Hinduism in South Africa: Caste, Ethnicity, and Invented Traditions, 1860-Present

Vinay Lal[1] and Goolam Vahed[2]

[1]Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles, USA
E-mail: vlal@history.ucla.ed
[2]Department of History, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
E-mail: vahedg@ukzn.ac.za

ABSTRACT This paper examines the experience of Hindus and Hinduism in South Africa over the past century and half. It shows that while the influence of caste has generally greatly diminished, Hinduism continues to flourish, and even shows signs of prosperity in public spaces. If the reification of Hinduism is taking place, the faith is also opening itself up to other transgressive possibilities. Hinduism has not been static but continues to undergo transformations of all kinds, in part due to influences from the Indian sub-continent, and one of the burdens of this paper is to suggest that no Hinduism should be regarded as "authentic". South African Hinduism displays its own characteristic features and should be examined on its own terms, in the very specific social, cultural, political, and economic conditions in which it is forged. Understanding how Hinduism is conceptualized and formulated in different settings will allow us to compare distant diasporic communities with each other, as well as with the "homeland", and also understand how these communities view each other.

INTRODUCTION

Indentured migration to Natal was part of an international circulation of labour which evolved after the British Parliament abolished slavery in 1833. This created a labour shortage on colonial plantations where considerable sums of money had been invested in the production of sugar cane. Altogether, some 1.3 million Indian contract labourers were exported to the mainly British colonies of Mauritius, Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Suriname, Fiji, Granada, and Natal from the middle decades of the nineteenth century to satisfy the demand for cheap labour. In all, 152,184 Indian indentured workers migrated to Natal between 1860 and 1911: sixty-two per cent were men, 25 per cent were women, and 13 per cent were children under thirteen. Sixty per cent were Tamil and Telegu speakers from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in South India; the rest were from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the north. Over 80 per cent were Hindu, around 15 per cent Muslim, and there were a small number of Christians. Indentured migrants comprised several hundred castes, ranging from Brahmins to Pariahs. Madras was the point of departure from the south and Calcutta (Kolkata) from the north (Bhana 1991: 20).

Indentured migrants were followed to Natal by the 'passenger' Indians, a term that referred to migrants who came at their own expense and volition. While the majority of passengers were Muslim, they included in their midst substantial numbers of Hindus from Gujarat, the Punjab, as well as some from South India. From Natal, many Indians, of both passenger and indentured origins, made their way to various other parts of South Africa, even though there were restrictions on inter-provincial movement (Bhana and Brain 1984). Hindus constituted a highly heterogeneous group in terms of class, caste, region, and linguistic background, and among them were to be found speakers of Tamil, Telegu, Gujarati, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and what one scholar has described as 'plantation Hindustani' (Tinker 1974: 208). The significant diversity of beliefs and practices among Hindus, as shall be seen, reflected differences that characterize Hinduism in the subcontinent itself. Yet, stated blandly as facts, these processes do not adequately or even remotely furnish any clues about the enormous import of the migrations that transported Hindus to South Africa and helped in the transformation of Hinduism into a "world religion". Just what is to be understood by "Hinduism" in the nineteenth century and later, and did Hindus even view themselves as such? Where does South African Hinduism belong in the larger narrative of Hinduism's dissemination in the modern period, and what might be some of the peculiarities of Hinduism's diasporic presence, especially in South Africa?

Broad as some of these questions are, any assessment of Hinduism's history in South Af-

rica can only acquire salience when viewed against the backdrop of Hinduism's transformation into a "world religion" and its transmission to outposts, near and remote, of what would become a far flung diaspora. In this respect, several considerations come to the fore. Whatever the early history, and it is not an inconsiderable one, of Hinduism's dispersal to Southeast Asia over several centuries in the first millennium of the Common Era, by the seventeenth century if not earlier, the religion had become confined to the Indian subcontinent — barring the remnants of Hinduism in Bali, among Vietnamese Cham, and in perhaps a few other pockets. There is, of course, a complex literature on what precisely is to be understood when the Indianization of the Malay Archipelago, the Mekong Delta, Java, or Angkor is being invoked, but the fact of a substantive Indic presence in this part of the world remains incontrovertible. Some older theses, which represented the kshatrityas (or members of the warrior caste) as carriers of Indian civilization to Southeast Asia, or viewed traders as the advance guard of an army of religious emissaries and cultural ambassadors, are no longer uncritically accepted. However, the artifacts of India's civilizational presence, whether manifested in enormous temple complexes at Angkor, Prambanan, Champa, and elsewhere, or in the widespread proliferation of India's mythological lore and puranic literature across Southeast Asia's immensely varied linguistic and ethnic landscapes, continue to tell a narrative of the enduring influence of Hinduism in this part of the world. The verdict of Indian nationalists, who celebrated India's "cultural empire" with some awareness of what it meant to forge an empire shorn of arms, may be questioned by some; but less suspect is the viewpoint of two distinguished German scholars who have long been scholars of Indian history. As they write, 'The transmission of Indian culture to distant parts of central Asia, China, Japan, and especially Southeast Asia is one of the greatest achievements of Indian history or even of the history of mankind. None of the other great civilisations - not even the Hellenic - had been able to achieve a similar success without military conquest' (Kulke and Rothermund 1998: 143).

By the sixteenth century, a new phase would be inaugurated in world history, one marked by Europe's dominance over Asia. This would even-tually permit the diffusion of Hinduism in the nineteenth century under vastly different conditions, as indentured Indians, taking the place of newly freed slaves, and playing an unwitting role in the global circulation of capital, were dispersed around the globe, to Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, South Africa, Malaysia, Fiji, and elsewhere. Hinduism was destined to reach those corners of the world that it had never before breached, but it did so at a time when the religion in India itself was under great stress. The British conquest of India in the 18th century was far more than a military triumph that would bleed the country and render Indians into a subject people living, for the most part, in abject poverty; it was a conquest of knowledge, one of the consequences of which was to throw the various practitioners of what would in time be called "Hinduism" into considerable disarray. To be sure, there had always been distinctions between 'high' and 'low', between classical and popular forms of religious worship, but one effect of colonial rule was to heighten these differences, create new hierarchies of texts, even "authorized" forms of texts for which natives, scarcely beholden to colonial notions of an "authentic" text, had little use.

