CASTE, CLASS AND COMMUNITY
THE ROLE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HINDU MAHA SABHA IN (RE) MAKING HINDUISM IN SOUTH AFRICA
1912-1960.

By

Karthigasen Gopalan

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Abbreviations

ABH	Aryan Benevolent Home
APS	Arya Pratinidhi Sabha
AYS	Arya Yuvuk Sabha
CBSIA	Colonial Born and Settlers India Association
GHMM	Gujarati Hindu Mahila Mandal
HTI	Hindu Tamil Institute
HYMS	Hindu Young Men's Society
KHSS	Kathiawad Hindu Seva Samaj
Maha Sabha	South African Hindu Maha Sabha
NED	Natal Education Department
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NIO	Natal Indian Organisation
NITS	Natal Indian Teachers Society
NTVS	Natal Tamil Vedic Society
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAHMS	South African Hindu Maha Sabha
SAHSS	South African Hindi Sahitya Sammalan
SSDS	Shri Sanathan Dharma Sabha
THSS	Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
YMVS	Young Men's Vedic Society

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INTRODUCTION

The South African Hindu Maha Sabha (henceforth Maha Sabha, which translates into "Great Society") was formed in 1912 at the inaugural national conference of South African Hindus that was held in Durban under the presidency of Swami Shankaranand, a visiting *Vedic* missionary from Punjab who had been brought to South Africa by local Hindus in 1908 to help propagate Hinduism among the masses. Concerned with the "upliftment of Hinduism" in South Africa, the five central issues addressed at this conference were: the formation of a national body for Hindus; promotion of Hindu education; popularisation of Hindu festivals; establishment of more Hindu cultural and religious institutions; and increasing the participation of women in social and religious activities.[1] The proceedings of this conference and outcomes will be discussed in greater details in subsequent chapters. For now it suffices to say that the most important outcome was the establishment of the Maha Sabha, which, according to one study, was founded "with the primary object of promoting the religious, educational, social and economic welfare and advancement of the Hindu community."[2] This study examines the formation, organisation, and activities of the Maha Sabha from its inception in 1912 until 1960, which is an arbitrary year but a convenient point to end this study as Indians celebrated the centenary of their arrival in South Africa. To mark the occasion, the Maha Sabha published a book that dealt with various aspects of the Hindu presence in this country. This study will evaluate their assessment of the state of Hinduism to that point. Importantly too, shortly thereafter the National Party accepted people of Indian origin as South African citizens. The conversion of the de facto status of most Indians into legal citizenship resulted in a whole host of political and other changes which also impacted on the workings of the Maha Sabha. Going beyond 1960 would have resulted in project that would have been too wide for an MA and the period after 1960 will be considered for a future study.

While the Maha Sabha aimed to function as a national body, this study is largely confined to Natal, which was home both to the organisation and to around 90 percent of South Africa's Hindus. A central aim of this study is to explore notions of "Hinduness" and the changing notions of what it meant to be Hindu in South Africa, especially in relation to

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[1] Nagindas P. Desai. "A History of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha" in R. S. Nowbath, S.Chotai and B.D. Lalla (eds). *The Hindu Heritage in South Africa* (Durban: The South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 1960), 91.
[2] Desai. "A History", 92.

the various identities that a South African "Hindu" may embrace. Identity is a complex phenomenon, which is not only multifaceted but fluid, being constantly negotiated in the present in accordance with changing social contexts. The early indentured labourers lacked a "common" Hindu identity as they arrived from various parts of India, bringing with them a myriad of traditions, languages, castes, and beliefs. International Hindu missionaries who arrived from the turn of the twentieth century worked with local Hindu leaders in an attempt to provide a common ground around which the heterogeneous groups of Hindus could coalesce. In addition to these sectional differences among Hindus, there was also an attempt to promote an "Indian" identity by various political leaders, whether Hindu, Parsi, Christian, or Muslim. Stuart Hall spoke of identity as a "movable feast" when he explained why the factors that give individuals firm locations as social individuals are fluid and constantly negotiated in the present.[3]

Being Hindu was one, and a very important one at that, identity embraced by Indian migrants during the period of this study. Fiona Bowie suggests that identity can be seen as providing a sense of stability in the complexity of social factors that make up an individual or group, as well as something that the individual or group constantly (re)creates as they associate with various social factors.[4] An important question under investigation is why successive leaders of the Maha Sabha saw it as vital to promote a broad "Hindu identity", one that encompassed various strands of Hinduism, and the debates that this generated with those Hindus who were concerned at the exclusion of Muslims and Christians, as well as those who did not want to conform to a particular kind of Hinduism promoted by the Maha Sabha. These questions were not resolved during the period of this study and remain unresolved; in fact, in post Cold War and post-apartheid South African society, religious, linguistic and cultural identities seem to be hardening. Boundary markers are employed for various purposes. For Hall, during times of crises people attempt to hold on to certain characteristics that make them different from others with whom they come into contact.[5] Samuel Huntington has even suggested that there is a "clash of civilisations" in the contemporary period.[6]

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[3] Stuart Hall. "Introduction: Identity in Question" in S. Hall (ed). *Modernity and Its Futures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 3.
[4] Fiona Bowie. *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction Second Edition* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 63.
[5] Hall. "Introduction", 1-3.
[6] While Huntington's thesis that cultural and religious identities would become the new cause of global conflict in the post Cold War era is highly contentious and has attracted criticism from many, fundamental to his argument and those who supported it is the realization that cultural and religious identities are hardening and have become more "rigid" during this period. See Malcolm Waters. G*lobalisation* (London: Routledge, 1995),

This study contributes to the study of Hinduism and the ways in which it is negotiated in changing historical settings by focusing on the national body of Hindus in the evolving South African state during the first half of the twentieth-century. Examining the origins, motives, successes and failures of the Maha Sabha, an organisation that attempted to function as the umbrella body of all Hindus in South Africa, provides an important entry point into the multiple identities within a group termed officially as "Indian" or "Asian" and seen by others as homogenous. In reality a multiplicity of identities makes up what one might call Indian. By focusing on aspects of the Indian experience other than the political or economic, which have been widely studied, this study contributes to a fuller study of the South African Indian experience.[7]

Defining Hinduism

The term Hinduism encompasses a number of diverging religious practices originating in the Indian subcontinent. In fact, some authors have gone to the extent of arguing that the term is a British colonial construct to categorise the wide variety of religious practices that they encountered.[8] The classical paradigm held that Hindu traditions were features of a religion with holy texts, distinct beliefs, doctrines, and sacred laws. Many academics now consider this conception to be a colonial construction. While other scholars[9] challenge this view, even the fiercest critics admit that the complex set of encounters that took place between the British Christians and Indian Hindus during a period lasting little more than a century was decisive in the way that we have come to understand Hinduism in the contemporary period.[10] While careful not to take a particular stance in this debate, and acknowledging the existence of religious identity on the sub-continent long before the arrival

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124-157; Adam Tarock "Civilisation Conflict? Fighting the enemy under a new banner" in *Foreign Affairs*. Summer 1993; Jacinta O' Hagan. "Civilisation Conflict" Looking for a cultural enemy" in *Third World Quarterly*, 16:1 (1995) and Samuel Huntington. "The Clash of Civilisations? in *Foreign Affairs*. 72:3 (Summer 1993).

[7] See Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie. "The Place of India in South African History: Academic Scholarship, Past, Present and Future" in *South African Historical Journal,* 57:1 (2007).

[8] This is the view held by Dal Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Stietencron (eds). *Representing Hinduism. The constructions of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, 1995); Robert Frykenberg. "The Emergence of Modern "Hinduism" as a Concept and as an Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India" in G.D. Sontheimer and H. Kulke (eds) *Hinduism Reconsidered* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997); and Pankaj Mishra. *Temptations of the West: How to be Modern in India, Pakistan and Beyond* (London: Picador, 2006).

[9] See David N. Lorenzen. "Who Invented Hinduism?" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41:4 (1999) and Brian K. Pennington. *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[10] Pennington. *Was Hinduism invented*, 6.

of the British, what she calls "fragmented identities", Sharada Sugirtharajah nevertheless argues that "the notion of a monolithic Hinduism emerged in the colonial era."[11] The fact that Hinduism is not based on the teachings of a particular prophet, text or set of texts but on a variety of texts, beliefs and traditions that evolved over many centuries in a diverse and multilingual region, highlights the difficulty of defining the term, and has led to multiple ways of interpreting Hinduism.

South African Hindus reflect this diversity. Broadly speaking, they can be divided into four linguistic groups viz. Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, which can be further divided along other communal lines. For example, Gujaratis can be divided into Kathiawadis and Suratis, depending on their region of origin. And there are caste and class divisions as well. Apart from these divisions, there is a further important division between so called "reformers" and "orthodox" Hindus. The situation is complex and the Maha Sabha found itself in the precarious position of trying to unite this variety of Hinduisms under an umbrella South African Hindu identity. The fact that South Africa has slightly more (two thirds) migrants from South India (Tamil and Telugu speakers) than from North India (Hindi and Gujarati speakers) is also important as the differences between these two groups in India are significant and migrants brought traditions to Natal which were noticeably different.[12] North Indians are believed to be descendents of the *Aryans* and South Indians of *Dravidians*.[13] These groups see themselves as different on a number of levels. This study is concerned specifically with religious practices. Kuppusami argues that differences are largely the result of physical features such as the Narmada and Tapti Rivers, the Vindhyas and Saptura Hills and dense forests called the Mahakarta, all of which have acted as a barrier separating North India from South India and inhibiting movement between these two regions in past centuries.[14] Traditions evolved separately to a large extent and today many texts that are seen as synonymous with Hinduism, such as the *Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and the four *Vedas* are regarded as North Indian by many South Indians who have their own set of religious texts, which includes the *Gnana Bodham, Thirukural*, *Thevaram* and *Thiruvaimoli*.[15] An illustration of these differences is that while many Hindus see the *Vedas*

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[11] Sharada Sugirtharajah. *Imagining Hinduism*: *A Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003), xi.
[12] See Surendra Bhana. *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal, 1860-1902: A Study Based on Ships' Lists.* (New Delhi: Promilla & Co, 1991).
[13] See Hillary Rodrigues. *Introducing Hinduism* (New York : Routledge, 2006), 8-16.
[14] C. Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture in South Africa* (Durban: Rapid Graphic, 1993), 10.
[15] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 10.

as the "authentic" voice of Hinduism, *Shiva*, one of the most widely worshipped deities amongst South Indians, does not feature in the *Vedas*.[16]

The notion of a homogeneous Hinduism that emerged during the colonial period to unite Hindus and defend it against criticism by creating the idea of a "glorious era" was promoted by reformers who placed authority on North Indian or *Aryan* texts and traditions.[17] What is important for the purposes of this study is that in South Africa North and South Indians sometimes saw themselves as distinct in their beliefs and traditions, while at other times they worked together. Some critics today see the Maha Sabha as a North Indian movement that gives little attention to the interests of South Indians.[18] When examining its history, however, one can see that while some of the Maha Sabha's founding members were influenced by the teachings of a missionary movement that emerged in the North, individuals of South Indian descent held important positions within the organisation throughout the time frame of this study.

An understanding of the Arya Samaj missionary movement founded in Bombay in 1875 by the Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) to refine Hindu practices is central to this study owing to the pivotal influence that its missionaries have had on South African Hindu leaders.[19] Even a cursory glance at the Maha Sabha's history indicates strong tendencies toward this particular approach to Hinduism in spite of the organisation's attempts to represent all South African Hindus. The Maha Sabha faced the dilemma of trying to unite Hindus while many of its leaders subscribed to the ideals of a movement that aimed to eradicate practices regarded by many Hindus in South Africa as fundamental to their religious heritage.[20] Swami Dayananda was concerned over what he regarded as inherent

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[16] Owing to the similarities between Shiva and a deity in the Vedas, Ruda some believe that Shiva is Ruda. See Vinay Lal. *Introducing Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 68.

