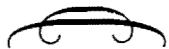
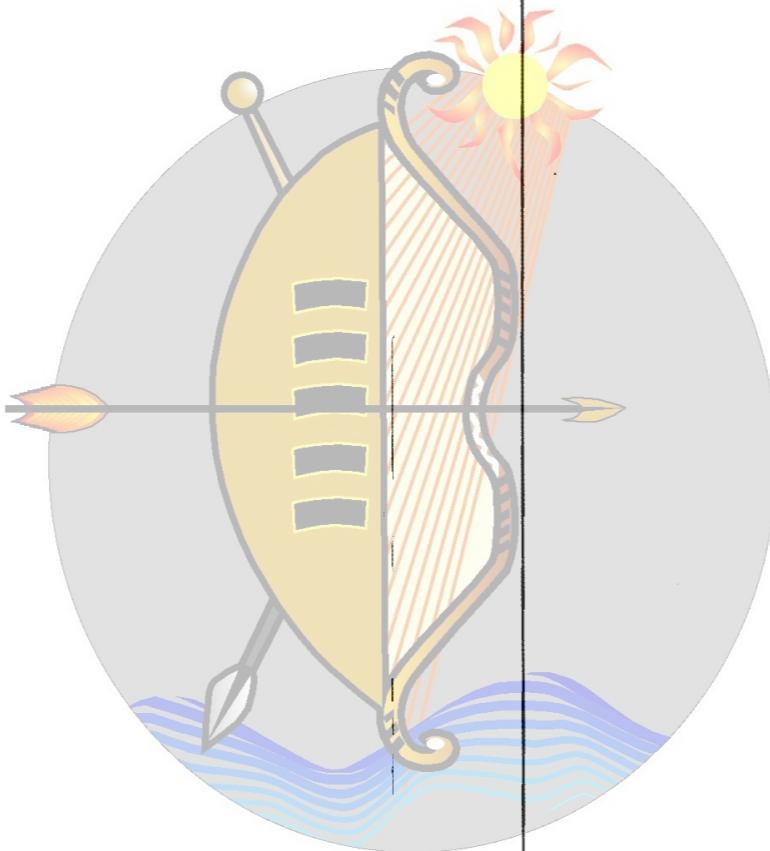


The
Hindu Heritage
in
South Africa

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tural activities, the Hindi Shiksha Sangh concerns itself largely with educational matters.

Among the Gujarati community, the multi-teacher schools have a supervisor, a principal and a vice-principal. The first two offices are held by persons in an honorary capacity. Supervision in the other schools is done by members of the committee in charge of the schools.

The money for running most of the schools is raised from the community, except where the fees charged are sufficient to meet the financial needs of the school. Some institutions have investments which provide the necessary funds. The Hindi Shiksha Sangh recently toured Natal and the Transvaal with a show in order to raise funds for the purpose of placing Hindi education on a sound footing.

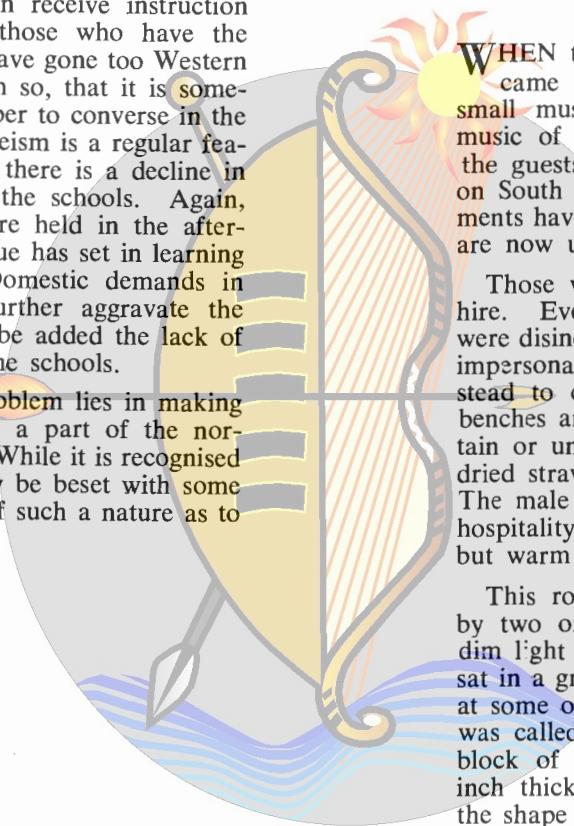
None of the institutions receives any State assistance since the Government has not yet recognised the need to foster mother-tongue education among the Indians.