In the late nineteenth century, as Indian nationalists pondered over the fate of their country, they sought the revival of an ancient faith and cast it in a militant mode, partly on the assumption that the religion's supposed accent on nonviolence and pacifism had rendered it spectacularly vulnerable to the Abrahamic faiths (Lal V 2008). To take one example, Bankimcandra Chatterjee, who pioneered the novel in Bengali with immense success and became a widely acclaimed essayist, was among those who argued that the Hindu's attachment to the philosophy of bhakti (devotion) had emasculated the once vigorous race of the Aryans and made them incapable of defending themselves against the more militant and single-minded adherents of Islam and Christianity. His affirmation of a Hinduism that would at once be more masculine and possessed of a semblance to the Semitic faiths won him many followers, especially among the following generation of nationalists. Two generations before him, Rammohun Roy, later to be dubbed "the father of modern India", had already paved the way for the idea that Hinduism required a wholesale reformation: if Catholicism had to be shorn of its ritualism and

superstitions, its venerations of saints, and its popery, to pave the way for Protestanism, so Hinduism had to be rid of its idolatrous and obscurantist accretions before Vedic Hinduism could once again be comprehended in its pristine form. Bankim would thus number among those who, consciously or otherwise, were persuaded by the argument that Hinduism stood in need of a thoroughgoing reformation.

While the same might perhaps have been argued apropos of religions other than Protestant Christianity, considering, for example, the "decline" of Islam from its heyday when the religion had swept the globe and Islamic empires reigned supreme, Hinduism was believed to be especially deficient. Whatever Islam's other problems from the viewpoint of Protestants, it was at least a recognized religion; but the same could not be said of Hinduism, a chaotic faith that lacked a historical founder, a central church, even a text which all its adherents could agree upon as the ultimate source of "canonical" authority. The task set before the reformers of "Hinduism" was therefore especially onerous, since they were, in a manner of speaking, charged with the creation a proper religion that, in time, would serve a proper nation-state. The very idea of "religion", as Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) has persuasively argued, was to be understood by the nineteenth century in the template of Protestant Christianity, and henceforth Hinduism's more vocal adherents would also attempt to transform it into a "world religion".

One might well ask, of course, what bearing this larger narrative has to the story of the transplantation of Hinduism in South Africa and the manner in which it would take roots in a foreign climate. We find, to take one trajectory, that the question of the "reform" of Hinduism has never been far from the mind of some of the religion's practitioners in South Africa; indeed, at the onset of the twentieth century, some South African Hindus felt emboldened to suggest that certain religious practices were inauthentic and scarcely proper for a religion aspiring to demonstrate its modernity. We may likewise ask whether, in the diasporic setting, "temple Hinduism" acquires rather more importance, partly as a form of community solidarity, than it had in India itself. Though in this paper the enduring if controversial place of Mohandas Gandhi in South Africa's history and in giving shape to notions of Indian "community" has received

little scrutiny, it is surely striking that it is Gandhi's sustained encounters with South African Christians that gave him a greater comprehension of his own faith. It is in these dialectical, dialogic, and hermeneutic spaces that the full history of Hinduism in South Africa will eventually have to be written.

This article, then, tracks some of the major developments amongst Hindus and Hinduism as it evolved in South Africa over the past century and half, in the context of changing socio-economic and political conditions. For the sake of convenience, it is divided into four chronological periods: the Colonial period (1860-1914) which we end with the departure of Gandhi from South Africa and not the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910; the period of Segregation (1914-1948); the Apartheid era (1948-1994); and the post-Apartheid period. This periodization is done mainly for ease of reference as many important developments overlapped these arbitrary boundaries.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Migration and indenture disrupted the *girmityas'* religious and cultural life. There were few shrines and sacred places, few *murtis* or images, few learned men, *pandits*, *sadhus* or *maulvis*, versed in the scriptures to impart moral and spiritual instruction. Their absence facilitated an essentially emotional, egalitarian and non-intellectual moral order among the *girmityas* (Lal B 2004: 17).

Migration overseas was not an easy decision for Hindus; often it was not a decision at all, since we can be reasonably certain that some among those who boarded the ships that took them beyond the *"kalapani"*, the forbidden waters, were entirely unaware of their destination. There was concern about being "polluted" by mixing with "outsiders", and others would have experienced a particular sense of loss in reflecting on the journey given the Hindu relationship with the sacred geography of India, and with its gods, goddesses, holy rivers, and places of pilgrimage. There was an 'emotional and ritual attachment to this landscape' (Warrier 2008: 89), a landscape literally littered with signs of the sacred and the presence of the gods. Most indentured migrants moved to Natal out of economic necessity and despite the terrible work, health, and living conditions on the plantations

of Colonial Natal, which have been well documented (see Desai and Vahed 2010), had the presence of mind and will to begin rebuilding their cultural, religious, and social lives which proved to be one of the means of survival in the new setting. Religion, we have been told by several generations of Indologists and anthropologists, was central to Hindu lives in India, and certainly the Hindus newly arrived South Africa set about establishing temples and religious rituals from the earliest days of settlement in Natal, which became important sites in diasporic cultural reproduction. Generally, in diasporic settings, the migratory experience of first generation Hindus included 'exclusiveness in their social interactions [and] communal self-renewal through participation at social events marking birth, marriage, and death' (Warrier 2008: 94).

Few Hindus would have been exposed to the reformist tendencies of movements such as the Arya Samaj that was sweeping India from the late 1870s. The Hinduism practiced in Natal was largely 'a non-scriptural devotional and ritualistic cult,' known as Sanathanism, which operated on a popular rather than philosophical level, and was closely bound to temples and festivals (Diesel and Maxwell 1993:17). Migration was mostly an individual undertaking, which made it difficult to replicate lives left behind in India. But the fact that the migrants were recruited from particular regions meant that, in the new Natal setting, individuals migrants would have come across people who broadly shared some religious beliefs and cultural practices. The fundamentals of Hinduism were transmitted to the young largely through priests, temples, and festivals, and orally through stories from Hindu texts such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavad Gita (Naidoo et al. 1989:153). The *African Chronicle* (23 April 1906) recorded that when indentured Indians arrived in Natal 'there was no-one there to teach them [because] the learned Pandits in Natal themselves have very little formal education.' The Pandits, the newspaper went on, exploited the masses by keeping them in superstition and idolatry.