[17] For a discussion on the authority attributed to "North Indian" texts see Friedhelm Hardy. "A Radical Reassessment of the Vedic Heritage-The Acaryahrdayam and Its Wider Implications" in Dalmia and Von Stietencron (eds). *Representing Hinduism* and Krishna Kumar. "Hindu Revivalism and Education in North-Central India" in *Social Scientist*, 18: 10 (October, 1990).

[18] These are the sentiments of one of the largest Tamil bodies in the country the KZN Tamil Federation which consequently disassociated itself from the Maha Sabha see *Post Natal*, 23Aug 2006.

[19] For a biography on the swami see Bawa C. Singh. *Life and Teachings of Swami Dayananda* (New Delhi: Jan Gyan Prakashan, 1871).

[20] It is interesting that certain practices performed in the country, including the *Kavady* and fire walking ceremonies, continue to exist in spite of various attempts by reformers, both local community leaders as well as international missionaries, to eradicate them. While individual Maha Sabha members may have been members of other institutions that sought to eradicate these practices, in Maha Sabha produced literature they tended to accept or at least tolerate them. See copies of the Maha Sabha journal the *Hindu* (1946-present) for articles that

weaknesses in Hindu practice, such as the hereditary caste system, idolatry, animal sacrifices, polytheism, child marriage, ancestor worship, unequal gender relations, and the belief that humans could be incarnations of gods. He argued that Hinduism should be based exclusively on the religious texts known as the four *Vedas* and sought to eradicate all of the above mentioned practices which, he maintained, had crept into Hinduism through the ages and had distorted its true essence.[21]

Swami Dayananda was a source of inspiration and an exemplar for many South African Hindus, including members of the Maha Sabha, as well as the international Hindu missionaries who visited periodically. However, there were many Hindu individuals and organisations, both in India and abroad, who challenged his definition of Hinduism. Some argued that Hinduism was not synonymous with the knowledge contained in the *Vedas* while others challenged his interpretation of the *Vedas*. Regardless of this opposition and the fact that Arya Samaj practices were contrary to the popular religious practices in South Africa, it will be shown that the ideas of the Arya Samaj movement were influential on Hindu organisations and leaders during the period of the study. It would seem that Hindu leaders, while embracing Arya Samaj ideas, were aware of the possible negative consequences of trying to enforce a particular type of reformist Hinduism on people who subscribed to different traditions, rituals, and practices.

The way in which loosely knit traditions of India became categorized during the colonial era to form a Hindu religion based on Western concepts has been the subject of intense debate. Vertovec, however, makes the important point that while social scientists may approach religion as a "historically conditioned socio-cultural construct open to re-definition, re-configuration, and re-institutionalization of symbols and social forms in light of shifting contexts" this has little influence on religious adherents who regard "transcendent, sacred notions concerning cosmology and soteriology" as "a-historical in content and ultimate in authority." Vertovec adds that although "Hinduism" appears as a colonial construct in India, this notion "by no means diminishes any of its personal and collective power" over those who regard themselves as Hindus.[22]

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show Maha Sabha members throughout its existence describe these practices but aim to provide a philosophical justification.
[21] Thillayvel Naidoo. *The Arya Samaj Movement in South Africa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992), 15-24.
[22] Steven Vertovec. *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns* (London: Routledge, 2000), 107.

Religious reformers in India who were seeking to defend Hinduism against Western criticism did so by presupposing homogenising tendencies within Hinduism.[23] According to Sugirtharajah, the implications for understanding Hinduism extend further than merely "critiquing totalizing tendencies in Eurocentric as well as nationalistic modes of thinking and practice" in India.[24] The task of exploring how missionaries and Orientalists used Western concepts of religion to create an idea of Hinduism to incorporate various religious practices and how Hindu reformers adopted these modes of thinking in their defence of Hinduism is a wide field of study.[25] However, for Sugirtharajah, it is vital to look at how Hinduism was (re)constructed in the diaspora where various Hindu leaders remodelled the "oriental articulations of Hinduism."[26] For example, for centuries "orthodox" Hinduism forbade Hindus who converted to other faiths to reconvert to Hinduism. However, Arya Samaj founder Swami Dayananda introduced a practice known as *suddhi*, whereby individuals could reconvert to Hinduism.[27] In South Africa, given the deep concern among reformers over the influence of Christianity, Swami Shankaranand, who was in South Africa from 1908 to 1912, and Pandit Bhawani Dayal, whose influence extended from the 1910s to the 1940s, both introduced *suddhi*, allowing converts to Christianity and Islam to reconvert to Hinduism.[28] This study will explore some instances of how Hinduism was negotiated in response to social and economic conditions prevailing in South Africa. It cannot be emphasised enough that circumstances in South Africa were unique and had important implications for this task.

This thesis will document and analyse the development of the Maha Sabha in the period under review with a view to interrogate the central hypothesis of this study, viz,

> 'The South African Hindu Maha Sabha, as an organisation inspired by reformist Hinduism, failed to unite to unite Hindus in South Africa in pursuit of common aims and objectives.'

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[23] For a discussion and brief literature review on how the *Arya Samaj* movement in India borrowed homogenising and missionary vocabulary from Christianity and Islam to remodel a counter colonial Hindu movement see John D. Kelly. *A Politics of Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 121-139.

[24] Sugirtharajah. *Imagining Hinduism,* xiii.

[25] Edward Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978) has influenced scholars to look at the implications of "post colonial" theory as it relates to "Hinduism." See Peter Van Der Veer. *Imperial Encounters Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Pennington. *Was Hinduism invented?*

[26] Sugirtharajah. *Imagining Hinduism,* xiii.

[27] Naidoo. *Arya Samaj*, 4.

[28] Goolam Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand and the Consolidation of Hinduism in Natal, 1908-1914" in *Journal for the Study of Religion*; 10:2, 1997, 5 and *Dharma Vir*, 4 April 1918.

This study investigates whether the Maha Sabha was able function as a central body which represented all Hindus in South Africa or whether it was an elitist project that was unrepresentative of the heterogeneous group of Hindu South Africans. While the Maha Sabha made a concerted effort to be representative of the different linguistic and sectional groups of Hindus, given the dominant role of professionals in the organisation it is anticipated that the Maha Sabha did not succeed in overcoming sectional divisions among Hindus and creating a unitary Hindu identity.

An examination of the Maha Sabha's history also reveals that periods of intense activity were followed by extended periods in which the organisation was dormant. This study will examine the reasons for these periods of inactivity and the impact of the failure to sustain its activities on the Maha Sabha's quest to be the primary Hindu organisation in South Africa. Another important final thrust of this dissertation is to examine whether the quest to unite Indians in their political struggle against white minority rule compromised the ability of the leaders of the Maha Sabha, many of whom held leadership positions in Indian political organisations, to unite Hindus through the Maha Sabha by taking up their time and energy and causing them not to pursue issues that may have seemed to harm relations with Indian Muslims and Christians.

Review of literature

Apart from ephemeral pamphlets and brochures highlighting the role of particular Hindu organisations and individuals, and a few studies that focus mainly on Hindu beliefs, customs, and practices, there is a dearth of studies that critically examine the history of Hinduism in South Africa.[29] Two important studies, Alleyn Diesel and Patrick Maxwell's *Hinduism in Natal*, and Pratap Kumar's *Hindus in South Africa*, contain some historical background but are largely ethnographic and provide descriptive accounts of religious practices, festivals, and beliefs. Thillayvel Naidoo's *Arya Samaj Movement in South Africa* provides a valuable outline and contribution of the Arya Samaj movement; however, it is not

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[29] Two books produced by Hindu bodies that this study draws extensively from are Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage* and Nardev Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening in South Africa: History of the Arya Samaj Movement in South Africa* (Natal: Arya Pratinidhi Sabha).

a critical study in the sense of locating the Arya Samaj movement within the broader Hindu community and examining the contestation between these groupings.[30] C.G. Henning[31], Hilda Kuper[32], Fatima Meer,[33] and Paul Mikula et al[34] also touch upon different aspects of the Hindu experience in South Africa but are largely ethnographic and descriptive without tracing the historical development of Hinduism.

Unlike the extensive literature on Hinduism in other places where Hindus settled in large numbers, there is a paucity of material on Hindu organisations in South Africa and this study will contribute to the historiography of Hinduism in diasporic situations. More important, this study will attempt to fill the void in the historiography on Hinduism in South Africa by going beyond a description of Hindu practices, beliefs and traditions and the divisions among Hindus, by examining some of the major Hindu personalities, what they were seeking to achieve, when and why tensions emerged among Hindu organisations, and how these differences were resolved. By dealing with the work of the Maha Sabha and its members historically (chronologically and thematically where relevant) and critically this study will explore the friction that emerged when different interpretations of Hinduism were in conflict. Naidoo, a member of various South African Hindu organisations, claims in his study that amongst "the various debilitating weaknesses inherent within" Hinduism was "above all, the singular lack of a cohesive set of religiously inspired national and cultural ideals."[35] This sentiment captures the way in which the idea of a homogeneous and unified Hinduism was seen as an ideal by many Hindus in South Africa. This raises important questions. Can there be a homogeneous and unitary Hinduism? And if there is, who gets to decide what constitutes the core characteristics of this Hinduism? Or, can there be unity for specific objectives while respecting differences in beliefs and traditions?

The Arya Samaj was highly influential among many Hindu leaders in the country, including those of the Maha Sabha, and an investigation into how this umbrella Hindu organisation dealt with potential divisions when various interpretations of Hinduism clashed,

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[30] Alleyn Diesel and Patrick Maxwell. *Hinduism in Natal: A Brief Guide* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1993) and Pratap P. Kumar's *Hindus in South Africa: Their traditions and Beliefs* (Durban: University of Durban-Westville, 2000) and Naidoo. *Arya Samaj.*

[31] C.G. Henning. *The Indentured Indian in Natal 1860-1917* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1993).

[32] Hilda Kuper. *Indian People in Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, Natal University Press, 1960).

[33] Fatima Meer. *Portrait of Indian South Africans* (Durban: Avon House, 1969).

[34] Paul Mikula, Brian Kearney and Rodney Harber. *Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa* (Durban: Hindu Temple Publications, 1982).

[35] Naidoo. *Arya Samaj*, 1.

provides vital clues as to how the organisation has survived for so long. Goolam Vahed's study of the Arya Samaj missionary Swami Shankaranand, under whose presidency the Maha Sabha was formed, shows that the swami was concerned with purifying Hinduism and abandoning aspects regarded by the Arya Samaj as "degenerate."[36] Maureen Swan's *Gandhi: The South African experience* and Surendra Bhana and Vahed's *The making of a Social Reformer: Gandhi in South Africa, 1893-1914* also depict the way in which the swami created tension among and between Hindus and Muslims. This study will add to and take the issue further along the time line by exploring these tensions in subsequent years, particularly when other missionaries visited the country. For example, the 1929 visit of Pandit Ramgovind Trivedi, who arrived from Mauritius, widened the divide among Hindi speaking Hindus because he was a proponent of the Sanathan Dharma and preached a different form of Hinduism from that of the Arya Samaj, which was the most organised Hindu movement to that point, even though its influence among the Hindu masses is questionable.

