". Like this "The Guide", in the Hindu concepts of cyclical existence and the four stages of human life which lie unobtrusively behind the facade of other novels. The religious sense of Indian myth is a part of Narayan's grip of reality, of his
particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feeling and experience. What one can say about Narayan without qualification is that he embodies the pure spirit of Hinduism. In Narayan Hinduism appears at the natural sub-stratum of a sensibility pre-occupied with individuality, with the specific, with particularisation. Not that he is concerned with a mere ticked collection of particulars. Each detail is seen and presented so as to imply an essential truth about its own nature, just as the aggregate of details is raised from a simple collection to an order or world or portrait. The tension between the one and the many, a sustaining theme of Hinduism, operates quietly and unpretentiously throughout Narayan’s fiction. In “The Dark Room”, Savitri has epic parallels in her famous namesake of the Mahabharata and in Sita and Shakuntala, all of whom are parted from their husbands for a time. The two dark rooms – one in the home and the other in the temple are used. In the Hindu mythology, Yama is considered to be as object of terror, signalling death. And Savitri dreads the death and hurriedly leaves the temple. When Savitri is reminiscing her past in the temple, she feels: “Anything is better than nothing. She sat in the dark hall beside him, whispering criticisms of the pictures before hers : a stirring episode from the Ramayana, in which the giant monkey-god set fire to Lanka” (p.61). Narayan also gives us the picture of Navaratri festival during which people worship the Goddess Durga. The offering of coconut is also considered auspicious in the Hindu mythology. The ritual of offering coconuts abounds in the novel, ‘The Dark Room’. So R.K. Narayan present various mythical motifs like lotus, milk, fire, temple and emerge as archetypal images and evoke deep emotional response in the mind of the reader. His novel also demonstrates abiding interest
in folk wisdom, his faith in ancient Indian values and his pride for the rich spiritual heritage of his country. Thus Narayan present an traditional Hindu philosophy of life and all his novels embody this truth that human life is cyclic.

One of the main aspects of the works of Nayantara Sahgal too is her concern with religion and religious attitudes, which, she believes, go a long way to explain both the personal predicaments and the political plight of people. An important component of her political consciousness is the awareness of religion as a motivating force of action. Hinduism and religious consciousness in the social and political context, we have to look at Hinduism, the dominant creed which has influenced the ethos of the land, in a wide perspective, both historical and contemporary. In Hinduism religious truths are realized and expressed through a gradual process of reflection by many individuals spanning over centuries. Through gradual evolution a wide spectrum of beliefs and rituals, ranging from primitive animism through polytheism to lofty, abstract philosophical monism, have got assimilated into the body of Hinduism. The idea of Godhood is indefinable in Hinduism. The basic truth of Hindu religious evolution is: Truth is one, its statements many, each one open-ended but pointing to an ascending order of experience and apprehension. There is much in tradition which she values and a great deal in modernity which she rejects. 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. In India religion seems to be the reason for nearly everything and influences life at every juncture. There is perhaps nothing wrong with this kind of a pervasive
influence but unfortunately Hindu philosophy has fostered a number of contradictions and anomalies and has not been able to provide a definitive and clear opinion on moral issues. Its ability to remain unaffected by other religions has, over the years, hardened into an inability to grow and develop and to accept new ideas. 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 for a great deal more. Yet Sahgal believes that religion even if it is the despair of India is also its hope. Religion is ordinarily expected to provide the basis for compassion and understanding but it no longer does this when men are governed by their surface interpretation of religion. The Hindu family of religions lay greater stress on man's duty towards himself and the individual's God, and both usually were subsumed under the concept of the individual's duty of "the inner self". Nayantra's criticism of Hinduism is in no way irreligious or vituperative. She does not consider religion to be dispensable (not essential for it provides a significant base for progress. In the past India's leaders who have tried to lift India out of this terrible apathy have been deeply religious, "in spirit if not in conventional observance". Nayantara is of the opinion that no worthwhile growth can take place without the religious yearning. For all religions are restrictive when they work in a purely religious sense: they are slow to change and to adopt new ideas.