In the absence of formal religious instruction the basic tenets of Hinduism were learnt in the normal course of family life through prayers at home, ceremonies, festivals, and reading and acting out religious texts such as the Ramayana. Financial constraints, difficulty in observing caste rules, and absence of a learned priestly class made it a challenge for Hindus to reconstruct their religious life in Durban. "Temples", which Hindus erected on sugar estates, became the centre of community life. Most early structures were tiny, roughly six feet squared, and were made from wattle, daub, thatch and, later, corrugated iron (Henning 1993: 150). The first temples included Umbilo (1869), Newlands (1896), Cato Manor (1882), Isipingo Rail (1870), Mount Edgecombe (1875), Somtseu Road (1880s), Umgeni Road (1885), and Sea View (1910).

These simple structures allowed Hindus to practice ritual and engage in sacrificial worship, and they became the converging point of a community's social and cultural life. The notion that the temple could serve as something of a community centre was beginning to take shape, a characteristic development not only in South Africa but across the growing Hindu diaspora. Over time, most temples had elaborate designs because visual imagery (*darshana*) is an important part of religious worship (Eck 1985), and designs reflected regional variations in India (Bhana and Vahed 2005: 54). One of the legendary early temple builders in Natal was Kistappa Reddi (1863-1941) who arrived as an indentured worker in 1898 and was assigned to Marshall Campbell's Natal Estates Sugar Mill. While still under indenture, Reddy built the Ganesha Temple in Mount Edgecombe. After completing his indenture, Reddi built many temples in Natal, including the Umbilo Siva (1930), Newlands Narainsamy Vishnu (1906), and Canelands Emperumal (1937) (Kuppusami 1993: 70-71).

Festivals fulfilled several functions for Hindus. They helped to increase religious devotion by reminding followers of particular deities; they served a social role as devotees joined together in a show of unity; and they provided an escape from the grind of plantation labour. During the formative decades, most indentured workers participated in the Muslim festival of Muharram, which was known in the colony as "Coolie Christmas" (see Vahed 2002). What should perhaps be underscored here is the fact, for fact it is, that most Hindus partook of the festivities surrounding Muharram. In Trinidad, where Muharram was known as "Hosay" or "Hosein", it came to be looked upon with immense disfavour by the colonial authorities who were first puzzled and then outraged at Hindu

participation in a Shia festival.Thirteen years before the Muharram massacre of 1884, in which police firing led to the death of twelve people and many more injured, a certain Reverend Morton attempted to explain the habitual presence of Hindus in the Muharram celebrations with the observation that they had joined in them 'simply in remembrance of their country, or they have fallen in with it that they may have one fete day in the year during their expatriation' (Singh 1988: 45-47). Colonial officials and European observers, accustomed as they were from their understanding of Europe's history as one of interminable religious conflict, and wholly persuaded by the idea that Hindus and Muslims had always existed in a relationship of unmitigated antagonism, could not countenance the thought that Hindus and Muslims might have a history of shared customs, festivals, and ways of life. Doubtless, such intermingling was easier in the earlier days of migration and settlement, and one is not surprised that gradually Hindu festivals such as Thai Pongal, Thai Pusam (Kavadi), Draupadi, Mariamman, and Diwali assumed greater importance among Hindus.

From 1890, the Shree Temple organized a festival annually in April during the Tamil New Year (Chaita Masam), the day, Hindus believe, Lord Brahma started creation. It marked both an occasion to atone for bad deeds and pray for a profitable new year. One of the most popular festivals was the Mariamman "Porridge" festival, associated with the popular Goddess Mariamman who, in South India, is believed to both cause and cure infectious diseases like smallpox and measles. Devotees offer "cooling" foods such as milk and coconut to the goddess to "cool" her anger. In some places, a goat is sacrificed and its blood spilt to represent life and fertility (Diesel and Maxwell 1993: 49). This festival was celebrated widely in Isipingo on the south coast of Natal on Good Friday from around the turn of the twentieth century and drew crowds in excess of 10,000 (*African Chronicle* 16 September 1916). Reformist-minded Hindus condemned the festival. For example, C.V. Pillay, editor of *The Vineka Bhanoo*, wrote that 'ignorant people who did not understand the Indian religion spent their money in useless pursuits.' The proprietor of the temple sued him for defamation. The magistrate gave judgment in favor of the plaintiff on the

grounds that people were going there on their own free will but he did not award monetary damages (Diesel and Maxwell 1993: 51).

The Draupadi (fire walking) festival was celebrated annually in March in honour of the Goddess Draupadi who is regarded by Hindus as 'the model of duty, love and devotion, who bore various trials with great fortitude' (Diesel and Maxwell 1993: 51). Kavadi was celebrated in February and May of each year in honour of the god Muruga who, devotees believe, has the power to cure people of their illness and get rid of misfortune. Kavadi remains a mass based festival in Tamilnadu and Kerala, as well as in the Tamil diaspora in Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius. The mortification of the body is part of kavadi. The central component involved devotees ceremonially carrying a kavadi or 'burden' (such as a pot of milk carried on a decorated semi-circular canopy supported by a wooden rod carried on the shoulder) and walking around the temple on a set route and making an offering at the temple (Ganesh 2010: 35). Mortification of the body included devotees sticking needles and pins in their tongues and cheeks, or drawing chariots with strings knotted into large hooks protruding from the fleshy parts of the backs. Reformist minded Hindus, not unlike their counterparts in India, regarded these festivals as a distortion of 'authentic' Hinduism. The newspaper *Dharma Vir* (25 January 1925), a voice of reformist Hinduism, complained that these 'practices and usages have entered into our religion.... [They] may have suited our forefathers with their ample leisure in our Homeland ... [but] are somewhat wearisome in these modern days and must give way to simpler modes'. An editorial in the *Indian Opinion* opined in 1936 that festivals had become 'haunts for gamblers and other money makers, who seem more to be in the forefront than the religious ceremony itself' (*Indian Opinion* 10 April 1936). These grumblings of discontent are not without interest: the objection appears to be not merely that some of the festivals could not be reconciled with 'authentic' or 'high' Hinduism, but also that they did not quite comport with the idea of religion under modernity, of a religion that, Protestant-like, ought to be stripped bare of unnecessary accoutrements.