In *A politics of Virtue*, John Kelly explores how anti-colonial resistance by Indians in Fiji was threatened by internal tensions between proponents of the Arya Samaj and those of its "rival", the Sanathan Dharma. Kelly's concern was why attempts to foster a unified political resistance became fractured by religious disputes among Hindus.[37] Although tensions between these groups existed in South Africa they never reached a level comparable to Fiji. Studies of diasporic Hindu communities in Trinidad[38] and Mauritius[39] have also explored these divisions. The question that this study will consider is whether religious tensions among Hindus, as was the case in Fiji, Trinidad, and Mauritius, surfaced in South Africa and, if not, why not? In making this comparison we need to factor in differences such as the proportion of North and South Indians in the migrant population and the percentage of Indians in the overall population.

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[36] Goolam Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand."
[37] See Kelly. *A Politics.*
[38] Steven Vertovec. *Hindu Trinidad: Religion, Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Change* (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1992).
[39] Suchita Ramdin. "Folk Religion of the Hindu Immigrant-a case study" 109-137 and Pahlad Ramsurran. "The Mauritius Arya Samaj," 95-108 in U. Bissoondoyal. (ed). *Indians overseas. The Mauritian Experience* (Moka, Mauritius: The Mahatma Gandhi Institute, 1984).

Sources and Methodology

Research for this dissertation was largely qualitative and centred on primary sources, which comprised mainly of the minutes of various Maha Sabha meetings and conference proceedings. Some of these materials are housed at the Documentation Centre at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Westville campus, while others were made avaible by the Maha Sabha itself. Unfortunately, the full collection of minutes was not available. To supplement the available records, it was necessary to travel to various libraries, individuals, and organisations to peruse newspapers, brochures, photographs, and constitutions, which helped to piece together a fuller story of the Maha Sabha.

This study has drawn on a number of sources, including the minutes of the Maha Sabha's meetings, pamphlets and other ephemeral publications. This study draws on texts produced by organisations, such as brochures and pamphlets, because they contain valuable biographical and historical information. However, such sources have been used cautiously because they are often of a celebratory nature and serve a different purpose than critical scholoary publications. Minutes of the Maha Sabha for the period between 1940 and 1960 were very kindly made available by the current secretary, Vijay Misra, during the second half of 2009. These provide detailed data on the arguments made by council members with regard to the strategies that the Maha Sabha adopted at various times and over various issues. Examining what was said during meetings in relation to the changing social, economic, and political context, helps to clarify the ways in which the organisation responded to the conditions in the unique South African context.

The Maha Sabha also published a journal, *The Hindu*, in which council members produced articles on specific aspects of Hindu practices and culture. These were often very similar to those of the original founders of the Arya Samaj movement in India and reformers elsewhere in the diaspora. These publications contain extensive literature that the Maha Sabha recommended for its readers. An analysis of the recommended reading list points to the form of Hinduism that the leadership favoured. It can be compared to the actual lived activities of the majority of Hindus, which were established through announcements in newspapers and newspaper reports, for example.[40]

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[40] While the readership of these newspapers represented a tiny and privileged section of Hindu South Africans during the early period, and was unrepresentative of the masses, the significance and questions over the

For the early period, ethnic newspapers such as *Indian Opinion*, *Colonial Indian News* and *The African Chronicle* were crucial. During the 1940s and 1950s newly established newspapers such as the *Leader*, *Graphic* and *Post* emerged. They represented different shades of opinion among Indians. This study makes extensive use of these newspapers, especially the "Letters to the Editor" section, which contained ferocious debates for and against the Maha Sabha and its officials, and their actions and policies. Newspapers also dealt with the evolving political situation and tensions between the Arya Samaj and Sanathan Dharma.

The Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal is home to many boxes of information on the Maha Sabha as well as individual Hindu organisations that were affiliated to the Maha Sabha. The centre also has information on the work of international missionaries who visited South Africa. These include advertisements for functions and lectures, transcriptions of public speeches by Hindu leaders, both local and international, ephemeral publications, and minutes of some of the conferences and meetings organised by affiliated bodies.

Two oral interviews were conducted with individuals who served on the Maha Sabha and other religious organisations during the period of this study. While fading memory is always a consideration, given the existence of minutes and newspapers, the oral testimony was used judiciously and critically to support or clarify particular perspectives. The original intention was to conduct many more interviews but the difficulty of finding individuals who were familiar with the early period made this impractical.

These forms of primary evidence were supported by secondary literature on Hinduism in India and the Hindu diaspora. Together they provided stimulating material to examine the questions outlined above and assisted in filling the gap in the literature on Hindus and Hinduism in South Africa. This study will complement work on Hindus in other parts of the world and point to the similarities and differences in the local experience.

"legitimacy" of what was occurring among Hindus at grassroots level was the subject matter of their debates. When the Maha Sabha was revived in 1933 the *Indian Opinion* argued in an editorial that the fact that one its leaders defended a Hindu fire walking ritual was evidence that he represented the "wrong kind" of Hinduism. See *Indian Opinion,* 14 May 1934.

Biographies of the officials of the Maha Sabha were important in constructing a profile (class, caste, language) of the leadership and members who came to make up the leadership of the organisation. The *South African Indian's WHO'S WHO*, published in 1936, 1939 and 1960, provided biographical information on many members of the Maha Sabha. Biographies were also constructed from brochures of religious organisations and *Fiat Lux*, an apartheid-era publication that contained much valuable information even though the publication had nefarious intentions. As already pointed out, information from these sources was sometimes hagiographic and biased and newspapers proved crucial in providing alternative voices because they often published letters from critics who condemned the Maha Sabha's activities and questioned its influence and relevance. References to populist forms of Hindu worship made in newspapers as well as brochures produced by temple societies as well as scholarly publications are also important as these activities attracted large numbers of Hindus who operated largely outside the purview of the Maha Sabha. The condemnation of such activites by by Maha Sabha leaders was usually ignored by the Hindu masses.

Newspapers were especially helpful because of the wide coverage that they gave to the visits of overseas missionaries. This provided an additional means of understanding the Maha Sabha. Newspapers such as the *Indian Opinion*, for example, covered in full the public speeches of visitors as well as the speeches of local Hindu leaders. This helped to analyse the major concerns of local and overseas leaders.

Another important method of understanding the Maha Sabha's role in South Africa was by locating its activities in the context of other forces that affected Indians. During periods in which the Maha Sabha was inactive, its leaders were often dealing with other challenges facing Indians. This included organising protests and sending delegates to India to foster support against discriminatory laws passed by the South African government, as well as organising relief projects during a crisis, the 1949 race riots being a good example. The absence of the Maha Sabha leaders through their involvement in these activities meant that the organisation was short of manpower, and it was always men who were in control, and ceased to function. Questions that arise from this are the extent to which the organisation was elitist to its detriment, and whether leaders placed primacy on 'Indian' issues as opposed to 'Hindu' affairs.

Limitations

Focusing on the Maha Sabha and its reform minded leaders means that this study does not interrogate the religious practices of the Hindu masses. Even critics whose voices appear in newspapers represent a privileged group since they had an education and command of the English language. While community organisations were vital amongst Indians during this period for the role that they played in many people's lives, it is accepted that large numbers of Hindus continued to partake in forms of worship that were independent of organisations such as the Maha Sabha. These were conducted at home and at various Sanathan temples that appeared wherever Hindus settled. Examining these Sanathan practices is beyond the scope of this study which is concerned with how the Maha Sabha attempted to forge a unified Hindu identity. It was the only body that claimed to represent Hindus across the country and as such deserves careful and critical interrogation.

The Maha Sabha attempted a number of projects to bring Hindu practices under its control, including a Hindu syllabus for school children and establishing a *Devasthanum* committee to organise temples. A major concern of the Maha Sabha was the activities of Christian missionaries who were making inroads into the Hindu community. This study examines how this small but influential group of Hindu leaders attempted to prevent this from occurring by addressing what they identified as the reasons that made Hindus "vulnerable" to Christian proselytising. The Maha Sabha's leaders felt that the absence of a unitary Hindu identity was one factor, among many, that led Hindus to convert to Christianity and they therefore saw it as their duty to create a unified Hindu identity, even though this meant requiring other Hindus to eradicate practices that they had brought with them from India.

We must guard against the illusion that Indians constitute a homogenous grouping. Indians are socially divided, clearly split with regard to class, religion, language, custom, and ancestry. However, they do constitute a distinct racial category in the peculiar South African state where race is a primary marker of distinction, and have historically been treated as a monolithic group by the government as well as Africans and whites.

Terminology

The term "diaspora" is facing increasing scrutiny as an appropriate term to refer to groups of people living in various parts of the world who are seen to have some commonalities on the basis of an attachment to a "homeland." Originally used to describe the Jewish community after they were dispersed from Israel, the term is now widely applied to peoples who are seen to have once been homogenous and who are now "dispersed", resulting in migrants finding themselves faced with two locations at once, their new setting and their lands of origin. Diaspora is applied to groups such as Indians, Chinese, and Armenians. Eisenlohr points out that although this allegiance to a homeland may be an imagined identity it is an identity nonetheless.[41] During the 1980s, the term diaspora began to find its way increasingly into the use of mainstream academia, to the extent that wherever there was displacement of any sort, there was talk of a diaspora.[42]

In some of the literature there is reference to a Hindu diaspora, which is used to refer to places where Hindu people have settled in large numbers.[43] The notion of a Hindu diaspora is based on the notion that Hinduism is an ethnic religion, given its strong link to the sub-continent. This Hindu diaspora is seen to have originated with the large-scale migration of indentured labourers, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, which resulted in Hinduism being established in new settings. While Hinduism was not simply transplanted in its exact form in the new setting, it was nevertheless seen as an exact replica of the old. Migrants from the sub-continent to South Africa,[44] as was the case in other colonies that received indentured labour, such as Uganda, Fiji, Jamaica, Mauritius, Suriname and Trinidad, as well as those migrants from the Indian sub-continent who subsequently migrated on their own accord to places such as New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, sought to recreate aspects of their religious life in the new settling. The place of origin and more especially the place of settlement had a great bearing on the ways in which Hinduism could be recreated. Hindus in South Africa came from various locations in

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[41]Patrick Eisenlohr. *Little India: Diaspora, Time, and Ethnolinguistic Belonging in Hindu Mauritius* (California: University of California Press, 2006) 227-229.

[42] Steven Vertovec. "Religion and diaspora" Paper presented at the conference on "New Landscapes of Religion in the West," School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford. http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/Vertovec01.PDF (Accessed on the 5 March 2009), 1.

[43] For a discussion see Vertovec. *Hindu Diaspora*, 2-38 and "Religion and diaspora."

[44] The Union of South Africa was only established in 1910. Technically, migrants arrived in Natal, the Transvaal, or Cape Colony. However, for the purposes of this dissertation "South Africa" is used to refer to these areas even though such an entity did not exist during the colonial period.

India but lived in close proximity in their new setting, partly as a result of migratory patterns, but also because of the racist laws of the new country. There were notable differences in forms of rituals, traditions, and worship among migrants. While such diversity existed in India, reformers, both South African and those who came from abroad, attempted in the course of the twentieth-century to enforce particular homogeneous approaches to Hinduism.

While cognisant of the differences and dangers of seeking to homogenise, the term "diaspora" is employed in this dissertation because some of the key actors in this narrative used similar terms to refer to themselves and understood themselves to be part of a broader transnational grouping. Travelling missionaries, Arya Samajists and others, saw themselves as travelling across a Hindu diaspora, but they used the term "greater India" to refer to it. South Africa was one of many locations to which Hindu missionaries travelled and although each location offered unique challenges for the establishment of Hindu practices, there were also certain commonalities which will be discussed in the course of this study. The formation of various Hindu institutions and a national body such as the Maha Sabha to unite Hindus occurred in the various locations of Hindu settlement. Institutions such as the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (APS) and Shri Sanathan Dharma Sabha (SSDS), which existed in all these locations, were affiliated to each other and to the corresponding body in India.