The duality of Hinduism is touched upon in her very first novel, 'A Time to Be Happy'. The central philosophy of Karma can itself be interpreted to support two ways of life. If on the one hand it encourages passivity for man's present life as the result of man's present life as the result of his past actions, on the other hand it is a
challenge for it lies within human power to create a better future for himself. Hinduism places responsibility on the individual. Other opposing attitudes exist side by side: violence and non-violence, materialism and spiritualism, acquisition and renunciation are all part of Hinduism. The division between illusion and reality becomes blurred as does the one between non-attachment and inhumanity. Nayantara Sahgal’s awareness of this duality is, however accompanied by a sense of genial tolerance and a belief that traditional religion can coexist with a liberal, enlightened attitude and that it need not be an inhibiting factor in the development of life.”

Rakesh, in her novel, "This Time of Morning", faces the uncertainty of orthodoxy in India. He finds Christianity and Islam to be unambiguous religions, which spell out clearly what they believe, but Hinduism remains a "baffling uncertainty". Rakesh turns to Kailas Vrind in his need to understand it. Kailas explains to him the essential duality of Hinduism:

"It was a torpor that accepted maimed limbs, blind eyes and object 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 entirely without harbouring ignorance and superstition too. You could not wholly reject it without destroying part of yourself, for it was the story of India." (p.40)

For Rakesh and Kailas and for many others like them, in religious India, the choice was not between the acceptance or the rejection of religion, but between interpreting it positively as a living
faith or exploiting its ritualistic pattern for narrow selfish concerns. While Kailas Vrind and Swami Satyanand choose the path of enlightened religion, men like Hari Mohan in ‘This Time of Morning’ prefer to exploit it for personal ends. Hari Mohan consciously becomes the “rallying point for all the rigid orthodox Hindu elements and does not hesitate to inflame communal discontent and ill-feeling for his own political gains. Hari Mohan also believes though mistakenly that by practising ritualistic religion by proxy he can attain salvation. In this novel it ceases to be a matter of religion and becomes one of the differences in the approach to it while Hari Mohan approaches it as a tool to be used for political exploitation and personal salvation. Kailas wants to use it for moral enrichment of both the individual and society. It becomes the difference between secularism and fanaticism, between the “modern and the medieval mind” (p.197).

In “Storm in Chadigarh” the two approaches are represented by two sets of people. On the one hand are Trivedi, Dubey and Harpal, while on the other are men like Inder and Gyan. Trivedi is disturbed by the ambiguity of Hinduism and tells Dubey, “This lack of definition doesn’t suit us at all.” He feels the need for a center of gravity and for a confrontation with the self instead of a surface adherence to rituals. He questions the role of the Brahmin as “Priest, lawgiver, adviser to sovereigns, custodian of the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the race”(p.77) in the contemporary context obviously something has gone wrong, for the heritage, instead of making some positive contribution to ordinary life, has become a hindrance to progress and growth. Trivedi asks:
What use was this heritage to ordinary men? What did it create but quietude? Did it toughen fibre, give emotional satisfaction? Did it help the soldier to fight better, the businessmen to do his job better? (P.78).

Dubey, in later years, echoes this view. Brahminism, which he feels, should stand for a "quality of life which a people evolves for itself" (p.80) had lost its vitality and become ineffective.