Schools are run in temple halls, most of which are serving as Government-aided Schools, garages, private homes and public halls. The platoon system in the English schools has seriously cut across the provision of mother-tongue education in the town schools.

Mother-tongue education among the Indians in South Africa suffers from many ills. Less

than ten per cent of the school population is receiving any form of instruction in the home-language. The claims of the English school take precedence to the detriment of the language of one's birth. The result is that Indian children are denied knowledge of their own language and culture. Extra-curricular activities, homework and preparation for the examination all hinder the successful functioning of the system. Mother-tongue education is regarded as a convenience, not a necessity since it does not carry with it the promise of economic advancement. Few parents ever care to ensure that their children receive instruction despite the appeals of those who have the cause at heart. Others have gone too Western in their outlook, so much so, that it is sometimes considered not proper to converse in the home-language. Absenteeism is a regular feature of most classes and there is a decline in the number enrolling at the schools. Again, as most of the classes are held in the afternoons, when mental fatigue has set in learning becomes a drudgery. Domestic demands in the case of the girls further aggravate the position. To these may be added the lack of proper supervision in some schools.

The solution to the problem lies in making mother-tongue instruction a part of the normal educational system. While it is recognised that its incorporation may be beset with some difficulties, they are not of such a nature as to be insurmountable.



Musical Instruments and Entertainers at Hindi Weddings

By BAL GANESH

WHEN the first Indian indentured labourers came to South Africa they brought some small musical instruments with them. The music of these instruments gave pleasure to the guests attending the first Hindi wedding on South African soil. Most of these instruments have become obsolete and some of them are now unknown to the younger generation.

Those were days when halls were hard to hire. Even if they could be found parents were disinclined to marry their children in such impersonal atmosphere. They preferred instead to construct their own marquees. As benches and chairs were either difficult to obtain or unknown to the indentured labourers, dried straw was strewn over the hard ground. The male guests who were used to such rude hospitality sat on the floor of this makeshift but warm arrangement.

This rough and ready hall was usually lit by two or three hurricane lanterns. In the dim light could be seen the musicians. They sat in a group among the guests. Let us look at some of the instruments they played. One was called the *kartal*. It was almost a solid block of wood about two inches wide, one inch thick and six inches long. A piece in the shape of an angular U had been sawn out from both ends and some round tin chips strung on a wire across the cuttings. In the middle of the wood was an oblong split in which the player put his fingers to grasp the instrument. When two *kartals* were held in one hand and clasped together by a movement of the fingers and thumb, a dull shivering sound was the outcome. The *kanjaree* was like a tambourine but smaller. There were no bells in the rim as is usually found in its western counterpart. The two large cymbals were like shiny, silver saucers. Looking at the *dholok*, a kind of drum played with the

fingers, one could have mistaken it for a small, wine casket. Both ends were covered with leather. And the Indian fiddle with its vibrating wires beneath the two playing ones was in all appearances a long rectangular box.

At the concert which the musicians provided, the *kartal* player was invariably the leader. He sang a line of song in a sweet melodious voice. The others, in a chorus, repeated it. The movement was slow and only the fiddle and the *dholok* followed the singing. Music and musicians continued in this dreamy fashion for a while. Then, suddenly, in a loud and rough voice the leader shouted out the words and at the same time increased the tempo. His party was quick to take the lead. The hands of the cymbal player worked up and down like the pistons of a car. Upon his small instrument the man with the *kanjaree* drummed a rapid continuous tattoo. The fiddler's bow went forward and backward industriously. Strong fingers and palms beat the two leather faces of the *dholok* with so much vigour and consistency that they might well have burst. In the uproar, the sound of the *kartal* was lost, but the leader held them before him and clapped them together as he bent and stretched his arms like the wheels of a carriage.