Mariamman and Draupadi are South Indian goddesses who were widely worshipped in areas of South Africa where the majority of mi-

grants were from South India. Most lower-caste Tamil-speaking Hindus in South India worship these two goddesses who play an important role in their daily lives. Worshippers walking on burning coals, animal sacrifices, and religious figures going into trance to heal the sick are all features of Hinduism among the working classes in Madras and vicinity (see Hiltebal 1988). In Natal, however, goddess worshippers (Sakti worshippers) blended various traditions so that subsidiary-deities of Mariammen, such as Munisvaran and Koterie, are often placed outside temples rather that Mariamman herself (Ganesh 2010: 33).

When a full history of Hinduism in South Africa is written, the name of Swami Shankeranand, who spent almost four years in Natal between 1908 and 1912, will loom large given his influence over a wide canvas of Hindu life in South Africa. The building of temples and establishment of festivals were due in large measure to the memories of first generation migrants. Subsequent generations built on this by establishing institutional structures that allowed for the practice and replication of cultural and religious life. John Kelly and Martha Kaplan, in their 2001 study, *Represented Communities*, suggest that communities and nations are not just 'imagined', as Benedict Anderson (1983) argued when he wrote that 'print capitalism' fostered nations as imagined communities in a modular form that became the culture of modernity, but that at critical moments individual leaders make significant interventions that have long term consequences. Swami Shankeranand was one such individual. He played a pivotal role in establishing institutional Hinduism, with the most significant organisation being the South African Hindu Maha Sabha in 1912, and in stressing the importance of education. His role in raising a Hindu, as opposed to Indian, consciousness is better appreciated through an understanding of his efforts in making Diwali the premier Hindu festival in Natal. Among Fiji Indians, the anthropologist John Kelly has written, the two festivals of which the colonial state took at all any cognizance were Holi and Muharram; Diwali was not the 'focus of the Fiji Hindu ritual calendar' (Kelly 1988: 44). Much the same can be said about Diwali in South Africa: if in Fiji 'Holi and its transcendence of status and caste is especially popular among the low caste and low class, Diwali among the urban middle class and rich' (Kelly 1988: 45), this consideration held sway in South Africa as well. In India and in diasporic locations, Holi has long been associated with the god Krishna, whose sexual morality is questionable; in arguing for the primacy of Diwali, which celebrates the return of Rama to Ayodhya, Swami Shankeranand was enacting that same Protestant impulse to render Hinduism into a respectable religion.

The Swami, however, also created dissension among Indians by taking issue with the political agenda of Mohandas K. Gandhi, who lived in South Africa between 1893 and 1914, and asking Hindus to dissociate from Indian Muslims and Christians. The presence of Gandhi was important in several respects. Gandhi was brought to South Africa by a Muslim trader Dada Abdoolla, and formed the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 to challenge the racial restrictions being implemented to curtail Indian trade, finance, residence, and immigration (see Swan 1985). Gandhi played a crucial role in transcending religious differences and ensuring that religion did not divide Indians. He demanded of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims, of all classes and castes, to trust each other and work together against white minority rule. This would not have been possible had migrants remained in India (see Bhana and Vahed 2005).

The decades following the departure of Gandhi from South Africa were witness to the rapid urbanisation of Indians, extensive urban poverty, formation of education and social welfare institutions, and increasing state hostility. These changes in work patterns and geographic location impacted on religious and cultural practices. Most Indians in Natal were Hindu. According to the 1936 population census, 81 percent of Natal's Indians were Hindu. African labour rendered Indians superfluous in farming, mining, and the public sector and their numbers dropped dramatically on Natal's mines, railways, in general farming, and on sugar estates. Most Indians moved to cities. The number of Indians in Durban, for example, increased from 17,015 in 1911 to 123,165 in 1949. As a percentage of Durban's population, Indians increased from 23 to 33 per cent (Housing Survey 1952: 35). Unemployment and low pay resulted in wide-scale poverty among Indians. A study by the University of Natal in 1943/44 reported that 70.6 percent of Indians were living below

the poverty datum line and that 40 percent were destitute (*Daily News* 8 June 1944).

The white minority government's main focus during these years was on repatriating Indians. A round-table conference between the South African, Indian and Imperial governments in 1927 introduced a system of voluntary repatriation and an "Agent" was appointed by the Indian government to oversee the upliftment of Indians who remained in South Africa (Pachai 1971: 108). The policy failed because few Indians repatriated while the government, for its part, did little to improve the condition of Indians. For the most part, Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony. Recalling life in Durban in the 1930s and 1940s, a correspondent to a newspaper, Harry Sewall, recalled that 'what was remarkable was the camaraderie that existed between Muslims and Hindus, who lived cheek-by-jowl with one another. I was not aware of any differences between us. In my family, we referred to our elderly Muslim neighbours as *"mausi"* (aunt) and *"mausa"* (uncle")' (*Sunday Times Extra* 12 December 1999). While Indians largely overlooked religious distinctions, visits by overseas missionaries, both Hindu and Muslim, usually created religious discord.

Part of the reason for religion not dividing Indians was that they felt sandwiched between a white governing minority and the African masses. From the 1930s the focus of the state was on repatriating Indians and segregating those who remained. The land struggle was protracted and culminated in a passive resistance campaign by Indians between 1946 and 1948 (Bugwandeen 1991). At the same time, the growing tension between Indians and Africans during the 1940s culminated in three days of riots between Africans and Indians in January 1949 which resulted in 142 deaths and 1087 injuries. This was an indication of the depth of antagonism that Africans felt against Indians in a climate where they competed for scarce economic resources (Edwards and Nuttall 1990). This brought Indian, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims together in the public sphere and fostered the racial identity, "Indianness", which would be cemented after the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948 and began to implement its policy of apartheid. One very important trend among Hindus was the appearance of the Bethesda Temple in the 1930s, a form of Pentecostal Christianity that would have a powerful impact on Hindus. This is discussed in detail below.