Religion is ordinarily expected to provide the basis for compassion and understanding but it no longer does this when men are governed by their surface interpretation of religion. Inder in "Storm in Chandigarh" a men who, not really religious, still derive their idea of male superiority from religious sources. Inder views Saroj’s premarital relationship from the limited angle of physical chastity. His pursuit of material interests is justified on the basis of belief in the four ashrams of life, ‘there is a time for everything, for making money and renouncing it’. One was as much a performance of duty as other and who but the individual was responsible for what he chooses to do. Sahgal also represents this aspect of Hinduism in "Storm in Chandigarh", violence spreads because it is tolerated. Nobody takes a stand against it, people are inert and indifferent and allow 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. Vishal Dubey also shares the feeling that Hindus have a backward - looking tendency and are excessively dominated by the past. Dubey tells a colleague:
I think our great grandmother does have a formidable influence on what we do. In a number of ways she’s still alive. Sometimes I think it will need a tearing up by the roots to get her out of the way. (p.66)

In the same novel ‘Storm in Chandigarh’ Mara finds the Hindu heritage suffocatingly limiting. It is a bundle of old, useless, impossible ideas going on and on. She tells Jit that it is a dead burden. It’s our all right, but some of it is rotten. We’ll die if we go on like this. Sometimes I think we’re already dead’. (p.138)

There is need for action and fresh thought on almost every religious issue. Nayantara Sahgal makes this plea in an article entitled “Fresh Air on Hinduism” (The Sunday Standard, 1 December 1968) where she points out that the religious leaders had shown a tendency to concentrate on the superfluitics 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. Sahgal is of the view 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.” Narayana Sahgal is critical of the Hindu attitude towards evil. The Hindus relegate it to some unknown future and do not take cognizance of it in this life. This attitude is evasive and helps to solve none of the problems of our life. Such a philosophy-
Contains no dynamic of its own, 
no inner bone structure to
constitute what the rest of the
world calls character. It cannot
inject that iron into the soul
which will help it to hold its
own against other strong encroaching
forces. The Hindu does not hold his
own. He succumbs.¹⁰

What is urgently required, if Hinduism is to become a
meaningful philosophy, is an updating of ideas and an awareness of
the present, of reality as an undeniable fact. There are characters in
her novels who are not Hindus or who while being Hindus are critical
of the inhibiting nature of Hinduism. In “This Time of Morning” there
is Neil who is a European and Kalyan Sinha who is a non-believer,
Rakesh though a Hindu has a heightened critical awareness while
Kailas Vrind has already broken free from the narrowness of the
conventional world represented by his mother who had a way of
“reducing all grouping, all search, all soaring discovery to implacable
little formulas.” In her world there were no free spirits, only “sons and
daughters, husbands and wives, children and parents, and for each
category there were rigid rules of behaviour laid down.” (p.181)

In “Storm in Chandigarh” the American missionary is the
outsider and though he does not comment on Hinduism his behaviour
is a comment on the nature of true religion. For him religions have an
ethical dimension; it is an act of faith and a matter of conscience. But
all this is wasted on Gyan Singh who misses the lesson and grabbing
the strength of the faith spouts in direct opposition to all that the missionary had tried to teach. In this novel Dubey and Trivedi, like Rakesh and Kailas (This Time of Morning) before them, wish to use the Hindu tradition for meaningful positive action. Trivedi turns to the Bhagavad Gita which, he feels, alone among the Hindu scriptures tells us something 'specific', something beside ritual. The Gita recommends action and the performance of duty unallied to reward. Trivedi feels that the Gita is "occupied more with ethics than with morality" and considers this the basis of its value. Dubey who has imbibed the useful lessons of the Gita turns to action when faced by violence and communal disharmony and applies the same code of the behaviour to his personal life. Nayantara's criticism of Hinduism is in no way irreligious or vituperative. She does not consider religion to be dispensable for it provides a significant base for progress. In the past India's leaders who have tried to lift India out of this terrible apathy have been deeply religious, "in spirit if not in conventional observance". Nayantara is of the opinion that no worthwhile growth can take place without the religious yearning, which she identifies with the ethical impulse. For all religions are restrictive when they work in a purely religious sense: they are slow to change and to adopt new ideas. Nayantara is only marginally aware in her criticism of Hinduism. And if it is true on one hand that Hinduism has an inherent ambivalence, it is also true that minority religious have had to be more open minded in order to survive. Nevertheless she is quite right in her regret that the vast spiritual resources of Hinduism are being frittered away by a superficial adherence to rituals and religious orthodoxy. Hinduism must, and any religion for that matter should, shed its purely religious role in order to become a living tradition.
The painstaking portrayal in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal of the sickening scenario in the socio-political realm around us, with scrupulous regard for facts would still have been incomplete, in a way, had the novelist not penetrated the surface to probe the inner malaise, the crippling creed, which has facilitated the relentless exploitation of the people in the political process. One of the main aspects of the work of Nayantara Sahgal is her concern with religion and religious attitudes, which, she believes, go a long way to explain both the personal predicaments and the political plight of people. An important component of her political consciousness is the awareness of religion as a motivating force of action or otherwise. However, to understand and evaluate the role of Hinduism and religious consciousness in the social and political context, Nayantara Sahgal highly influenced by Hinduism, the dominant creed that has influenced the ethos of the land, in a wide perspective, both historical and contemporary.