The term "elite" can be defined as a small but privileged group belonging to a larger group. In 1960, when Hilda Kuper undertook her study of Indians, she discussed the important role of Indian elites in South Africa.[45] When the term "elite" is employed in this study, reference is being made to Indians in South Africa who had accumulated wealth and status, either through business or via a professional qualification and, owing to this privileged status played important roles in religious, welfare, linguistic, sporting and cultural associations that were vital to the needs of many Indians. Although this elite group, as with elites everywhere, constituted a minority, their work had a great bearing on the Hindu masses. They came to be identified as community leaders whose presence at "community" events such as the opening of a school or welfare institution was very important.

The term "community" can be utilised in various ways. According to Worsley, we can refer to "community as locality" or "community as a type of relationship." The former refers to

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[45] See Kuper. *Indian People,* 44-80.

"a human settlement located within a fixed and bounded local territory" while the latter portrays the community as "a sense of shared identity." Community in the latter sense does not necessarily have a geographical basis and may exist among people who have not met at all.[46] According to Anthony Cohen, community implies "similarity" and "difference" and is therefore a relational idea. Members of a community have something in common that distinguishes them "in a significant way" from members of other groups. They instinctively create boundaries, which can be religious, physical, racial, or linguistic. What is important is what that boundary means to people or what meanings they give to it. This is the symbolic aspect of community boundaries.[47]

The Maha Sabha was formed with the intention of promoting a Hindu community. This was based on the idea of Hindus being united by a common Hindu religion and heritage. The rationale for a body such as the Maha Sabha was based on the idea that Hindus faced common problems and challenges, which required them to be united in order to solve these. Council member B.D. Lalla, for example, explained that the Maha Sabha had been formed when prominent Hindus in the country realised "that unless they co-ordinated their efforts, there was little hope for the survival of Hinduism which was threatened from all sides."[48] In many of the primary sources there are references to "the community", which refers at times to the Indian community in South Africa and at other times specifically to Hindus.

While the notion of community was often mooted, debate over Hindu beliefs and practices remained a feature of Hindu Indian life throughout the period of study. Articles in newspapers, for example, constantly dealt with individuals questioning aspects of Hindu worship, their legitimacy and importance, and how they were practised in India. Christians, Hindus, and Muslims sometimes attacked aspects of each other's religion. The caste system, for example, was at times a topic of debate in letters to the press. Leaders of Hindu bodies entered the fray to defend Hinduism against what they regarded as unjust attacks. The message that Hindu leaders were trying to relate to the public reveals much about the type of Hinduism they promoted and its variance with popular practices among the Hindu majority, and allows us to interrogate critically notions of Hindu or Indian identity during these decades.

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[46] Peter Worsley. *The new introducing sociology* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987), 239.
[47] Anthony P. Cohen. *The symbolic construction of community* (London: Tavistock, 1985), 12.
[48] B.D. Lalla. "A review of the work of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha" in Nowbath et al (eds). *The Hindu Heritage*, 108.

While caste is a major component in India as a hierarchical system of classification based on heredity most scholars see it as being less important in places where Indians have settled in large numbers.[49] The *Varna* system specified in many ancient Hindu texts, including the *Vedas*, divided people into four groups, *Brahmins* (scholars and priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (agriculturists and merchants) and *Shudras* (labourers). In practice the system became based on heredity. Reformist religious leaders increasingly argued from the nineteenth century onwards that this was a distortion, as the *Varna* division was meant to be based on merit rather than heredity.[50] The caste system, these reformers argued, is a distortion of the *Varna* created in what they regard as inauthentic texts like the *Puranas,* and is a social construction. Notwithstanding the attempts of some Indian leaders to put an end to the caste system it continues to exist throughout the twentieth century in India with a fifth addition known as the untouchables.[51] In South Africa, owing to indentured Hindus originating from various villages throughout India, and being placed in a new context, usually in the company of people from different castes, the caste system became difficult to recreate. However, remnants of the caste system and caste consciousness did survive.[52]

Further, a different system of classification became significant among Indian South Africans, one based not on heredity but on wealth and status. In the early years of indenture there were two broad classes; indentured and passenger. The latter referred to those who came at their own expense and outside the official arrangement between colonial authorities. However, once the indentured contract was served, a small number of the formerly indentured accumulated wealth and according to Maureen Swan emerged as a new definable elite, based either on education or business.[53] This study will examine the background and profession of Maha Sabha members to see which caste/class they represented, whether they were from the indentured or merchant class and how this influenced actions and interactions within the Maha Sabha. The caste system was an issue that emerged in the speeches of some of the international missionaries whom the Maha Sabha leaders invited periodically, as well

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[49] This is the premise of a comparative study that focused on the caste system in Overseas Indian Communities. See Barton M. Schwartz (ed). *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities* (California: Chandler Publishing Company, 1964).

[50] Lal. *Introducing Hinduism.* 17-18.

[51] The idea of untouchables comes from a reference made to *candala* (fierce) tribes who should never come into contact with those of the highest castes. Rodrigues. *Introducing Hinduism*, 65.

[52] See Kuper *Indian People*, 18-43 and Rehana Ebr–Valley. *Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 127-140.

[53] Maureen Swan. *Gandhi: A South African Experience* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), 16.

as in the journal that the Maha Sabha produced, the *Hindu*. Caste, other than being an obvious hindrance to the Maha Sabha's aim to bring Hindus together, has also been seen as a factor that may have led to some Hindus converting to other religions.[54] Generally, the feeling of local Maha Sabha leaders and international visitors, as we shall see, was that the caste system was almost non-existent in South Africa.

Outline of chapters

Given the complex nature of Hinduism and the diversity of practices said to be Hindu, it is clear that the project of the Maha Sabha was always going to be complex and difficult. Indian migrants, both indentured and passenger, brought various religious practices with them. These remained largely informal and Hindus in Natal lacked a coherent central association to represent them until the arrival of the first Hindu missionaries in the early twentieth-century who identified this institutional absence as a threat to the very survival of Hinduism. Chapter One traces this process and introduces some of the local members who were involved in founding the Maha Sabha. It focuses on the arrival of Indians, early religious practices of migrants, major theological divisions, and the role of Arya Samaj missionaries who began arriving from 1905.

The two decades of inactivity that followed the departure to India of the Maha Sabha's founder, Swami Shankaranand, in 1912, will be examined in the second chapter. While the national coordinating organisation was dormant, the work of Hindu organisations was carried out through the efforts of parochial Hindu bodies. This remained the status quo until the formation of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha in 1925 and through it came the revival of the Maha Sabha in 1934. Looking at the individuals who led the parochial bodies is important, as it was through them that that the APS was established.

Overseas travelling missionaries were a crucial component in the development of institutional Hinduism in South Africa. While many religious and cultural bodies were established by local Hindu leaders the drive to establish a central body to unite them came from an overseas missionary. Chapter Three will look at three who were crucial in the revival of the Maha Sabha in 1934. Swami Bhawani Dayal especially was important in the revival of the Maha Sabha as well as various other Hindu bodies that led the reformist mission during

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[54] Kuppusami. *Religions, Customs*, 147.

the Maha Sabha's dormancy. However, many local Hindus opposed the idea of a Maha Sabha in South Africa because they feared that it would lead to an ethnicity-based sectarianism. Many of the elites who dominated the membership of cultural and religious bodies were also political leaders and feared that the Maha Sabha would get involved in politics, as its counterpart in India had, with disastrous consequences for Indians in South Africa. This chapter will focus on the major divisions among Hindus and attempts to reconcile these differences.

The various projects (educational, social welfare, and religious) that the Maha Sabha undertook during the 1930s and 1940s, and major issues that it took up, constitute the subject matter of the forth chapter. Here the questions are: How were the activities of the Sabha reconciled with the larger political struggle? What impact did the movement towards independence in India have on local Hindu identities, given the Muslim-Hindu tension in the sub-continent and the partition of India? How did the partition of India impact in the local setting on relations between Muslims and Hindus?

Chapter five takes up the story from a conference held by the Maha Sabha in 1953, which indicated to observers that there was a newfound energy in the organisation. Hindu organisations in general became better organised and this chapter continues with its analysis of the Maha Sabha's work, culminating in the Maha Sabha's participation in the 1960 Centenary Celebrations. These developments must be seen in the context of the coming to power of the National Party in 1948 and its policy of apartheid, increasing non-racial anti-apartheid protest, expanded educational opportunities, and implementation of the first stage of group areas segregation.

The Arya Samaj is an ideal movement to explore such notions of interconnectivity where ideas are exchanged between people in far away locations, given the extent to which its missionaries travelled to "preserve" and preach *Vedic* culture wherever Indians settled. Of importance for this study is the popularity of these travelling preachers in South Africa. They stressed the importance of *Vedic* knowledge and the ideals of the Arya Samaj movement through their lectures, which were attended by large audiences. It is therefore no surprise that Hindu organisations stressed the value of visits by missionaries and in spite of the difficulty of arranging such visits to South Africa, which included a shortage of funds and local government authorities' resistence to providing entry visas, local leaders made repeated

efforts to invite missionaries who in them inspired many South African Indians to join reformist-inclined Hindu movements. While it is beyond the study to look closely at all the missionaries who arrived within the period, an emphasis is placed on those who were particularly influential on the Maha Sabha.

The conclusion will assess the role and contribution of the Maha Sabha in the history of Hinduism among South African Hindus. Some of the questions that will be addressed include: What do the Maha Sabha's activities reveal about the divisions (regional, ethnic, linguistic, class, caste) among Hindus? Were Hindu organisations able to overcome these divisions? Was the organisation, which claimed to be the "national" voice of Hindus, indeed a national influence? Or was it an umbrella organisation that accommodated many "Hinduisms", and did this render it ineffective? Was the Maha Sabha representative of South African Hindus and was it able to create a united voice or was it representative of a small elitist group? What was the state of Hinduism as Indians celebrated their centenary in South Africa, and as they were about to be accepted as South African citizens? These are some of the issues that will be examined as the history of the Maha Sabha, its leaders, and activities is critically interrogated during the period 1912-1960.

CHAPTER ONE:
SWAMI SHANKARANAND AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
SOUTH AFRICA HINDU MAHA SABHA

This chapter traces the formation of the Maha Sabha. As background, it charts the arrival of Indians in Natal in 1860, the religious practices of Hindu migrants, and the advent of missionaries from India in the early twentieth-century, who encouraged local Hindus to establish local religious bodies, which culminated in the founding of the Maha Sabha in 1912. The first group of migrants, indentured workers who were brought primarily to serve as a source of cheap labour, attempted as best they could to recreate aspects of their religious life in South Africa. This heterogeneous group practised a form of Hinduism often referred to as Sanathan Dharma, which was popular among the masses both in India and across the diaspora. This tradition placed emphasis on ritual forms of worship and was based on a wide variety of myths, traditions, texts and festivals.[55]

By the beginning of the twentieth-century the prevalence and practice of this popular form of Hinduism was a growing concern for a small but influential group of reform minded Hindus who included ex-indentured workers who had acquired wealth and status, as well as a small group of free migrants who are referred to as "passenger" migrants in the literature, comprising predominantly but not exclusively migrants from Gujarat who arrived of their own volition and at their own expense.[56] Their concern was that the emphasis on ritual forms of Hinduism made worshippers more receptive to Christian missionaries while the lack of a central organisation meant that Hindus were unable to deal in a unified and constructive manner with the common problems that they faced as a group.

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[55] Vertovec. *The Hindu Diaspora*, 105.