INSTITUTIONS AND EXEMPLARS: THE APARTHEID PERIOD, 1948-1994

The coming to power of the National Party (NP) government in 1948 had paradoxical consequences for Indians. Social, political and economic segregation was intensified but Indians were finally recognised as permanent citizens. The expansion of educational opportunities and economic mobility impacted on the form and practice of Hinduism. Partly because of state policy and in part because of settlement patterns in the post-indenture period, there was 91 percent residential segregation between Indians and whites in Durban in 1951 (Davies 1963: 37). Segregation was consolidated after 1948 through the Group Areas Act which relocated thousands of Indians, mainly to two large townships, Chatsworth in the south and Phoenix in the north, while areas like Reservoir Hills, La Mercy and Westville were made available for middle class housing in KwaZulu Natal. In the Transvaal, the township of Lenasia became "home" for Indians. Apartheid, abhorrent as the policy was, meant that Indians lived in racially segregated residential areas which made it easier for them to establish and practice their religion and culture.

Education played a crucial transformative role. Literacy levels were very low in 1950. After the control of Indian education shifted to a Department of Indian Affairs in 1965, free and compulsory education was available from 1970. The rapid increase in the building of secular schools resulted in adequate space for all children by 1983. The number of candidates who wrote the final year examination at secondary school level increased from 2,623 in 1968 to 10,449 in 1984 (Naidoo 1989: 116). This was coupled with the opening of the University of Durban-Westville (1963) and expansion of the M L Sultan Technical College. The advantage taken by Indians of these opportunities is reflected in the fact that English became the language of communication among Indians; the number who regarded English as their home language increased from six per cent in 1951 to ninety-three per cent in 1996.

Mass education was critical in reshaping conceptions of self and religion, which contin-

ued to be an important part of Indian lives under apartheid. Religious practices were not static but transformed to meet new needs and grow. Important trends during this period included the continued growth of institutional religion among Hindus, the expansion of Hindu reformist activities, and the attraction of Pentecostal Christianity. One important development was what has come to be called a process of "Sanskritisation", that is, the giving up of oral-based religious practices in preference for worship forms that include the use of the Sanskrit language and its texts in worship. Reformist tendencies in India, which resulted from the ongoing encounter with the voices of colonialism challenging Indian conceptions of religion, and which proposed new forms of Hinduism, made their way to South Africa where they influenced local practices. For some Hindus, this meant conversion to Christianity, but others embraced new streams of Hinduism. Three major phases of Indian Hinduism influenced Hindus in South Africa. The first was the influence of the AryaSamaj from the turn of the 20th century; a second influence was the neo-vedantic movements from the 1940s (Ramakrishna Centre and Divine Life society); while the third important influence was the charismatic guru based sects and movements from the 1970s onwards, such as Sai Baba and Hare Krishna (Ganesh 2010: 35).

The majority of Hindus, however, continued to practice a ritualistic form of Hinduism, which included major festivals such as the Draupadi-firewalking festival, Mariammen "Porridge" prayer, the Gengaiamman festival, and Kavadi. Neither urbanisation nor Group Areas failed to dampen enthusiasm for these festivals. According to Diesel, these festivals played an important role in the lives of worshippers:

Participation can bring considerable empowerment, particularly to the South African Hindu community, which during the apartheid era was politically, socially, and religiously marginalised and discriminated against. Many of the descendents of the south Indian indentured labourers have tended to remain relatively economically depressed, suffering more than usual stress, frustration and anxiety. This has led to considerable physical and psychological illness. Many people cannot afford doctors' fees, while others despair of the ability of conventional Western medicine to provide cures for their ail-

ments. In this context, the entire worshipping community can be seen as experiencing a strong sense of identity and solidarity from their participation in the richly symbolic rituals, with their powerful mythology. To come through the fire unscathed, viewed as affirmation of one's purity and devotion to the Goddess, is in itself empowering, and claimed by many to bring healing. Loring Danforth maintains that 'through firewalking [worshippers] are empowered; their lives are transformed. They gain an enhanced sense of self-confidence and self-esteem, and they are able to function more effectively in the world in which they live (Diesel 2003: 44).

While ritualistic tradition continued to appeal to large numbers of Hindus, reformist Hindu movements made their mark from during the middle decades of the twentieth century. They included the Ramakrishna Centre, Krishna Consciousness Movement, Divine Life Society, and the SaivaSithanthaSungum. In general, these movements were characterised by regular communal religious services (satsang); avoidance of trance festivals such as firewalking and Kavadi; a focus on inner spirituality through practices such as yoga and meditation; and the reading and study of religious scriptures (Diesel and Maxwell 1993: 63). The Arya Samaj movement, as already pointed out, had its roots in the visit of missionaries Professor Parmanand and Swami Shakeranand in the early twentieth-century. It failed to make a significant impact at the time but established a foothold through the efforts of Bhavani Dayal Sanyasi (1892-1950), who was born in Johannesburg yet became a sanyasi in India. On the occasion of the Birth Centenary Celebration (Shivaratri day 22 February 1925) of Swami Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha was established in Natal. The movement's headquarters in Carlisle Street, Durban, was built in 1936, while the grand Aryan Temple on the site, the Veda Mandir, was built here in 1975.

The Arya Samaj and their missionaries, though they failed to attract a large following, paved the way for other Neo-Vedanta reformist movements. Neo-Vedanta revolves around local ashrams. Its basic message is that God is real and can be realised in the depths of one's being by following one of a number of paths. The Ramakrishna Centre, started by M.D. Naidoo (1925-1965), originated in 1942 when

a group of young men led by Naidoo, who was then a stores clerk, formed a literary group to study Hindu religion, philosophy and culture. His correspondence with the then President of the world-wide Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Virajananda, fanned his devotion. Books on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and the Cultural Heritage of India as well as the Mission's journals (*Prabuddha Bharata* and *Vedanta Kesari*) were studied. Naidoo went to India to be initiated into the holy order of a Swami. He stayed at the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata, India. In March 1949 he was initiated into spiritual life by Swami Virajananda. He subsequently spent about five years in a cave in the Himalayas. Under Swami Purushottamananda, he took his final monastic vows (*sanyasa*). Swami Nischalananda returned to South Africa in 1953. In 1959 Nischalananda set up the Ashram, printing press and Ramakrishna Clinic on a fourteen-acre property in Glen Anil, Durban, where the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa is based. Ashrams were subsequently established in Asherville, Chatsworth, Northdale, Ladysmith, and Newcastle. Journalist G.R. Naidoo recorded the following after visiting the Centre in 1961:

I met Swami Nichalananda (he is referred to as "Swamijee" by all his followers) at the plush £12,000 headquarters of the movement a few miles out of town. The headquarters, a sprawling two-storeyed building set amidst fourteen acres of gloriously wooded land, was previously the retreat of a Frenchman and was known as the "Chateau de Montreal". The Swami is a small wiry man with flowing curly hair, a bushy black beard interspersed with a few white hairs which stand out in sharp relief, piercing brown eyes and two large hands with tapered fingers of an artist. He has a flamboyant personality and a keen analytical mind. He is courteous, easy of manner, well read and able to discuss intimately a vast repertoire of subjects. The Swami's religious beliefs and the methods employed for disseminating his beliefs are as modern as the surroundings in which he lives. He makes good use of modern tape recorders, film projectors and colour slides during his lectures and prayer sessions. Special 78 r.p.m. records with devotional songs are available to members and well-wishers of the centre. "Religion", says

the Swami, "must not be treated only as an awe-inspiring subject, but that both the material and spiritual benefits should be brought home – to the younger set in particular. Our movement offers a variety of activities from the spiritual to the sporting side." The Swami impressed upon me that his movement was completely non-racial. "Black, white or blue receive the same treatment at our centre. Because a person is white he gets no special treatment," he said, while a white follower from Johannesburg brought a tray of tea and toasted cheese sandwiches into the carpeted lounge where we sat, talking. The lounge is as tastefully furnished as the other rooms of the headquarters. The shrine is the one place in the centre where one has to take off one's shoes before entering. After a short but impressive service, the followers walked to the Swami, who stood below the images and blessed each of his flock. I found a strange assortment of people – academic men, professional men, simple labourers, students, businessmen, and housewives.... One man fell in a dead faint after the Swami had touched him, and had to be carried away from the grotto. The party then wended its way back to the shrine after an hour to offer more prayers and to finish off the morning's service. It was at the culmination of the service that I witnessed moving scenes. Several men and women in the shrine cried while they were again blessed by the Swami and more fainted. Women knelt at the feet of the swami and some laid themselves prostrate on his feet (Drum February 1961).

The Divine Life Society bases its teaching on Swami Sivananda (1887-1963) who opened an ashram in Rishikesh in northern India in 1936. An ashram was started in Reservoir Hills by V. Srinivasan (Swami Sahajananda) in 1949. Swami Sahajananda (1925–2007) was born in the small midlands town of Estcourt in KwaZulu and took up teaching. He was influenced by Swami Sivananda's book *Practice of Karma Yoga* and gave up teaching in 1948 to meet Sivananda in India. He returned the following year and took up a teaching post at the FOSA (Friends of Sick Association) TB Settlement in Durban. He started a Divine Life branch in October 1949 upon the request of Swami Sivananda. Swami Sahajananda published and disseminated Sivananda's writings and conducted prayer services. In 1956 Sahajananda visited Sivananda who initiated him into the Holy Or-

der of Sannyas. In 2008, in recognition of Swami Sahajananda's work for the underprivileged, the University of KwaZulu Natal posthumously conferred the degree of Doctor of Theology on him. Aside from the Divine Life Society's headquarters in Reservoir Hills, he also opened the Sivananda International Cultural Centre (SICC), Sivananda Nagar, La Mercy, which is one of the largest Hindu spiritual centres in the southern hemisphere (http://www.sivananda. dls.org.za). Other Vedanta organisations include the Chinmaya Mission in Chatsworth; the Vedanta Mission for Eternal Religion (M.E.R) in Isipingo Hills; and the Gita Mandir in Pietermaritzburg.

Among South Indians, the Saiva Sithantha Sungum is an important reformist organisation formed in 1937 by Guru SubramaniyaSwamikal (1910-1953). The movement established the Siva Kumara Prathanay – Jothi Linga Mandabam in Derby Street, Durban, and now has branches countrywide, with the Pietermaritzburg centre, opened in Northdale in 1980, one of the largest in the South Africa. Guru Swamikal was not a trained religious scholar but had studied classical Tamil scriptures of Saivism, and was responding to the challenges of both the Arya and the Bethesda Movement (Pentecostal Christianity) among Indians. It is said that local Hindus approached him to help counter the Bethesda movement. He started his religious revival work by giving outdoor lectures at the Victoria Street Market, at bus ranks in the city, and at the Magazine Barracks which housed the city's working class municipal workers. His lectures included the singing of the divine hymns. The Sungum adopted a Neo-Vedantic position which stresses the universality of all religions and inner spirituality through meditation. They de-emphasised traditional ritualistic Tamil/Dravidian festivals such as firewalking and Kavadi, but observed festivals such as Maha-Shivatri and Kartigai Deepam, and condemned image worship. The Swami wrote a prayer book and introduced a rigid prayer at 9:00 am every Sunday morning (see http://saiva-sithantha-sungum.org/home.html). Another Tamil organisation, The South African Tamil Federation, was formed in 1968, with three regional affiliates in KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng, and the Cape. Dravidians for Peace and Justice is a human rights organisation formed in East London in 1999.

The 1970s saw the arrival of Hindu forms that centered aroundcharismatic gurus and sects. This, as Ganesh points out, resulted in a 'further loosening of ritual and dogma, an opening up to various religions and nationalities, an emphasis on individual guru and congregational devotion, minimal ritual and life style inspired by Hinduism but coexisting with and indeed embracing modernity and technology (Ganesh 2010: 36). Two prominent expressions of Hinduism in South Africa revolved around the cult of SatyaSai Baba and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).As an aside, it should be noted that whatever ISKCON's associations with Hinduism in the public imagination, many of its own adherents describe themselves, not altogether convincingly, as followers of Krishna rather than of Hinduism. ISKCON was founded in the United States in 1966 by the Bengali Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who places himself in the direct lineage of Chaitanya Mahaprahu, a sixteenth century social reformer and exponent of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Its public face in South Africa is the spectacular Shri-ShriRadha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding in Chatsworth which was opened in 1985. ISKCON members tend to be more middle class and affluent than followers of other streams of Hinduism. The religion is commonly known as Hare Krishna from therefrain that appears in their principal mantra: '*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare'*. Krishna means '*The All-Attractive;'* Hare, adherents of the religion argue, addresses the energy of God, and Rama means '*The Greatest Pleasure.'* While Hare Krishna beliefs are similar to conventional Hinduism in many respects, differences include the emphasis on congregational singing of God's names as a means to achieve Krishna consciousness, the worship of Krishna as the Supreme God, and the need for a spiritual master. Public festivals form an important part of the Hare Krishna Temple. The largest and most spectacular of these is the Ratha Yatra five-day Festival of Chariots in honour of Lord Jagannath (Vishnu), which is held over Easter at the beachfront in Durban, KwaZulu Natal (see http://iskcondurban.net/about-us/temple-history).