Nayantara Sahgal repeatedly finds her characters inhibited in acting derisively and responsibly in all walks of life, private or public. She seeks to relate this self imposed helplessness to the inadequate creed that these people live by. In diverse ways “religion affects human action and far from becoming a creed of action, Hinduism becomes a creed of negation”. At times, in the hands of the unscrupulous, it becomes a tool of exploitation. Sahgal traces the root cause of the people’s fettered political existence to the inadequacies of their faith as it is practiced. Hinduism becomes an ally of exploiters – social, economic and political. The individual is the corner stone of Nayantara Sahgal’s philosophy. And religion is the greatest motivating force for the individual. That is why the novelist has the theme of religion as one of her main concerns. It is surprising to note how few attempts
have been made to relate her political concerns with her preoccupation with the theme of Hinduism. Jasbir Jain have touched upon what the former terms “the politics of Hinduism in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels.” Hindus, being the majority community set the tune of the country in matters political and social. Criticising the tendencies of inaction, complacency, mute acquiescence before the conventional and evasion of problems implicit in the misinterpretation of Hinduism. She advocates not only a positive and healthy reinterpretation of the ageless religion incorporating and highlighting virtues like action, decisiveness, responsibility and initiative but also a synthesis of the best qualities of all the religions.

“Hinduism was neither a creed nor a religion but a way of life sprung from the soil, the stones, the mountains and the rivers of India”. (This Time of Morning, p.25). That is perhaps the reason why it lacks “clear compelling commandments” and is not “easily defined” (This Time of Morning, p.41). The “Baffling uncertainty” of Hinduism is “boundless enough” to encompass even mutually exclusive virtues. You could not accept Hinduism in its entirely without harbouring ignorance and superstition ignorance and superstition too (This Time of Morning, p.42). There are “opposite tendencies existing side by side, violence and non-violence, materialism and spiritualism, acquisition and sacrifice.”14 Religion in this sense reflects in every aspect of life in India. There would have been nothing improper about this pervasive influence of Hinduism, if it had been less of a philosophers religion and more of the ordinary human beings, if the popular practice of it hadn’t fostered a number of contradictions and anomalies. Hinduism in its essence is but a way of lift (This Time of Morning). The inherent philosophic bias in Hinduism, the multipronged perspective
wherefrom an action is appraised, the simultaneous functioning of life on diverse dimensions. These diversities not only baffle individuals but also make it arduous for them to take dimensions.

