The word ‘Hindu’ doesn’t find its appearance in any of the original scriptures of the Hindus, compared to Christianity and Islam doctrines which have come into existence in a defined form by God to a particular person at a particular time and place. Religious doctrines in Hinduism are realized and expressed through a gradual process of reflection by different individuals, covering many centuries. Through gradual evolution, a wide spectrum of beliefs and rituals has got assimilated into the body of Hinduism. As there is no clear definition for the idea of god-hood in Hinduism, various creeds or cults which are considered divine manifestations complementing each other, orient to the infinity of truth and well-being of human race. The basic truth underlying Hindu religious evolution is that truth is unique but its interpretation is many sided. When compared to Islam or Christianity, Hinduism remains vague. Hinduism does put forward certain key concepts despite its doctrinal vagueness.

What is called ‘Hinduism’ in the present day would not be destroyed as no invader or foreigner or practising Hindu could explore it in depth. Its roots are embedded in mysterious sources. Its branches invaded space. Hinduism is all – pervasive, all – inclusive and percolating into depths. The peculiar feature of Hinduism is that it does not lend itself to be fitted into any rigid pattern or framework. Unlike the other great religions of the world; Islam and Christianity, it does not have one founder, one scripture, or one way of life. It is precisely due to this reason that it is
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sometimes dubbed, not as a religion, but only as a way of life or just a culture. S. Radha Krishnan expresses the same view that “Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought” 1

Hinduism is the dharma of the people of India. The Upanishads make it very clear that dharma gives coherence and direction to the various activities of life. S. Radhakrishnan considers dharma to be “a word of protean significance”2 and explains that it is the concept under which the Hindu “brings the forms and activities which shape and sustain human life”3. It is neither a religious creed nor cult imposing on ethical or social life. It is the complete rule of life, the harmony of the whole man who finds a right and just law of his living. It, in a wider sense is used to connote all the means for the achievement of various ends of life. It removes one’s owes and places in the highest bliss. A popular verse of the Mahabharatha says:

I cry with arms uplifted, yet no one heedeth. From righteousness (Dharma) flow forth pleasure and profit. Why then do ye not follow righteousness?

Man is not only with himself, but is in solidarity with all of his kind. The emphasis of the universal in its moments towards achieving its goal is the source of man’s sociality. Society is not something alien, but is a profound integration of the social destiny with that of the individual. Man is not an abstract individual. He belongs to a certain social group by virtue of his character and function by filling his place in social life. By helping its maintenance and continuity, the individual not only fulfils the law of his own being but makes his own contribution to the society. Man attains his full being only by living in harmonious social relationship. The individual and the society are interdependent. The sound development of the individual is the best condition for the growth of the society, and a healthy condition of the society is the best condition for the growth of individual.

Sahgal feels proud of inheriting the Hindu heritage. She speaks about her own attitude to Hinduism, thus:
How does Hindu culture affect our conduct, our decisions, that sort of things? What kind of person is the inheritor of this inheritance? Hinduism is of interest to me because most of us are Hindus, but even those who are not, live under the social and psychological overhang of Hinduism. It is not something we can ignore, if we want to understand ourselves.  

As an Indian, she knows the fact pretty well that Hinduism is both the despair and the hope of India. She understands quite clearly that various kinds of interpretations are attributed to its every single doctrine and there is stagnation at different stages of the ancient tradition. Sahgal often finds her characters restrain from acting decisively and responsibly both in private and public life. She relates this self-imposed inability to the inadequate creed that people live by. The religion shows its effect on human action in diverse ways. Instead of becoming a creed of action, Hinduism becomes a creed of negation. Sometimes, it becomes a tool of exploitation in the hands of unscrupulous people.

Sahgal keeps the individual as the cornerstone of her philosophy and religion, the greatest motivating force for the individual. That is the reason why religion becomes one of the thematic concerns of her fiction. Some eminent critics like Jasbir Jain and J.K. Thomas feels that her political concerns are also preoccupied with the theme of Hinduism. They have touched upon what the former terms as, “The politics of Hinduism in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels.”

In *A Time to Be Happy*, Sahgal discusses the inherent duality of Hinduism as a result of the diametrically opposite interpretations of the theory of Karma. The law of Karma prevails in the world of *Samsara*, where our deeds lead to higher or lower status in the world of time. The knower of the self ceases to be stained by action. He goes beyond the ethical, though rooted in it, ‘*ayyatra dharma*’6. The path of virtue and vice is a means, not an end. The end is beyond the law of
injection and prohibition of good and evil. According to Aristotle Nous is never wrong, which means our activities, being inspired by the divine, can’t be wrong. The life of the spirit is not restricted by any formulas. It breaks its bond and finds its own way to the enrichment of its own. The liberated spirit conforms spontaneously to the ethical norms. Every religion sets before us the goal of liberation, which has a sense of exaltation, a sense of freedom and victory over the world of evil and death.

The Karma theory encourages passivity in the present life indicating that the present is already shaped by the past. However, the narrator says, ‘the doctrine can also be taken as a challenge for it is within human capacity to shape a better future’ (161). He also interprets this theory of Karma in a positive way. He feels that Karma mainly means living one’s life and doing one’s duty to the best of our ability in whichever capacity he/she happen to have been born in.