In the late 1960s, Sai Baba began to emerge as a growing influence among Hindus. The founder's movement was Sathya Sai Baba

(1926-2011) of Puttaparthi in South India. The many Sai Baba groups in South Africa are affiliated to the Gauteng based Central Council of South Africa. Sai Baba emphasised God-realisation through group devotional singing (bhajans), prayer, spiritual meditation, service to the community (Seva), and participation in 'Education in Human Values' sessions. Sai Baba's teachings focus on the spiritual benefit of *darshan,* a time when Sai Baba interacts with people, accepts letters, distributes sacred ash, or interviews individuals. The figure of Sai Baba – his divinity and miracles – is important to believers. The movement has strong roots in Lenasia, where members formed the Lenasia Sai Centre. Branch centres were subsequently opened in Laudium and Benoni and eventually countrywide. Devotees of Sai Baba gather annually in April to remember and pray for the mystic and philanthropist, and celebrate his life and accomplishments (see http://www.srisathya sai.org.za).

Despite these reformist tendencies, the Hindu composition of the Indian population of South Africa has declined dramatically in the last half century, as reflected in the census figures (Table 1). This decline is due to various factors, in particular to the rapid "Christianisation" of the Indian population over this period.

The spread of Christianity among former Hindus, due mainly to the inroads made by Pentecostal churches, has been a worrying tendency among Hindu leaders. In the nineteenth-century, traditional churches, such as the Roman Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans and Lutherans, had proselytised vigorously among Indians but with limited success. Two individuals instrumental in spreading Pentecostal Christianity among Indians were Ebenezer Theophilius, an Indian Methodist and businessman, and J.A. Rowlands, a Quaker from England, and more especially his son John Francis Rowlands. It was J.F. Rowlands who founded the Bethesda Church which is the largest single church among Indi-

ans in South Africa. Another prominent church was that of Stephen Govender whose Peniel International Assembly started an independent church in Gale Street, Durban. When the church in Gale Street was forced to shut down by Group Areas, Govender relocated to Merebank. The rise of Pentecostalism among Indians was connected initially to the movement from rural to urban areas among Indians in the 1920s and 1930s, and subsequently to the dislocation caused by the Group Areas Act from the 1960s. Rowlandsshrewdly made his version of Christianity 'Indian' by calling his church a 'temple', regularly showing photographs of his tours of India at the church, and making healing and exorcism practices, which were important to the South Indian Hindu tradition, a part of the new Christianity (see Oosthuizen 1975).

In his presentation to the Trust and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on behalf of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha on 18 November 1999, Ashwin Trikamjee, the Sabha's president, noted the negative consequences of the Group Areas Act:

The most serious and painful of legislation was the Group Areas Act passed in 1950. Settled communities who had built little schools and temples were rudely uprooted by the ruling class and relocated to some distant areas or new areas with very little facilities. Cato Manor in Durban was one of the many affected areas where Indians settled, built homes, started their own market gardening and worked as unskilled labourers. When this area was declared a white area, the Indian Community received the biggest blow to its survival. To name one of many, the Arian Benevolent Home, which started as a home for the homeless in 1921, was badly affected in the grand settlement plan. It took about 15 years to find an alternative for re-settlement at a much higher cost. In the process, the old, the disabled and the affected children had to endure immeasurable hardships. In all such areas, including Johannesburg, where the Group

Table 1: Indian population in South Africa in the last half century

	1950	*1960*	*1970*	*1980*	*2001*
Hindus	246,257	327,908	430,290	512,304	527,353
Muslims	78,905	98,946	126,000	154,348	274,932
Christians	22,754	35,850	53,550	102,625	269,128
	6.2%			12.5%	24.12%
Other / None		19,084	15,296	20,160	52,544
Total	367,000	478,000	630,000	821,000	1115,467

Areas applied, temples, schools and cultural centres had to be left behind. Some such temples were never built ... It took the Hindu community a long time to rebuild their places of worship. Priority had to be given to providing much needed homes which were relatively small, giving birth to the dismantling of the joint family system and the disruption of the traditional family life. To compound the problem, religious sites in the new areas were generally purchased by the Christian churches because they had the necessary funds. This led to many conversions to other faiths, especially Christianity.

An analysis of the reasons for the spread of Pentecostal Christianity falls outside the scope of this chapter. One might argue that nineteenth-century Protestantism, though better positioned to win converts among a people who might have felt especially vulnerable in an alien land, alienated Hindus with its stern austerity; but Pentecostalism, which emphasizes baptism in the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by speaking in tongues, exorcism, divine healing, and the power of the miraculous, has been attractive to Hindus whose own forms of popular religiosity have dwelled on vibrant, even spectacular, displays of religious experience. We should certainly treat with caution the notion that Pentecostal Christianity has grown because of the intellectual poverty of Hindus, which implies that the people who convert do not know what is good for them, as is often suggested by local Hindu leaders. We have to assume that people choose something because they believe that it is better for them or because it helps them to confront certain immediate difficulties in their lives. According to Pillay:

Crisis, decision, commitment, and dedication were fundamental themes in the life and worship of the Pentecostal churches. Everyone in each congregation was called to evangelize, and clergy and laity were not readily distinguished. During the times of socio-economic crisis and cultural upheaval that was largely the result of apartheid legislation, churches like Bethesda gave succour to people caught between the old, traditional Indian life and culture, rapidly passing away, and new, Western secular life. They gave to their members a feeling of continuity with an old culture and helped to foster their socio-psychological well-being. They provided a level of social cohesion sufficient to cope in difficult circumstances and to develop a relatively well large middle class de-

spite their disenfranchisement. Pentecostal churches inadvertently contributed to social stability by creating surrogate communities for their members (Pillay 1997: 294).