In “Storm in Chandigarh” Trivedi is disturbed by the amorphousness of Hinduism, its “lack of definition”. The abstract nature of the creed encompasses a vague inclusivism wherefrom emanate self-contradictory traits, attitudes and virtues as desirable for its adherents. Trivedi also confused by the diverse dimensions and in storm in Chandigarh, wonders, “What is the meaning of Brahmin?” Of course we do have rituals, conventions, and books, but “where is the evidence now that those scriptures can inspire a people to live?” (Storm in Chandigarh pp.82-83). As Vishal tells Saroj in the same novel, Hinduism is “a way of life, wrongly called a religion (Storm in Chandigarh, p.92). For most of the people, Hinduism consists of “a sheep-like adherence to rituals (Storm in Chandigarh, p.82). Vishal in ‘Storm in Chandigarh’, bemoans the absence of “the courage” to “hold up what we call sacred to light and examine it, to throw it away, if necessary” (p.92). Vishal feels exasperated with the situation where “no one was enthused about anything. People functioned without spirit (p.72). Unaccustomed to think for themselves and unable to move out of the deep grooves of tradition, the people have got accustomed to accepting blindly whatever is around them, be that the insensitivity of a husband or the corruptability of a Chief Minister, as their destiny. That is what makes Vishal see in Chandigarh “the funeral march of Hinduism (p.92). “Either we sit paralysed waiting for heaven to send us a sign, or we charge like bulls into the ring and call it action (p.79). It is a cruel dilemma when those who are good
intentioned are inert and cannot achieve anything worthwhile either for themselves or for others, while those who act do so in a thought less and violent way. It is the dilemma of Hinduism which is acted out in the virtuous inaction of Saroj (who has to be coaxed out of Inder’s hold) and Harpal (who is aware of a feeling of withdrawal in his own self and a sense of frustration) and the vicious action of Inder and Gyan. Vishal’s decision to concentrate on loving Saroj presents a new alternative of good-intentioned action breaking the impasses. No wonder Kalyan who has had a close brush with stark poverty feels alienated and impatient in this strange land which was and yet was not his own (p. 25 Storm in Chandigarh). Of what use is this old heritage if it has no positive contribution to make to ordinary life, Trivedi wonders:

"what use was this heritage to ordinary men? What did it create but quietude? Did it toughen fibre, give emotional satisfaction? Did it help the solider to fight better, the businessman do his job better?" (p.78)

In a society characterized by wide spread ignorance and illiteracy with fatalistic and other worldly attitudes, religion becomes a tool of exploitation. Sahgal’s next novel ‘Rich Like Us’, suggests how the priests came to their own as middlemen between the people and the mysterious, divine power (pp. 127-28). Self appointed seers and interpreters have a vested interest in perpetuating themselves. That explains why they dole out superstition, fatalism and other opiates to consolidate their hegemony. Hindus view life as part of a continuum, it puts them in a frame of mind, which makes them seek answers to their present problems in terms of either, the past or the future. Mona
in 'Rich Like Us', rather than blaming her husband for marrying again, resorts to "calling upon the Almighty to spell out what she had done in this or past lives to deserve such outrageous treatment. (p.54)

The account of the Sati of Comor, taken from the file of Sonali's father in 'Rich Like Us', reveals how "this victim of superstition" had committed that act of self-immolation under the belief that "the present... (was the third time of her Soul's reincarnation" and that "she would be recompensed ... hereafter" (P.126). Far from being a credo of hope and action, faith in India, pushes the people down to passivity and subservience. Looking up to the gods for divine benediction often leads to passivity, acquiescence and bowing to whatever is meted out to one in life. In 'Rich Like Us', Sahgal explains how fatalism comes to be the final answer to all the questions with its "irrefutable iron logic"; when Sonali's father sought to explain to the family barber that draught is caused not by a curse but by lack of rain, put came the question: "what makes lack of rain?" When it was explained that rainfall was dependent on certain atmospheric conditions, the quarry was still the same: "what causes those?" Until the smug conclusion was unilaterally agreed upon: "there was definitely a reason which chose to bless or to punish". In the stagnant imagination of people, Smug under the Crux of passivity, anybody who breaks that shell and assumes control of the situation gets invested with a divine halo irrespective of what he stands for. It certainly is an ironical distoration of Bhagwad Gita that rather than setting their house in order themselves, under the impact of their faith. "The young idol on his white horse who had led Indians in a pledge of Independence on a river bank in Lahore" (Rich Like Us, p. 157), or "the man in the loin-cloth who had urged, "Let's free ourselves
without the barrel of a gun" (Rich Like Us, p.157). But a community cannot bank on luck alone. Craving for gods might as well breed tyrants. 'Rich like Us' illustrates this possibility most poignantly. During the emergency regime, the P.M. is termed "a many armed goddess". She forms with "her father, and her son, a regular Holy Trinity" for the people (p.155). This deification fulfils an internal need of the Indian psyche as is shown by the way Nishi reacts to the imposition of the emergency.