The narrator also points out that the paradox one can find in Hinduism is not at all a paradox as forthright sensuality and stoic renunciation are the two sides of the same coin. They are the two contrary attitudes that create the pattern of Indian life. Moreover both of them belong to India and Hinduism proclaiming that there is time for everything and everything is right in its appropriate time. The Hindu view of the individual and his relation to society is the synthesis and gradation of the four-fold objectives of life i.e the purusardas - desire and enjoyment (karma), interest (artha), ethical living (dharma) and spiritual freedom (moksha).

Swami Vivekananda considers the entire world as the manifestation of God implying that there is no difference between love for humanity and the devotion to God. Sohan Bai, a friend of the narrator, also reminds that Gandhiji also suggested the same thing. Personal enrichment may bring us close to limited humanity where as philanthropic outlook will certainly chain us to the vast humanity.
Sahgal is well aware of the fact that India has made a travesty of religion though the Indians are deeply religious. As she does not support everything in the name of tradition, she emphasizes the need for a review and enlightened attitude in the modern times. In her *A Time to Be Happy*, Sahgal vividly portrays how some people have become mere prisoners of the conventions.

Sahgal projects the different dimensions of Hinduism in the novel. Through the narrator, she reveals how the doctrines of Karma and non-attachment make human life meaningful and useful.

In *This time of Morning*, Sahgal depicts the different kinds of approaches to Hinduism: positive approach to it as a living faith and the exploitation of it for personal advantages.

Kailas, the P.M.’s reliable assistant and a sincere follower of Gandhian principles, stresses the importance of interpreting Hinduism as a living faith and points out that there is every need to follow it. But for a while like Arjuna in the Mahabharatha, he too falls into a kind of dilemma as a result of which he renunciates the social activities. When the call comes from his political idealist, the P.M. to shun his silence, he comes out from his passivity and accepts the chief-minister-ship of Uttar Pradesh to rededicate himself and makes determined perseverance for the welfare of the society.

Myth and reality are meticulously interwoven into a single perception in the context of contemporary history. Lord Rama’s reign is often referred to as the rule of individuals who are strictly adhered to morality and ethical values which constitute a welfare society. While stressing the efficacy of moral and ethical values in personal life Rama tells Lakshmana:

> I bear arms for the sake of truth. It is not difficult for me to gain the whole universe but I desire not even the suzerainty of the heavens if it is to be unrighteousness. ⁸
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Sahgal, in *This Time of Morning* reiterates that Hinduism is an integral part of the Indian society. Having firm faith in Hindu Philosophy of Karma, Kailas renounces passivity and actively involves in politics where as Hari Mohan realizing his past deeds and begins a new phase in his life.

Chandigarh, the setting of *Storm in Chandigarh*, gains religious prominence as it is situated near Kurukshetra, where the mighty battle between the Pandavas and the Kouravas took place in the Mahabharatha. It is in that battle field that the Lord Krishna enlightened Arjuna by preaching the Bhagavatgita whose influence on the Hindus can hardly be exaggerated. The Bhagavathgita clearly reveals that Men cannot commit themselves to any course of action based on cowardice. They have to act on some principles. They have to go forward without getting frightened of its perils. They have to perform their duty without aspiring for any reward. Besides rituals, It is preoccupied more with ethics than with morality.

Vishal Dubey, the central character in the novel is highly critical of the taboo-ridden system, the noiseless chaos and the funeral march of Hinduism. He vehemently condemns the Hindus for whom the modern world has become too much. He believes that the Hindus are going to pieces as they lack the courage to face challenges of change.

Before his assignment as the liaison officer between the centre and the two warring states, Haryana and Punjab, Vishal Dubey is keenly interested to explore the role of a Brahmin in the contemporary culture. He wants to go back to the roots of Hinduism and find out the significance of Brahmins and whether they have any constructive role to play in the modern world. According to the Upanishads, the true Brahmin is said to be one who has sensed the deepest self and acts out of that consciousness. He is expected to embody the law of self dedicating love, the grace and joy of souls in the consciousness of the service where hatred, violence and fanaticism will be unknown. It is the duty of every Brahmin to lay down the science of values, draw out of the blue prints for social
reconstruction and persuade the world to accept the high ends of life. His intellectual introspectrum is not that of a spiritual recluse but that of a Karma Yogi, man of action. Vishal Dubey comprehends his role as a Brahmin and analyses his own self.

Vishal Dubey grows and mellows in search of real values in life. He wants to do research on ‘The Role of Brahmanism in our Culture’ at New England University. But he could not fulfill his desire on account of his assignment in Chandigarh. According to him the Bhagavadgīthā says, “men of all classes, if they fulfill their assigned duties, enjoy the highest imperishable bliss.”

Having understood the book in true sense, Vishal Dubey feels that true bliss lies in performing his duty. Ironically, it is in Chandigarh that he learns and performs the duty of establishing the great tradition of peace, tolerance and culture besides to possess courageous resistance to the evil. As he realizes that violence spreads only because it is tolerated, he suggests Herpal Singh, the C.M. of Haryana that there is a need for taking a stand against violence. He motivates his subordinate officers to meet the needs of people. With his indomitable will-power, he restores peace and tranquility in the two states.

In her novels, she makes a fervent plea for transforming the religion into a great instrument for social progress. She finds it nothing wrong in taking a cue from the people like Mother Teresa, who has made religion a synonym for humanity, devotion and sacrifice.

**PRIMARY SOURCES:**

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**This Time of Morning** : New York : W.W.Norton and Co, 1966

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3. Ibid.