[56] The term "passenger Indian" has led to the stereotype of the wealthy Gujarati trader which fails to capture the entirety of this migrant stream. There was a small wealthy elite of Gujarati traders but this stereotype masks important aspects of passenger migration. According to Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie: "The term passenger Indian imported into writings about the Cape from the Natal and Transvaal historiography requires redefinition. Its simplified definition leads to a divisive understanding of migration from the Indian subcontinent and contributes to the stereotype of the rich Gujarati. The term needs to embrace workers and in terms of regional origins to include not just those from west India and certainly not just Gujarat but also those from other parts of India….. [Many] Passenger Indians secured work in … in menial positions and some remained in these for more than just an initial phase."[56] Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie. "The Passenger Indian as Worker: Indian Immigrants in Cape Town in the Early Twentieth Century" in *African Studies*, 68: 1(2009), 129.

Hindu settlement in South Africa

The South African Hindu population was a consequence of the indentured labour system which brought indenture Hindus to the region as was the case in Mauritius and Fiji. With the abolition of slavery in 1833 settlers in plantation colonies in the tropics needed an alternative source of cheap labour to remain profitable. Natal's annexation as a British colony in 1843 was followed by the arrival of white settlers, mainly from England. While the settlers found, after some experimentation, that sugar thrived in the coastal areas, they faced the predicament of an inadequate labour supply because the indigenous Zulus were unwilling to work for them at ultra low wages in a regimented labour regime.[57] The recruitment of indentured Indian labourers, beginning in Mauritius (1829), offered a solution to the labour crisis. Indentured Indian labour was also introduced to British Guiana (1838), Trinidad (1845), Jamaica (1854), as well as the French colonies of Reunion (1829), French Guiana (1804), Martinique (1854), St Lucia (1854), and Grenada (1857).[58] Negotiations were conducted between the Natal and Indian governments and in November 1860 the first batch of Indentured Indians arrived on the *Truro*. The system was put on hold in 1866 owing to an economic depression, but reintroduced in 1874. By 1911, when indenture ended, 152,184 indentured migrants had been brought to Natal.[59] Around 80 per cent were Hindu. Migrants came from two ports, Madras (South Indian) and Calcutta (North Indian).

Apart from the broad differences in religious practices between North and South Indians, as Surendra Bhana points out, these ports covered vast and diverse presidencies and Natal's Indians came from numerous villages throughout these regions.[60] The Madras presidency, for example, covered 141 704 square miles which in 1901 contained a population of approximately 38 million and was divided into 22 districts with 55 000 villages.[61] Migrants disembarking from the port of Calcutta came mainly from the Bihar and the United

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[57] For a discussion of the attempts to recruit Zulu workers and the reasons for the failure to do so see Keletso E. Atkins. *The Moon is dead! Give us our money! The cultural origins of an African work ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900* (James Currey, Ltd: London, 1993).

[58] Vertovec. *Hindu Trinidad*, 4. For an overview of Indian indenture worldwide see Hugh Tinker. *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830- 1920*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); C. Kondapi. *Indians Overseas 1838-1949*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1951) and David Northrup *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[59] For a fuller discussion of indentured labour in Natal, see S. Bhana (ed). *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1990); Henning. *The Indentured*; and Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed. *Inside Indian Indenture. A South African Story, 1860-1914* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2010).

[60] Bhana. *Indentured Indian*, 50.

[61] Bhana. *Indentured Indian*, 43-44.

Provinces of Agra and Oudh, which in 1901 contained approximate populations of 24 and half million and 48 million respectively.[62] Bihar was divided into Patna which contained 35 towns and 34 169 villages and Bhagalpur which contained 15 towns and 21 656 villages.[63] The United Provinces covered a territory of 107 164 square miles and contained nine divisions in 1901, each containing a population of between five and six million.[64] Needless to say Natal's Indians came from various locations throughout large and heterogeneous regions[65] bringing with them a variety of different traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices.[66] Hinduism was diffuse, and largely a household religion with variations in practices and beliefs. Indians embraced a variety of practices and traditions in the rural villages that they lived in and there was no sense of an overarching Hindu identity.[67] Kancha Ilaiah, for example, writes in his autobiography that although he was a Hindu, the religious practices in which he participated differed greatly from the form of Hinduism that was forced upon him when he went to school in urban India.[68]

While there is a paucity of information on the religious practices of indentured migrants during the formative period, we do know from the little evidence that exists that there was great diversity. The literature generally refers to the four broad linguistic divisions, Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu, but within these groups there were a myriad of differences as migrants spoke different dialects and originated from various areas, bringing different religious traditions and practices with them. Migrants sought to recreate their religious life in their new surroundings and practiced a form of populist Hinduism commonly referred to as Sanathan Dharma.[69] Literally meaning the "eternal faith", this form of Hinduism was commonly practised wherever large numbers of Hindus settled. It marked, according to Kim Knott, an attempt at "to incorporate all Hindus, irrespective of ethnic or

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[62] Bhana. *Indentured Indian*, 46 and 48.

[63] Bhana. *Indentured Indian*, 48-49.

[64] Bhana. *Indentured Indian*, 46.

[65] For a discussion of the heterogeneity of the regions and the caste hierarchy that existed see Bhana. *Indentured Indian*, 43-65.

[66] See ships lists containing names and places of origin of each migrant which are available on the Gandhi Luthuli Documentation Centre website http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/.

[67] Some scholars argue that the impetus to unite Hindus by Hindu nationalist movements are politically motivated to form a homogenous "Hindu identity" that did not exist previously. See Christophe Jaffrelot. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia Press, 1996); Bruce D. Graham. *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Dal Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Stietencron. "Introduction" in Dalmia and Von Stietencron (eds). *Representing Hinduism.*

[68] Kancha Ilaiah. *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Calcutta: Bhatkal & Sen, 2005).

[69] While it is misleading to refer to all populist Hindu forms as Sanathan Dharma, the movement places emphasis on numerous traditions frown upon by most reform movements.

sectarian divisions. The content of those religious practices which take place in the temple – which form part of the Sanatana Dharma – reveals the development towards this new and standardised form of Hinduism."[70]

Reformers saw this form of Hinduism as based on "superstitious beliefs and meaningless rituals" which show "Hinduism in a less favourable light."[71] Notwithstanding this negative view there are testimonies from indentured migrants in the various places where they settled that claim that religious practices helped them to cope with some of the worst aspects of indenture.[72] Information on Sanathan Dharma practices in South Africa is provided by Diesel and Maxwell, as well as Kumar, but it is based largely on research conducted in the contemporary period.[73] Kuper provides an ethnographic study of Hindu practice based on research conducted in the late 1950s and Mikula et al's study of temple architecture contains anecdotal information on religious practices conducted at various temples during the formative decades.[74] From these sources, as well as references to specific examples of indentured Indians in particular historical settings, we can formulate a picture of the Hindu practices of early migrants.

Attempts to recreate Hinduism: Temples

While the migration of Brahmins was discouraged by the authorities, a significant number of individuals from the Brahmin caste, whether pseudo or real, came to Natal as indentured migrants and played a role in the lives of the indentured by travelling across plantations to preach and perform religious ceremonies.[75] By 1875 the first temples began to emerge. These were originally made of easily available wattle and daub, and were later substituted by wood and iron structures until they were finally replaced with permanent and more elaborate brick structures.[76] According to Mikula et al all the major brick temples built during the period 1875 to 1910 replaced wood and iron counterparts.[77] Temples helped create

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[70] Kim Knott. *Hinduism in Leeds*: *A Study of Religious Practice in the Indian Hindu Community and in Hindu-Related Groups* (University of Leeds, Community Religions Project Monograph Series, 1986), 163-164.
[71] Vedalankar. *Arya Samaj,* 42.
[72] See Desai and Vahed. *Inside Indenture,* 229.
[73] Diesel and Maxwell. *Hinduism in Natal* in 1993 and Kumar. *Hindus in South Africa* in 2000.
[74] Kuper. *Indian People,* 186-235 and Mikula et al. *Traditional Hindu Temples*.
[75] See Brain. "Religion, Missionaries" in Bhana (ed). *Essays,* 211 and Desai and Vahed. *Inside Indenture,* 230.
[76] Surendra Bhana and Goolam Vahed. *The Making of A Social Reformer: Gandhi in South Africa, 1893 – 1914* (New Delhi: Manohar Press, 2005)*,* 52-54.
[77] Mikula et al. *Traditional Hindu Temples*, 13.

an atmosphere familiar to migrants and were decorated with rich imagery of familiar deities, a characteristic frowned upon by Arya Samajists who sought to eradicate what they regarded as idol and image worship. One result of this, according to Naidoo, is that Arya Samaj temples have become "known for their emptiness and even coldness" while "many worshippers have difficulty in placing it into a specific cultural milieu." This he contrasts with "the spiritual love and cultural splendour" that are aroused by the rich variety of images and artefacts that fill a Sanathan temple.[78] Popular Sanathan festivals were conducted at these temples, including amongst others *Kavady*, firewalking and offerings to the goddess *Mariamma,* which included animal sacrifices.[79] Studying the history of temples helps to illustrate the development of Hindu practice and reveals how migrants sought to recreate their religious life in the new setting.[80]

For Brian Kearney, Hindu temples were "a place for prayer and worship, for celebration and family, festivity, priests and gods. A place for liberation from everyday toil." He adds that there was a "community basis for Hindu temples" and the "art of temple building was itself a form of religious worship."[81] The gradual replacement of temporary makeshift temples by permanent structures is seen as a metaphor of the way in which Hindus began to accept Natal as their permanent home.[82] Bhana and Vahed make the important point that there is no evidence of the authorities or employers discouraging the building of temples; in fact, some employers contributed by donating cash or land, and giving their workers time off for religious observances.[83] Some unique features characterised temples in South Africa. One important characteristic of Natal's temples was that a single temple was dedicated to the deities of both North and South Hindu traditions owing to the close proximity in which these groups lived. It is generally accepted that the first brick temple, which exists to the present, is the *Ganesa* Temple in Mount Edgecombe, built in 1898 by Kistappa Reddy.[84] By 1910 numerous other temples had been built, and these were home to a variety of Sanathan traditions. Three particular traditions *Kavady, firewalking* and the *Mariamman* prayers were not only common in South Africa but were also at times contentious, in attracting disapproval

[78] Naidoo. *Arya Samaj*, 79.
[79] Bhana and Vahed. *Gandhi,* 51-57.
[80] For dates of the establishment of early temples and festivals conducted at them see Mikula et al. *Traditional Hindu Temples*, 85-109.
[81] Brian Kearney. "Preface" in Mikula et al. *Traditional Hindu Temples*, 3.
[82] Surykanthi Chetty. "The Creation of south African Indian Identity in Relation to Hinduism" BA Hons dissertation, UKZN 1999, 8.
[83] Bhana and Vahed. *Gandhi,* 52.
[84] Mikula et al. *Traditional Hindu Temples*, 81.

from some reform orientated individuals whose criticisms appear in newspaper articles throughout the period of this study.

The role of festivals

According to Kumar, the major Hindu festivals observed in South Africa include Thai Pongal, Thai Pusam (Kavady), Diwali, Paratassi, Maha Sivaratri, Ramnavami, Krishna Jayanti, and Karttikaidipam.[85] The roots of *Kavady*, which was widely celebrated among Hindus in Natal, can be traced back many hundreds of years in India. Devotees carry a long and colourfully decorated bamboo pole with offerings in worship of lord *Murga*, a popular deity amongst South Indians, especially Tamils.[86] *Kavady* was observed in the Tamil months of Thai (January and February) and Chitray (April and May). To show their devotion, some devotees also underwent trances where they were believed to be possessed by a deity and showed no signs of pain when they pierced their tongues and cheeks with needles and inserted hooks into their chests and backs.[87] Numerous temples in South Africa attracted large numbers of devotees annually during the *Kavady* celebrations. These included the Shiva temple in the Umgeni Road temple complex, built originally as a wood and iron structure in 1885, and replaced by a brick building which was built during the years 1910–1915.[88] Another early site where *Kavady* was celebrated in large numbers was at the *Mariamman* Temple in Isipingo Rail, which was built by Kandasamy Moodley in 1870.[89] *Kavady* remains a popular festival amongst many Hindus of South Indian descent in spite of a number of reformers who tried to end this form of worship over the course of the past century and a half.