*The idea of the leader, someone to look upto,*  
*made her pulse beat faster, fulfilled a yearning for tidiness...*  

(Rich Like Us, p.73)

In the face of "divine" dispensation which makes people feel safe, the only reaction can be conformism. The delegations of teachers, lawyers, school children which went everyday to the P.M. to congratulate her for declaring emergency and the group of intellectuals, a chief editor, a professor from Delhi University and lawyer in their sophistic justification of "the dictatorship around us" (P.82) reveal a significant cross-section of Indian society rendered spineless by its faith. Sonali in 'Rich Like Us' explains why people in India accepted even the repressive regime during the emergency: "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) Sonali believes that it was her Hindu upbringing which had given her this insularity. The thoroughly rotten set of people basking in official favour during the emergency - all can be seen as inevitable products of the atmosphere generated by such indifferent attitudes, born of philosophic insulation from the world of fact.
Despite its philosophic view of evil, the basic issue of evil in its actual manifestation is not resolved in Hinduism, Keshav, in Rich Like Us, realizes how evil in the abstract engages the attention in Hindu thought whereas its manifestation in worldly forms, 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, make 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 of Mona relates to Rose relating to the two fold concept of time, cosmic and temporal (pp. 208-9) reveals one inbuilt ‘defence mechanism’ whereby temporal distress can be made to look insignificant against a cosmic background. The dead weight of stagnant ideas seems to be a negation of real Hinduism, rendering Hinduism to be merely a religion of cooking pots as Sonali in Rich Like Us puts it (p.120). Thrown behind the bars in solitary confinement during the Emergency, K.L. realizes that to counter balance the pervasive opiate in religion, “Hinduism needs antidotes” (P.172, Rich Like Us). It is this intrinsic opiate in Hinduism which makes all sensitive beings in Sahgal’s fictional universe feel stifled. Keshav and Sonali have no option but to seek shelter out of the fold, so much does the faith suffocate them. Rose in ‘Rich Like Us’, provide a perspective wherefrom the harmful implications in the attitudes bred by Hinduism can be seen. There are also a fair number of Hindus who subject their faith to critical scrutiny. All these characters are not merely aware of the fetters of their faith, they also seek to make them snap through their active involvement in their immediate environment.
Nayantara Sahgal makes it amply clear that Hinduism, to be a living force, requires constant renewal. It is only through a continuous reappraisal of what constitutes a desirable virtue in the present context and what doesn’t that a code of action can be formulated “at this particular juncture in our history when we have to act and be responsible for our actions”. It is only though a shuffling of priorities, through placing the welfare of the individual here and now at the center of every consideration that this opiate in Hinduism could be rendered ineffective, Nayantara Sahgal seems to imply. Sahgal obviously sees in a rejuvenated and positively interpreted Hinduism the only way out. In a recent letter to the writer she had this to say: I have ... seen it (Hinduism) as fettering as far as emotional and spiritual and intellectual growth are concerned, but only because people had misinterpreted it and its messages. I think we still have to define what Hinduism means, what its 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.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Vidyarthi M. L. (Vidyarthi), Cultural History of India.
4. The Swan and the Eagle (Simla; 1969) p.58.
12. Ishopanished, 9-12; Gita, II, 11-30.
15. Ibid., p.75.
16. Ibid., p.118.