It was not long before the leader sat on one knee. His restless arms still spun round and round. Perspiration dripped freely from his brow. Soon he was up on both feet and dancing among his friends. It was a weird dance. It frightened the children and made the blood course faster in the adults. The players of the *kanjaree* and the cymbals were quick to follow his example. While they danced they sang, taking the cue from their leader.

In this way they must have conducted themselves for fifteen minutes. Then the man with the *kartal* gave a sign, and song, dance and music stopped abruptly. The guests were quick to show their appreciation. "Wah! Wah, Shabaash!" they shouted and the exhausted players acknowledged their applause with a tired smile. But fatigue was a passing phase with them. A large bowl of black coffee and a deep pull at a *chelum*—soon gave them their lost energy and they were once again ready for the next song and dance.

While the men were entertained thus, the actual marriage ceremony was performed a little distance away under a canopy of bunches of flowers and pleasant looking fresh fruit. All the female guests sat around this gay structure. The ceremony was long and tedious and as stage after stage was developed, the women sang songs to suit the moment. One of them played a *dholok*. Next morning, when the visiting party sat under the canopy to eat their breakfast of *keecheedee*, they abused the bridegroom's father and his near relatives in many a line of song composed on the spur of the moment. The ironical part of it all was that the father was obliged to pay them for being the butt of such embarrassing and undignified humour.

Another form of diversion was provided by the *nagaara*. This instrument was made up of two drums which were shaped like big, brown cash bowls with the mouth covered with leather. The larger measured about two and a half feet across the face, whereas the other could not have been more than one-third its size. These were usually placed on padded rings with the playing surfaces almost touching each other at the bottom edge. Sitting cross-legged, the drummer beat them with two short sticks. The *nagaara* man, as a rule, was invited to play every day for a week before the wedding. And, during that period, he could be seen at the house of the host sending out vibrating, metrical notes into the afternoon air. Sometimes a cymbal player sat besides him and his music followed the beats of heavy drums. On the wedding night the drummer had another partner. He was a male dancer. The dancer's attire was strange. Both the pair of knickers and his shirt were made of pieces of gaudy material, with about a hundred tiny bells sewn on the garments so that the slightest movement on his part drew out the sound of five hundred mynahs in a fig tree at eventide.

As he danced, he sang songs of Rama and Krishna and told the mythological characters of the *Puranas*. Sometimes when the guests were tired of this he threw a challenge to them to come and outwit him at his own game. He did this subtly in one of his songs, but the guests had their ears keyed for such a turn. Many came forward. They gave a silver coin to the *nagaara* man, and, placing one hand over an ear, sang cleverly composed lines of song. There was ingenious wit in them and sarcasm, too—all directed towards the challenger. Some ignored the dancer and sought battle with the competing guests.

Sometimes the *nagaara* man did not have the support of a dancer. He kept time to the music of the *roshan chowkees*. The *roshan chowkees* were popularly known as "Indian bagpipes", but they did not resemble their Scottish namesake. They were a set of two wind instruments, each made in the fashion of a clarinet without its metal fittings. While one was played in such a way that it gave out a long, monotonous sound so reminiscent of the jammed horn of a motor vehicle, sweet music came out of the other. It was their combined music that reminded one of the bagpipes of Scotland.

But the most popular form of diversion was provided by the fiddlers and their troupe of dancers. It was undoubtedly most colourful and kept the guests wide-eyed till dawn. Dancing in public by women was unknown in South Africa till fifteen years ago; but there have always been men who impersonated women. Such were the dancers of the troupe. With paint, expensive saris, dazzling jewellery and musical ankle-bells, they appeared more beautiful than the sex they represented.

The canvas hall was always cleared for them in one corner. Two fiddlers entered the reservation at about ten o'clock in the night. A drummer with a pair of tublas tied to his waist stood between them. Another man with two cymbals in his hands stood in front of the musicians. They were the heralds of the show and they were always enthusiastically greeted.

They were soon playing their favourite opening number. Mildly it began as all good Indian music did, but the tempo quickened to a merry pace in a short while. Suddenly, to the delight of the guests, a dancer wriggled out from behind the musicians and began whirling round and round in the clearing. Not long afterwards another followed.

When these dancers sang they modulated their voices to imitate the weaker sex. The man with the cymbals often sang with them, adjusting his voice as skilfully as the others.