Firewalking in honour of *Draupadi*, a practice known as *Thimithi*, was another popular festival and was observed from March to May.[90] Like *Kavady*, *Thimithi* was popular among South Indians and involved devotees walking barefoot across burning coals to display their purity by showing no signs of pain. The tradition dates back to the *Mahabharata* where *Draupadi,* one of the principal characters, underwent a walk through a bed of fire to prove

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[85] Kumar. *Hindus in South Africa*, 59-61.
[86] See C. Kuppusami. *Religion Customs* and Thillayvel Naidoo "Kavidi: Worship through ceremonial festival" in *Religion in Southern Africa*, 2:2 (July 1981).
[87] Diesel and Maxwell. *Hinduism in Natal,* 43.
[88] Mikula et al. *Traditional Hindu Temples*, 60.
[89] Bhana and Vahed. *Gandhi,* 53.
[90] Alleyn Diesel, Patrick Maxwell and Thillayvel Naidoo. "Hinduism in South Africa" in M.H. Prozesky (ed). *Living Faiths in South Africa*, 191.

her purity.[91] Although she is not depicted as a goddess in the *Mahabharata* the character had later taken on a new meaning in South Indian literature and by 1400 CE she was widely worshipped as a fierce South Indian goddess.[92] There are numerous references to the practice of *Thimithi* in South Africa in the years covered by this study and to its significance for devotees, as well as condemnation by reformers.

Another Sanathan festival practised in South Africa was a ceremony where devotees made offerings to the goddess *Mariamman* to appease her. This occurred during the Tamil month of Adi (July and August) and offerings included "cooling" foods such as porridge, coconut milk and pumpkin to cool her anger.[93] However, some individuals also made non-vegetarian offerings which included goats and chickens, which were slaughtered as blood sacrifices. Blood sacrifices associated with *Mariamman* as well as other goddesses, such as *Khali*, *Durga*, and *Angalamman* have been popular among many Hindus in South Africa.[94] The *Mariamman* festival was most widely practised at the Isipingo Temple. The Shree Angalaman temple and the Shree Poongavana temples, both built in the early twentieth century in Cato Manor, were also popular sites for this ceremony.[95]

The religious practices of Hindu migrants were diverse. There was no central organisation to represent Hindus and no single festival that was celebrated by all Hindus. Migrants, instead, celebrated different festivals at different times of the year.[96] It seems that festivals which placed emphasis on ritualistic practices were very popular among the Hindu masses. This was a concern to those who sought to promote the philosophical side of Hinduism based on religious texts.[97]

One of the most widely observed festivals in Natal was Muharram, a Muslim festival that honoured the martyrdom of Husayn, a relative of the Prophet Muhammad who was killed on the plain of Karbala in Iraq. The practice of Hindus participating in Muharram was a common occurrence in various colonies where indentured Indians had settled, including

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[91] See Deepak Sarma. *Hinduism: A reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 89-120.
[92] Diesel et al."Hinduism", 191.
[93] Diesel et al."Hinduism", 49.
[94] Diesel et al."Hinduism", 31.
[95] Diesel et al."Hinduism"*, 29-31.
[96] Bhana and Vahed. *Gandhi,* 55-57.
[97] See *African Chronicle*.

Trinidad, Mauritius, and Fiji.[98] In Mauritius for example, Muharram became "an occasion for national rejoicing by the people of the locality."[99] While Muharram activities have been well recorded, it is not clear why Muharram was given this priority, although it was also the case that Muslims and Hindus celebrated each other's festivals.[100] Muharram, apart from being a Muslim festival, also contained features such as drinking alcohol, dancing, fighting, and merry-making. There were therefore many reasons for Hindu reformists to end Hindu participation in Muharram. According to Vahed, reformers who voiced disapproval of Hindu participation in Muharram were "powerless to have a discursive impact on the "mass of Indians" during the early decades.[101] The arrival of Hindu missionaries from India would result in a more concerted effort to end Hindu participation in Muharram.

Missionaries and institutional Hinduism

Lala Mokamchand Varman (also known as M.C. Varman), who was from the Punjab, was one of the early migrants who was extremely concerned over the state of Hinduism in Natal. He is often praised in various brochures and books produced by local Hindu organisations for the role that he played in inviting Hindu missionaries to South Africa, often at his own expense, in order to promote the Hindu religion.[102] Reformist minded Hindu leaders, such as Varman, regarded it as imperative to import missionaries to educate local Hindus about the "truths" of their religion. Sometime in early 1905 he appealed to the principal of Lahore College, Mahatma Hansraj, to send a missionary to South Africa to preach the "teachings of Hinduism." Hansraj responded by sending the Arya Samaj missionary, Professor Bhai Parmanand, who arrived in Durban on 5 August 1905. Under the chairmanship of Ramchandra, whose full name is not listed in any of the sources, a reception committee was formed with B.A. Maghrajh and S.D. Moodley as the joint secretaries to

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[98] See Frank J. Korom. *Hosay Trinidad Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) and G. Thaiss. "Contested Meanings and the Politics of Authenticity. The 'Hosay' in Trinidad" in A.S. Ahmed and H. Donnan (eds). *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1994) for Trinidad. See Kelly. *Politics* for Fiji and see K. Hazareesingh. "The Religion and Culture of Indian Immigrants in Mauritius and the Effect of Social Change" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8: 2 (January, 1966) for Mauritius.
[99] Hazareesingh. "The Religion", 249.
[100] Korom points to some of the similarities between Muharram and Hindu festivals - burning of frankincence, competition and play, curative powers of tombs, drumming, and food offerings see Korom *Hosay Trinidad,* 226.
[101] Goolam Vahed. "Constructions of Community and Identity among Indians in Colonial Natal, 1860-1910: The Role of the Muharram Festival" in *Journal of African History*, 43: 1 (2002), 90.
[102] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage*, 88 and Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening* 54 and 56.

welcome Professor Parmanand and organise his lectures.[103] Maghrajh was active as a Hindu leader for most of the period of this study. He was born in Mauritius on 9 July 1873 and migrated to Natal with his family in 1879.[104] He was educated in Durban, and represented the city in soccer, cycling and cricket. He also joined the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and represented Natal at numerous conferences of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) as well as being a member of a number of benevolent societies, including the Indian Child Welfare Society.[105] According to Vedalankar, in the years following his involvement in welcoming Parmanand, Maghrajh was active, and even assumed leadership roles, in several reformist Hindu organizations.[106]

Professor Parmanand, a faculty member of Lahore College, was the first Hindu missionary to visit South Africa and is credited by most Hindus with sowing the seeds for reformation through his lectures as well as the Vedic institutions that he inspired local Hindus to establish.[107] That Varman looked to an institution in India to provide a teacher for South African Hindus is not surprising. His choice, however, is revealing. The Arya Samaj was at the forefront of moves to reform Hinduism in order to defend it against criticisms levelled by Christian missionaries. The Arya Samaj has, over the years, also produced many Hindu nationalist politicians and Parmanand was one of them.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, faced with the pressures of colonial rule and influence of Christian missionaries, many Hindu reformist movements emerged in India to "refine" Hindu practice. They were particularly concerned with what they regarded as inherent weaknesses in Hindu practices, such as the caste system, unequal gender relations and the absence of textual or philosophical Hinduism in place of ritual forms of worship. They sought to promote a more reflective Hinduism free of such practices and placed great emphasis on education.[108] The Arya Samaj, formed in 1895 by Swami Dayananda, was one such reformist organisation. It sought to promote a form of Hinduism based exclusively on the *Vedas*.[109] The idea of a "golden age" when India led the world in knowledge, which they

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[103] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 15.
[104] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 100.
[105] *South African Indian WHO'S WHO and Commercial Directory 1939* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness Ltd, 1939), 145.
[106] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 100.
[107] Sookraj Chotai. "Ambassadors of Hindu Culture, Religion and Philosophy" in Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 83.
[108] See Sugirtharajah. *Imagining Hinduism,* 133-138.
[109] Singh. *Life and Teachings*. 142.

argued was compatible with Western science, was used by Arya Samajists to foster pride among Hindus. Swami Dayananda focused his attention on promoting a monolithic Hinduism, based exclusively on the Vedas and one free of ritual practices.[110] The Arya Samaj promoted a type of Hinduism free of such practices as idol worship, child labour, child marriage, and forced widowhood. Dayananda was critical of both Christianity and Islam which he described as "foreign religions" that did not belong in India.[111]

The Arya Samaj represented a particular approach to Hinduism and many Hindu leaders challenge Swami Dayananda's interpretation. Other Neo-Hindu reform movements that would be established in South Africa in the course of the twentieth century included the Ramakrishna movement[112], Divine Life Society[113], and the *Saiva Sithantha Sungum*[114], while the orthodox missionary movement, Sanathan Dharma*, became more organised itself.[115]

However the first international missionaries to arrive in South Africa were exclusively Arya Samaj and therefore they were most influential in creating Hindu institutions even though the majority of South African Hindus continued to partake in populist religious practices. The factors that instigated the formation of reform movements in India were also present in the plantation colonies where indentured labourers had settled. These factors included poverty the high level of illiteracy as well as inadequate schools and absence of Hindu institutions. Arya Samajists were not only concerned with refining Hindu practices but their philanthropic contributions were also vital to the survival of many communities.[116]

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[110] Naidoo. *Arya Samaj*, 38.

[111] Kelly. *A Politics*, 122.

[112] The movement's first missionary arrived in South Africa in 1934 and in 1946 the first Ramakrishna mission was established in Sea Cow Lake.

[113] Divine Life Society was established in South Africa in 1949 by Swami Sivananda.

[114] Formed in 1937 by Sri Siva Subramoney, a descendent of indentured Tamils. He was born Soobramaniar Reddy on 10 May 1910 in Tongaat. His family moved to Durban and he was educated at the Thiruvaluva Nainaar Free Tamil School in Umgeni Road before being sent to a private Tamil School at the Vishnu Temple in the Magazine Barracks. He soon began teaching Saivism at the Magazine Barracks before teaching Tamil at the Nadaraja Temple in Umhlatuzana. Fed up with the Sanathan practices popular amongst Tamils he established the Saiva Sithantha Sungum to refine Saiva worship. See Diesel and Maxwell. Hinduism, 76. For a biography of Sri Siva Subramoney see the *Graphic*, 9 January 1954 and http://saiva-sithantha-sungum.org/home.html (Accessed 26 November 2010).

[115] Although the religious practices that indentured Hindus brought with them are called sanathan, the first missionary of the movement arrived in 1929 and it was only in 1941 the *Shri Sanathan Dharma Sabha* was established to unite Natal Sanathanists.

[116] See Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening* for their philanthropic work in South Africa and *Arya Samaj* for their work in other places where Indians settled in large numbers. See Kelly. *A Politics*, 131-133 for Fiji.

