



Brief history of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 1912- to present



Swami Shankaranandji

[List of Hindu Organisations](#)

The year 1860 marked the arrival of the first batch of Indians into South Africa under the scheme of indenture. As their numbers increased from year to year, they began erecting many temples on the estates, thereby they were able to maintain and adhere to their religious traditions, practices, customs and beliefs. It was not until 1912 that Hinduism was formally housed under one parent organisation.

Swami Shankaranandji came to South Africa in 1907 to continue with the missionary work done by Shri Bhai Parmanand. Since his arrival, he worked tirelessly for the cause of Hindu Dharma. He helped form Hindu organisations, revived Hindu festivals, resuscitated ancient Indian traditions and established vernacular schools. He inspired Hindus through his various lectures and discourses throughout the country. Under his dynamic leadership he convened the first South African Hindu Conference in May 1912. Three hundred delegates from forty-four Hindu institutions attended the conference. At this Conference the South African Hindu Maha Sabha was born with Swamiji as its first President. Swamiji's departure to India in 1913 left a vacuum resulting in a period of inactivity until the arrival of Mehta Jaimini, Swami Adhyanandji, Pandit Rishi Ram and other missionaries who rekindled the spirit of Hinduism.

The 1950's and 1960's saw the establishment, development and growth of Neo-Hindu Movements such as the Ramakrishna Centre and the Divine Life Society which advocated spirituality by means of prayer, worship, meditation and discourses.

Through its conference and related activities, the Maha Sabha has, through the years, provided a forum for all Hindus to meet and discuss their common problems and exchange their views and ideas. Today, in the forum of the Maha Sabha we find the Sanathanist, the Saivite, the Arya Samajist, the Vaishnavite, the Shakta, the Advaita, the Visisthadvaita, the Dwaita, the Mimansaka - all Hindus of similar and divergent social, cultural, educational and religious backgrounds.

While the Sabha has strived over the years to keep Hinduism alive, it needs to meet the challenges of transition. As part of a broader South African society, the Indian needs to fit into this fabric and the Hindu Sabha has therefore the continued task to convey the views, hopes and aspirations of the Hindus in South Africa to the various forums engaged in the transformation process. The Sabha must, of necessity, continue to serve the Hindu cause in this country for this group to survive.

NOTE :

The Centre has an entire collection devoted to the South African Hindu Maha Sabha and its affiliates. Here are some of the social, cultural and religious organisations on which we have information :

- Andhra Maha Sabha
- Arya Pratinidhi Sabha South Africa
- Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Centre
- Divine Life Society of South Africa
- Gujarati Maha Parishad
- Hindu Maha Sabha
- International Society for Krishna Consciousness
- Kathiawad Hindu Seva Samaj
- Merebank Saraswati Andhra Sabha
- Natal Gujarati Parishad
- Natal Tamil Vedic Society
- [National Hindu Youth Federation of South Africa](#)
- Pathmajuranni Andhra Sabha
- Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa
- Saiva Sithantha Sungum of South Africa
- Sathya Sai Baba Foundation
- Shree Emperumal Hindu Temple Society
- Shree Sanathan Dharma Sabha of South Africa
- South African Tamil Federation
- Surat Hindu Association
- Vedanta Mission
- ... and many more

Visit our Centre for information on a host of different Hindu rites and rituals as well as different fasts and festivals.