At about two or three o'clock in the morning it was natural that the guests should show signs of losing interest. Then the comedians entered from behind the fiddlers. They were dressed like the clowns of a circus and their jokes and jibes were of the same variety. Their wit was sometimes praiseworthy; sometimes it was very close, but all were taken in good humour and the night passed happily.

These were the forms of diversion at Hindi weddings for over fifty years. For the benefit of the guests many reforms took place during that time. They no longer sat on dried straw but were provided with benches and chairs. Women threw off their purdah and sat with the men in the canvas enclosures. The weak hurricane lanterns were replaced by bright mantle and electric lights. Food was now being served on tables and trestles instead of on the ground. Many weddings were being held in halls. But still the Hindus persisted in holding them during the night and the types of amusements remained the same.

Then came the war and with it great changes in Hindi weddings. A rigid blackout was enforced. Consequently Hindi marriages had to be performed during the day, and very quickly it was noticed that in the light of the sun much of the glamour of the entertainers was lost.

A little before the war a new form of entertainment had sprung up. Young men with a hand-press harmonium, a pair of tublas and a group of singers began organizing concerts at weddings. This form of entertainment was common at Moslem functions, but it did not prove popular at Hindi weddings. With the blackout regulations in force and the other diversions out of favour, these concert parties saw their chance of monopolising the stage. They suddenly enlarged into orchestras, having as many as ten musical instruments. Most of them were of the popular European variety. The microphone which had come into vogue by now proved a great boon to them. To add to their attractions they obtained the services of maids to dance to the accompaniment of their music.

But what of the others? The very old group of entertainers with the *kartal*, the cym-

bals and the *kanjreee* faded away. They ceased to perform at weddings and were seen only at temples on festive occasions. As the women no more segregated themselves, they enjoyed the same amusements as the men and forgot the songs that their mothers and grandmothers had brought out from India. The others realised that if they were to survive something had to be done. Many parties dissolved and then re-formed into new combines. Some fiddlers and their troupes expanded into big theatrical companies. Their sponsors erected stages for them in the makeshift hall, but the curtains, backdrops and other properties were provided by the players. The stories that were acted on the stage were taken from mythology and ancient Indian history. With colourful costumes, glistening paint and inherent talent, the artists made the characters live.

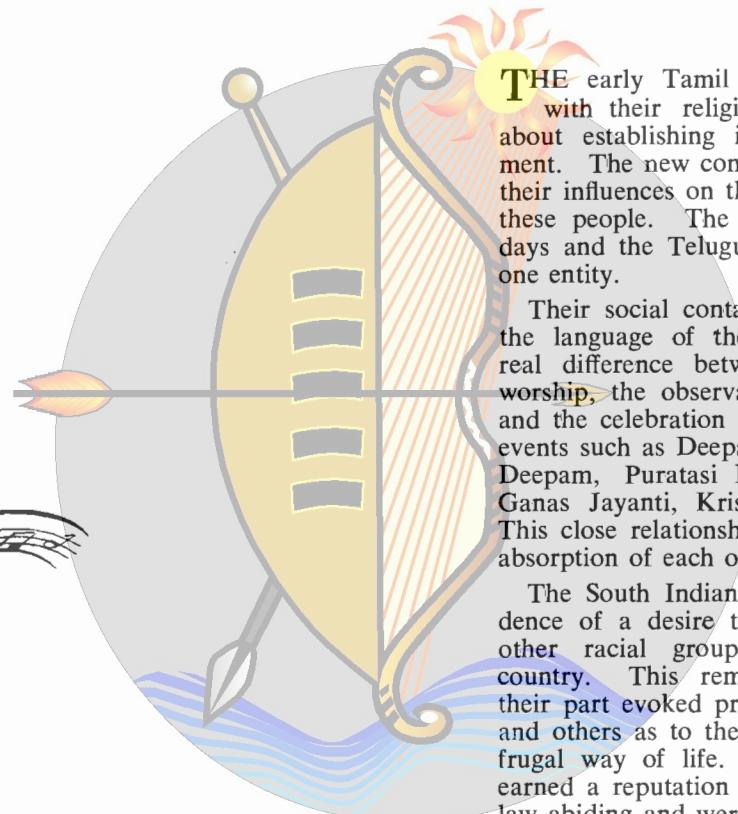
Gods, goddesses, demons, ascetics, celibates and lovers—all had their turn and each drew a hearty round of applause. After the war the Hindus continued to hold their weddings during the day, and the changes enforced during the war became permanent. Consequently the world of entertainments was saved much turmoil and readjustment.