Bhai Parmanand, the first Arya Samajist missionary to visit South Africa, was born in the Punjab on 4 November 1876 and was a descendent of a famous Sikh martyr, Bhai Mati Das. Parmanand's father Bhai Tara Chand Mohyal was also an active Arya Samaj missionary and was at one time the president of the Hindu Nationalist movement Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha (All India Mahasabha).[117] While remembered by most Hindu institutions in South Africa as a religious leader, Professor Parmanand was also a nationalist politician well known for his views regarding a separate state for Hindus and Muslims. According to M.G. Agrawal, Parmanand wrote in 1905 that:

> the territory beyond Sindh should be united with Afghanistan and North-West Frontier Province into a great Musulman Kingdom. The Hindus of the region should come away, while at the same time the Musulmans in the rest of the country should go and settle in this territory.[118]

Professor Parmanand wrote this three decades before the Muslim League's Pakistan Resolution of 1940 and he was one of the first individuals to advocate a separate state for Hindus and Muslims.[119] Parmanand did, however, change his stance over the course of the next few decades and in 1930, as chair of the Sindh Provincial Hindu Council, argued that the creation of a separate Muslim state would be to the detriment of a future independent India.[120] However, importantly, at the time of his tour of South Africa he harboured doubts about the ability of Hindus and Muslims to coexist. Even when he met with Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi at Wardha in 1933, where Gandhi advocated the unity of Hindus and Muslims in order to overthrow the British, Parmanand argued that Hindus had to first organise themselves into a strong force and then join with Muslims from a position of strength.[121] While Parmanand is an interesting individual in his own right, it is beyond the scope of this study to go into his biography in any detail, his significance for this thesis lies in the fact that he galvanised local Hindus, being the first individual to attempt to unite Hindus in South Africa.

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[117] M.G. Agrawal. *Freedom Fighters of India* (Delhi: ISHA books, 2008), 82.
[118] Agrawal. *Freedom Fighters,* 82. This quote also appears on numerous websites.
[119] Agrawal. *Freedom Fighters,* 80. Also known as the Lahore Resolution the Muslim league demanded the formation of an independent state called Pakistan. See Christophe Jaffrelot (ed). *A History of Pakistan and its Origins* (London: Anthem Press, 2002).
[120] Agrawal. *Freedom Fighters,* 85.
[121] See Desai and Vahed. *Inside Indenture*, 435-436.

On arrival in South Africa on 5 August 1905, Parmanand initially stayed with Gandhi and there is no evidence of tensions or disagreement between them. His first order of business was to establish the Hindu *Sudhar Sabha* (Hindu Reform Society) in Durban with Maghrajh as president.[122] The first known Arya Samaj institution in Natal actually predated Parmanand's arrival.[123] Established in Pietermaritzburg by Babu Padam Singh, it was originally called the Guljar *Sabha* until 1904 when Singh changed the name.[124] Unfortunately, little is known about Singh or the early history of the Guljar Sabha until the second mission changed its name to Veda Dharma Sabha.[125] Although a representative of the movement, Parmanand did not set up Arya Samaj institutions, most likely because the philosophy was unfamiliar to Hindus in South Africa at the time of his visit. Instead, he helped to establish organisations that, although subscribing to a reflective Hinduism, were not called Arya Samaj. While cultural organisations and vernacular schools existed prior to Parmanand's arrival, his presence was nonetheless a spur in establishing organisations countrywide. Bhana and Vahed, for example, listed almost sixty Hindu organisations which were in existence by 1913. While not discounting the initiative of local Hindus, Parmanand, and Swami Shankaranand who followed, provided a major organisational impetus.

Of the Vedic institutions that Parmanand inspired local Hindus to form, the most significant was arguably the Hindu Young Men's Association (HYMA) which was formed in Pietermaritzburg. Aside from being long-lasting, HYMA's significance lay in the fact that it was made up of prominent Tamil-speaking Hindus and was the first organisation in the country whose membership comprised mainly ex-indentured Indians. HYMA can be seen as marking the emergence of a new elite of educated Indians who had taken advantage of the few opportunities which existed for education, and had secured jobs as clerks, teachers, and lawyers.[126] Swan suggests that this new elite redefined "their relation relationship with the merchant class, forming an identity for themselves and in the process re-interpreting their relationship with the underclasses from whom they had arisen."[127] Swan is right to an extent, but the relationship between the educated elite and trading classes was never ruptured entirely. They continued to work together in a myriad of ways, including the political sphere. HYMA was an important organisation and apart from promoting a Hindu reformist message,

[122] Vedalankar, *Religious Awakening,* 16 and 100.
[123] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 120.
[124] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 111.
[125] The exact date that the Guljar *Sabha* was formed is also uncertain.
[126] Swan. *Gandhi,* 16.
[127] Swan. *Gandhi,* 16.

it also played a significant role in promoting education and occasionally took a stance on political issues. Its political influence was limited by its religious orientation which resulted in the exclusion of Muslims and Christians,[128] who comprised an important section of the new elite.

During his short stay in South Africa, Parmanand's lecturing tour took him to Ladysmith, Dundee, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town before his return to India in March 1906. At all these venues he attracted large audiences of Indians as well as whites. Described by Maha Sabha leaders as the "torch bearer of the sublime teachings of Hinduism in the country", Parmanand is credited with making the first attempt to foster awareness amongst Hindus in South Africa of their "common religion" and trying to unite the different linguistic groups.[129] While Parmanand did attempt to establish institutional Hinduism, Swan sees his work as a prism from which to view some of the earliest divisions between reformist and non reformist minded Hindus, as well as between Hindus and Muslims.[130] Professor Parmanand's actions and utterances, however, were moderate in comparison to the Hindu missionary who followed.

Swami Shankaranand and the South African Hindu Maha Sabha

Swami Shankaranand, who followed, Parmanand, had a longer lasting influence among Hindus in South Africa. M.C. Varman was again instrumental in organising the visit of the swami. He appealed to local Hindus for funds in March 1908 to bring a Hindu leader from India. By June he had raised sufficient funds to finance the visit of Swami Shankaranand, an Arya Samaj missionary who was on a lecture tour in England at this time. The swami arrived in Durban on 4 October 1908 and was given a public reception at Congress Hall, which was attended by more than a thousand people, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, as well as a substantial number of whites. The chairman of the Reception Committee was V.R.R. Moodaly, whose name crops up from time to time in this study due to his and his family's involvement in promoting Tamil education and culture. V.R. Rajaruthina Moodaly arrived in South Africa in 1884 and first worked as a clerk for the Durban and later Ladysmith Railways for 12 years before becoming a clerk and translator at the magisterial

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[128] Swan. *Gandhi,* 17.

[129] This is the way that he has been described by many individuals in the Maha Sabha whenever they account for the early history see Chotai, "Ambassadors"*,* 83.

[130] Swan. *Gandhi,* 18.

department which he served for twenty years.[131] He was the president of HYMA at the time and in his speech welcoming the swami, he claimed that Hindus "urgently needed a shepherd" and prayed that "we should prove ourselves worthy of the respect that he has shown us by choosing to come to South Africa."[132]

Swami Shankaranand was born to a Brahmin family in the Punjab in 1866. He was the son of a professor of the Oriental College of Lahore and was first educated at a mission school and later at the Dayananda Anglo Vedic College of Lahore. He became celibate after the death of his wife to lead a more "chaste and religious life." Fluent in Gujarati, Hindi, Persian, Sanskrit and Urdu, he also understood Bengali, English and Marathi. His guru was Swami Shri Atmanandjee Maharaj whom the swami had met in 1887. In 1891 he founded the Society of Celibates in Punjab. As an Arya Samajist he preached against child marriage and promoted religious and social reform which, he argued, were inseparable. He also edited an Anglo-vernacular newspaper which advocated the purchase of goods made in India. In 1894 he founded a High School and two years later became a *sannyasi*.[133] Before his arrival in South Africa he had experience of preaching in Italy, France, Scotland and England.

The swami's work in South Africa has been dealt with in some detail by Vahed and it while I follow his interpretation there are a number of issues he identifies which are pertinent to this study.[134] The first is that the swami was very popular and highly influential among a large number of Hindus, especially the poorer classes who, prior to his arrival, felt unrepresented. He also established Hindu bodies throughout Natal.[135] The swami's prime concern was to unite Hindus and for that reason he avoided referring to himself or his work as being inspired by the Arya Samaj so as not be typecast as a proponent of a particular Hindu sect. Rather, he claimed to represent all Hindus. When he inspired local Hindus to establish reform oriented institutions, he refrained from calling them Arya Samaj but chose such names as Veda Dharma Sabha. He even changed the name of Padam Singh's Arya Samaj to Veda Dharma Sabha on 10 April 1909 which continued to function throughout the period of this study. When translated to English the name refers to a religious body based on

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[131] *Dharma Vir*, 30 August 1918.
[132] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 3.
[133] See Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand"; Desai and Vahed. *Inside Indenture* and Bhana and Vahed. *Gandhi*.
[134] While I have consulted some of the sources that Vahed has used I cite his work to acknowledge that the argument is not original but repeated here because it helps emphasise points that are relevant to this study, namely the idea that the Swami provided the first form of leadership to the indentured and post indentured masses, most of whom were Hindu, and his role in promoting a Hindu consciousness.
[135] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 4.

the ancient Hindu texts, the *Vedas*. This name change avoided potential stigma from those who were critical of the Arya Samaj.[136]

The swami's popularity amongst poorer classes was illustrated most powerfully when he organised a meeting of more than 2000 Hindus in Mayville to protest against the killing of two cows in September 1909. Not only does this incident illustrate his popularity but it also showed how he was able to use the opportunity to create a heightened sense of Hindu consciousness by rallying Hindus around this issue. In his address to the mass meeting the swami declared that the cow was sacred to Hinduism, and that its life was as important as that of a human being.[137] The swami seemed to have succeeded in conveying his message, for as the *African Chronicle* reports that "women were crying and shedding torrents of tears as if their very children were being snatched away by the mighty hand of the messenger of death."[138] Some even offered themselves to be shot in lieu of the cows.[139] This incident not only captures the impact that Swami had in raising a Hindu religious awareness amongst the poor but, Vahed suggests, the broader significance is that the swami was the first individual to provide the Hindu majority with a form of leadership. Gandhi, it should be remembered, was busy in the Transvaal with the satyagraha campaign during the swami's stay in the country.