Generally, it seems that the appeal of Pentecostalism lies in the emphasis on group participation and the loose structure of worship services. It also helped that most church ministers were charismatic and that the liturgy was narrative with an emphasis on immediate and direct experience of God. While the founders of the early churches were whites, Pentecostal expansion from the 1960s was due almost entirely to Indian laypeople. The emotional prayer, joyful singing, clapping, raising hands and dancing in the presence of God, which are features of Pentecostal liturgical accoutrements, have an appeal for many ordinary people. This was, as we have already suggested, in stark contrast to the rationalistic, written and set liturgies presided over by a clergyman that was a feature of most forms of traditional Christianity. In townships like Chatsworth and Phoenix, where there were no established mosques and temples when Indians first relocated, Pentecostal denominations were quick to establish themselves. The Pentecostal Repentant Church in Chatsworth and the Bible Deliverance Fellowship in Phoenix are examples of churches that filled the void in townships. There are over fifty established and independent Pentecostal churches operating among Indians in the Durban – Pietermaritzburg regions alone.

THE POST-APARTHEID PERIOD

The end of apartheid redefined the world of Hindus who were part of an Indian minority that had a marginal role in determining the country's trajectory, even though many individual Indians figured, and continue to figure, in the post-apartheid African National Congress (ANC) led government. This was different to places like Trinidad, Mauritius, and Fiji where they played a significant role because of sheer demographics. Indians are dealing with this in different ways. While Indian Muslims have come to reconstitute their identities as part of global ummah and many Christians crossed racial barriers to be part of non-racial Pentecostal churches, Hindus were faced with a larger challenge and they have responded in various ways. The uncertainties created by the demise of apart-

heid in the context of globalization were compounded by globalization processes that challenged conceptions of national identity based on citizenship in a single nation state. This period also witnessed the rise of India as an emerging economic power, which has resulted in greater identification with the country of origin. Pilgrimages to India have become common as has the desire to obtain PIO (Person of Indian Origin) cards, but few have taken the plunge to return permanently to India.

Another result of the opening up of national boundaries in the post-apartheid period has been the influx of migrants from the Indian sub-continent. Included in this flow of migrants are the Kurukkal (traditional Brahmin priests) who arrived mainly from Sri Lanka. This is an indication of the continued value of customary rituals among local devotees. Locals, however, found that some Kurukkal families were monopolizing the priesthood and that some were using the position for personal financial gain. The move back to local priests can also be seen as a move to reclaim the local from the global (canonical), and not rely on mantras by learned specialists. At some temples this has been implemented but at other temples Kurukkal continue to officiate as priests (Ganesh 2010: 37).

Language and region have become further sources of identity. Tamil Hindus, Hindi-speaking Hindus, and Gujarati-speaking Hindus have resorted to language/region as the basis for ethno-religious identity. Region/language now function as caste categories. This is not to suggest that there are open tensions among Hindus. The South African Hindu Maha Sabha, formed in 1912, continues to provide a forum for Hindus to discuss common problems and share ideas. The MahaSabhahas aimed at becoming something of an umbrella organization, including in its fold the Sanathanist, the Saivite, the Arya Samajist, the Vaishnavite, the Shakta, the Advaita, the Visisthadvaita, the Dwaita, and the Mimansaka tendencies within Hinduism. It purports to shelter a variety of Hinduisms, with certain issues helping to create common cause and bridge differences. One example of an issue that has brought Hindus together is the clamour for Diwali to be made a national holiday in South Africa. The *Sunday Tribune Herald*, 1 July 2012, carried the story on its front page with the headline 'Anger over repeated Diwali exclusion'. In general, as was the case

in the former Soviet Union after the fall of communism, and as has been noted apropos of other societies where a politically repressive regime was toppled, the post-apartheid period has been witness to increased religiosity among many South Africans, with mosque, church, and temple worship increasing. All streams of Hinduism —Sanatanism, Arya Samaj, neo Vedanta and guru based sects — have witnessed a revival. One manifestation is the renewed emphasis on festivals. This seems contradictory because the increased participation by some Hindus in large scale public festivals such as Kavadi, Mariamman, and Thaippoossam goes against the reformist agenda of the Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Divine Life Society, and others who, until recent decades, sought to appeal to the educated and sophisticated Hindus by "modernizing" Hinduism.

CONCLUSION

This paper points to several important themes in the story of Hinduism in South Africa. The first is that Hinduism has not been static. It has continued to undergo transformations of all kinds, due in part to the impact of influences from the Indian sub-continent. While the Hinduism practiced in South Africa partakes of some of the tendencies encountered in India and in the wider Indian diaspora, South African Hinduism has displayed its own characteristic features. A more exhaustive study of the contours of Hinduism in South Africa, though not possible within the confines of this paper, would doubtless yield other insights. We have not, for example, considered the relationship of Hinduism to caste, a contentious subject on which a variety of sentiments continue to be entertained, with some even suggesting that when caste disappears, so too will Hinduism. Gandhi's principal intellectual adversary in India, the Dalit leader B. R. Ambedkar, was equally certain that caste discrimination was embedded in Hinduism, a religion that he construed as execrable to the core and incapable of being reformed. Now in South Africa, and elsewhere in diasporic settings such as Trinidad and Fiji, the influence of caste is generally held to have been greatly diminished. Social life in these settings is not organised by caste. And yet Hinduism flourished, even showing signs of prosperity in public spaces when the Indian community was weighed down

by political repression or had to contend, as in Trinidad, with African-Creole cultural hegemony. We could, as well, have raised another set of considerations: to what extent if at all have Hindus in South Africa brought their faith into conversation with African religions? In Trinidad, since the 1970s, some Hindus have been participating in the Orisha cult, or the worship of the Yoruba god. Is something similar at all happening in South Africa? If the reification of Hinduism is taking place, as seems likely, one has to acknowledge also that the faith is opening itself up to other transgressive possibilities. Wherever we appear to find 'fundamentalism', we should also seek out hybrid forms of religion, if not 'syncreticism'.

One of the burdens of this paper has been to suggest that no Hinduism should be regarded as "authentic". In the various diasporic settings, such as South Africa, Hinduism should be examined on its own terms, in the very specific social, cultural, political, and economic conditions in which it is forged. Understanding how Hinduism is conceptualized and formulated in different settings will allow us to compare, as we have endeavored to do briefly on more than one occasion, distant diasporic communities with each other, as well as with the "homeland", and also understand how these communities view each other. This has significant effects for issues of identity construction in the Hindu diaspora. While pointing to the various tendencies among Hindus and constant transformation, we should also emphasise that by and large Hindus are integrated into the broader South African society.

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