Today as we move into the new century popular entertainment is provided by the theatrical companies, the orchestra and a combination of the *nagaara* players and female impersonators. What changes will take place in the next hundred years is hard to foretell. In many homes the mother tongue has been replaced by English. Our way of living is drifting from that of the East to that of the West. All this is bound to influence entertainments at Hindu weddings. Already Indian bands have replaced most of their musical instruments with those from Europe. The Indian fiddle is now looked upon with amusement. The *kanjreee* and the *kartal* are not seen. The *dholok* and the *tubla* are giving way to the big noisy drums found in western jazz bands. And with the introduction of these new instruments, the music has also changed. Singers at the weddings reproduce the more popular songs sung from the Indian films. With these are also sung English and American rock 'n roll numbers. They receive a bigger applause these days. Is this a pointer to the future? If it is, then Indian music, as a form of entertainment at Hindu weddings is doomed. The *nagaara* man and his troupe of female impersonators please only the older

people. They sing songs as ancient as the hills of India and if they expire the last link with the music of the early indentured labourers will be lost. But if we look at the theatrical companies and count the number of people who sit throughout their own shows we are encouraged. These companies give good en-

tertainment. If there is a complaint against them it is that many of their artists are like unpolished diamonds—lacking refinement.

In spite of these faults the companies do a great service to the world of Indian music. Let us hope that they will still be here in another one hundred years.



THE early Tamil pioneers came to Natal with their religion and immediately set about establishing it in their new environment. The new conditions and situations had their influences on the practices and beliefs of these people. The Tamilians of those early days and the Telugus regarded themselves as one entity.

Their social contacts grew, and one learnt the language of the other. There was no real difference between them in modes of worship, the observance of religious festivals and the celebration of historical and religious events such as Deepavali, Thai Pujay, Karthik Deepam, Puratasi Fasting, Sarasvati Pujay, Ganesh Jayanti, Krishna Jayanti and others. This close relationship and friendliness led to absorption of each other's social standards.

The South Indian group showed early evidence of a desire to live in friendship with other racial groups, which inhabited the country. This remarkable achievement on their part evoked praise from White colonists and others as to their dependability and their frugal way of life. And, above all, they earned a reputation for being industrious and law abiding and were acclaimed as an abiding asset to the country. It was officially recorded that they turned what was a wilderness in Natal into a "Garden Colony" and brought prosperity to the country. Their presence was desirable and their permanent settlement was encouraged.

At this stage if I record my reminiscences and early experiences of what I have seen, felt and learnt of the religious work done by our forefathers, it would be of some interest to readers.

I have often and openly said that we owe a deep debt of gratitude to our pioneers for hav-

ing brought with them their bits of religious practices, usages and customs, dance and drama from their villages and cities in South India to a strange country which was to become their own. They were mostly illiterate, but in their blood veins ran culture, spirit of religion and ethics. Their ancient civilisation, culture, the epic stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabarata, the spiritual experience of the saints and sages as contained in the Peria Puranam gave them solidity and depth. They drew abundantly from these sources and established a religious way of life akin to that in South India.

Following the injunction "Live not in any place which is without a temple", they cast their minds about and built temples in ideal localities in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere. These became centres of religious and social meetings. Trustees were appointed and committees formed to carry out the work of the temples. Puja were performed and festivities were regularly observed according to the Tamil Calendar.

Readings from the Ramayana and the Mahabarata, story telling, the Katha Kalatchapam, depicting the exploits of heroes and heroines, like Rama and Sita, Pandus and Kauravas, Draupadi, Shakuntala and Savitri, Shiva and Parvati formed a regular feature of religious and moral lessons.

They were not without entertainments. Dances and drama, including folk dancing in the streets, and called "Theru Koothoo", and puppet shows in improvised pandals were organised to meet the cultural needs of our people.

In the social field, the rigidity of the caste system which was to disintegrate later, was recognised and respected. For any breach of

Some Reminiscences of South Indian Settlers

By S. R. NAIDOO