An important and long lasting contribution of the swami was his role in getting Diwali recognised as the national festival for Hindus. The fact that Muharram was a widely celebrated religious festival amongst Hindus, and that the indentured were given time off for this festival, concerned the swami. He regarded the celebration as "ridiculous ceremonials adopted through unreasonable imitation and slavish fashion, costly rituals, these and such as these arrogantly usurped the title and misnomer of religion."[140] In 1909 the swami made a request to the Town Clerk that 12 November be set aside as a holiday for indentured Indians to celebrate Diwali. The Town Clerk's office replied that its investigation into the matter revealed that Diwali was an occasion celebrated by "better class" Indians only.[141] On the very day that the Protector of Indian Immigrants was notified of the matter he had in his office

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[136] Not all educated Indians in Natal supported the Arya Samaj. Some influenced by the Gandhi's approach to Hinduism were critical of the *Arya Samaj*. See *African Chronicle*.
[137] Desai and Vahed. *Inside Indenture*, 242.
[138] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 5.
[139] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 5.
[140] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 7.
[141] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 8.

four migrants, two North Indian and two South Indians, and all of them, he claimed, saw Diwali as less important than other Hindu festivals.[142] Also important is that the authorities were reluctant to grant Hindus a day off to replace Muharram as Hindus celebrated eighteen festivals and they were unsure which one was universally observed.[143] The swami, as an Arya Samajist, sought to replace the ritualistic practices that most of the indentured celebrated, with Diwali, the festival of lights. His efforts eventually proved successful as from 1910 indentured Indians and schoolchildren were granted a day off to celebrate Diwali.[144]

The swami's lectures countrywide were widely attended and came to command great influence. In April 1912 he met with a number of Hindu leaders at the Vedic Ashram in Durban where they explored the possibility of establishing a Natal Hindu Maha Sabha to unite Hindus in the province. S.R. Pather, a lawyer, who typified the new elite, put forward the idea that they should form a national body rather than a provincial one. This meant that the possibility of a South African Hindu Maha Sabha was placed on the table. Singaravaloo Ruthnum (S.R.) Pather was born in Durban in April 1889 to parents who had migrated from Mauritius and established a jewellery business. Pather was educated in Durban and London where he was a member of the London Indian Society between 1906 and 1909. He played a leading part in student activities, including the organisation of a protest against the treatment of Indians in South Africa in 1907.[145] It was in London that Pather first met Swami Shankaranand. When he returned to South Africa Pather played a leading role in various bodies, including the Durban Hindu Young Men's Society, of which he was a founding member, the NIC, and the South Coast Junction Temple.[146]

Impressed with Pather's suggestion, the swami convened and presided over a conference to discuss the establishment of a national body of South African Hindus. This conference took place in Durban between 31 May and 2 June 1912. The adverts that appeared in the *African Chronicle* requested delegates from "all Hindu associations, temple committees and temples in South Africa" to attend a conference that aimed "to devise means to popularise the teachings of the Hindu religion", "to devise means to make this Religious Conference a permanent institution", and "to appoint officials to further the cause of the

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[142] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 8.
[143] Desai and Vahed. *Inside Indenture*, 241.
[144] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 8.
[145] *South African Indian WHO'S WHO and Commercial Directory 1960* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness Ltd, 1960), 172.
[146] *WHO'S WHO* 1960, 172.

conference by communicating with the various Hindu societies in South Africa."[147] To publicise the proposed conference, V.R.R. Moodaly organised a parade of school children with banners and marched with them to a number of Hindu institutions urging their leaders to attend the conference. Moodaly's wife, Mrs V.R.R. Moodaly, who was one of the very first Indian women teachers in Natal, organised women volunteers to participate in a similar march. The conference attracted delegates from Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Kimberly, Johannesburg, Pretoria, and various parts of Natal. Their attendance was possible largely because of the tireless work of the organising committee who arranged with the immigration department to grant entry permits to delegates, as inter-provincial migration was prohibited.[148] While the conference was a success in terms of the large attendance, it received mixed reactions.

According to contemporary reports as well as those looking back at the formation of the Maha Sabha, the main purpose of the conference was to unite Hindus in order to defend Hinduism from the threat posed by Christian missionaries. In his 1960 account tracing the history of the Maha Sabha, B.D. Lalla, a member of the then Maha Sabha council, wrote that the Maha Sabha was formed at a time when Hindu leaders in the country realised "that unless they co-ordinated their efforts, there was little hope for the survival of Hinduism which was threatened from all sides."[149] It was not made clear how Hinduism was threatened from all sides, but this was certainly the perception among delegates and remains the narrative to the present. Other issues discussed at the conference included the promotion of religious education, both at schools and the various Sabhas that were being formed throughout the country; the establishment of more Sabhas; and encouraging more women to become active and assumed leadership positions in religious and cultural occasions. No doubt the influence of Mrs V.R.R Moodaly would have played a role in raising the question of the status of women.[150] Proceedings at the conference angered some delegates who chose to distance themselves from the Maha Sabha because they felt that the swami's speech, in which he attacked Gandhi's political program, went beyond the religious matters that were on the agenda. The swami's critique of Gandhi reflected the deteriorating relationship between the

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[147] *African Chronicle,* 18 May 1912.
[148] Desai. "A History", 92.
[149] Lalla. "A Review", 108.
[150] Desai. "A History", 92.

two men. One of the swami's accusations was that Gandhi worked for the benefit of wealthy Indians only and neglected the needs of poorer Hindus.[151]

The swami's sentiments caused the *African Chronicle* to remind its readers that "a perusal of the speech will convince our readers that it is not a true reflex of the opinion of the majority of the Hindu public."[152] Some delegates dissociated themselves from the Maha Sabha. These included the United Hindu Association of Cape Town, whose two representatives, P.A. Joshie and C.B. Gihwala, complained that the speech was political rather than religious.[153] Kimberley representative, K. Kalidas Patel, proclaimed that Kimberley's Hindus also dissociated themselves from the swami and the Maha Sabha. This was confirmed at a public meeting in Kimberley. Representatives from the Tamil Benefit Society also claimed to have been misled into thinking that the conference's focus would be religious when in fact there was a strong political bent. Criticism was also levelled against the swami by a Christian visitor, J.M. Lazarus who claimed that he was not permitted "to refute some of those groundless statements" made by the swami against Gandhi because he was a Christian.[154] Lazarus argued that the swami was unable to support his accusations with evidence and that he would contribute £3.3s to any charity of the swami's choosing if he, the swami, was able to support his accusations.[155]

Regardless of the critics, however, many delegates supported the formation of a Maha Sabha, and its first officials included S. R. Pather, T.M. Naicker, R. Kanhaye and M. B. Naik as joint secretaries, and T.V. Pather and M.H. Desai as joint treasurers. Most of these officials made a massive contribution to the Sabha as well as other cultural bodies over many decades, as some brief profiles illustrate. Thungavelu Murugeas (T.M.) Naicker was born in Umgeni in September 1889. His father Muragesa Naicker was a pioneer merchant and farmer. Naicker was educated at the Higher Grade Indian School and thereafter entered the teaching profession. From 1909 to 1912 he was headmaster of the Umbogintwini Government aided Indian School (Isipingo) and later joined the Umgeni Government Indian School. He was actively involved in public works for many years, including being president of the Young Men's Vedic Society; Natal Indian Teachers Society and the Umbilo Hindu Temple. He also

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[151] Vahed. "Swami Shankeranand", 14 and see *Indian Opinion*, 8 June 1912.
[152] *African Chronicle,* 8 June 1912.
[153] *Natal Advertiser*, June 1912.
[154] *Natal Advertiser,* 4 June 1912.
[155] *Natal Advertiser,* 4 June 1912.

occupied administrative positions in many Indian sports organisations, and was himself a renowned footballer, cricketer and bantamweight boxer.[156] Morarjee Bhikhabhai (M.B) Naik, a Gujarati-speaking Brahmin, was born in Surat in 1875 and educated in Navasari and Surat City. He came to South Africa in 1904 and settled initially in Pietermaritzburg before moving to Durban. He was at one time the vice-president of the NIC and president of the Surat Hindu Association and Surat Hindu Educational Society. He was a committee member of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and former secretary of the Bombay Presidency Hindu Association and first secretary of the Veda Dharma Sabha. M.H. Desai was a businessman, being managing director and proprietor of the Crescent Trading Co (Pty) Ltd, wholesale merchants and importers.[157]

Officials of the Maha Sabha fell into that group which Swan categorised as either business or educated elites. They were not priests or qualified in matters of religious dogma, but their wealth and education gave them the means to contribute to multiple voluntary associations. Also noteworthy is that several of them, or their families, had moved to Natal from Mauritius. This raises the question of whether the support for a Maha Sabha in South Africa may have resulted from the existence of a similar organisation there. The answer is in the negative since a Hindu Maha Sabha was only formed in Mauritius in 1925 to coincide with the centenary celebrations of the birth of Swami Dayananda. Unlike the South African Maha Sabha the Mauritian version was led by Sanathanists to serve as a counter movement to the Arya Samaj, sparked by the increased activity in the Arya Samaj during the 1925 celebrations.[158] According to Hollup, two exclusively Arya Samaj bodies were behind the drive to unite Hindus in Mauritius.[159]

In South Africa, the Maha Sabha, while led by many who supported the Arya Samaj, did not claim to be an Arya Samaj movement. The Arya Samaj movement became a factor in Mauritius at about the same time as it did in South Africa. Its origins date to soldiers from the British Indian Army who were stationed in Mauritius between 1897 and 1903 and introduced Arya Samaj literature, including Dayananda's *Satyarth Prakash* and *Sanskar Vidhi*.[160] The

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[156] *WHO'S WHO* 1960, 142.

[157] *South African Indian WHO'S WHO and Commercial Directory 1936* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness Ltd, 1936), 11.

[158] Oddvar Hollup. "The disintegration of caste and changing concepts of Indian ethnic identity in Mauritius in *University of Pittsburgh- Of the Commonwealth System of Higher Education*, 33: 4 (Autumn, 1994), 321.

[159] Hollup. "The disintegration", 289.

[160] Vedalankar. *Arya Samaj,* 103-104.

first Arya Samaj was formed in 1903 and missionaries such as Manilal Doctor (1907) and Chiranjiva Bharadwaj (1911) followed.[161]

On 17 May 1913 Swami Shankaranand sailed for India. Two weeks later, on 31 May 1913, the Maha Sabha held its second national Hindu conference, which took place under the presidency of Kasani Ramasami (K.R.) Naidoo, with S. R. Pather and T. M. Naicker as joint secretaries, and T.V. Pather and M.H. Desai as joint treasurers. However, nothing tangible transpired from this conference and although the Maha Sabha had been formed amidst much publicity and fanfare, it failed to build on this. This was due to a number of factors. One was the departure of the swami which left a huge leadership vacuum among Hindus; the strike in late 1913 occupied the attention of many Indian leaders while the outbreak of the First World War from 1914 to 1918 resulted in many of the educated elite volunteering as stretcher-bearers in East Africa. The next chapter examines developments among Hindus and Hinduism during the inter-war years.

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[161] Hollup. "The disintegration", 307.

CHAPTER TWO:
INSTITUTIONS AND MISSIONARIES, 1912-1932

The Maha Sabha was largely dormant in the two decades following the departure of Swami Shankaranand from South Africa. This period is nevertheless important to understanding the development of Hinduism in South Africa. While the Maha Sabha was inactive, its founding members, as well as others who would join the organisation upon its revival in the 1930s, were active in other voluntary organisations, which ran the gamut from religious, linguistic and cultural to political associations. While these individuals represented a minority of the Hindu population, their activities were highly influential and extended far beyond their numbers. This chapter examines the work of some of these organisations, and their leaders, and their attempts to establish institutions that they saw as key to maintaining the culture, language, and religious practices of Hindus. Such organisations are important because they and their members would constitute the core membership of the Maha Sabha when it was revived in the 1930s. As important as local leaders and the institutions that they formed were the visits of missionaries who played a key role in stimulating local interest in various aspects of Hinduism. Visiting missionaries mostly played a positive role, though occasionally they did cause religious disputes locally.

After completing their indentures, some Indians accumulated wealth through land purchase or as traders. During the inter-war years, many Indians continued to work in agriculture as market gardeners and hawkers, but most eventually came to rely on industrial employment as the economy of Durban expanded.[162] The majority lived under difficult economic circumstances. In addition to their economic difficulties, Indians were also denied a political voice in the country. In the absence of state aid of any sort, voluntary associations were vital for the survival of large numbers of Indians as they provided a bare subsistence to sections of the Indian community,[163] while organisations such as the NIC, TIC, NIO, SAIC and CBSIA spearheaded protest against laws that were designed to subjugate Indians politically.

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[162] See Bill Freund. *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class of Durban 1910-1990.* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995) and Raymond Burrows. *Indian life and labour in Natal* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1961).

[163] For a discussion of the importance of voluntary associations see Kuper. *Indian People,* 80-94.

Voluntary organisations were extremely important as they provided assistance of various kinds – they established schools, societies that provided religious and vernacular instruction, and extended their reach to projects that assisted the economically downtrodden. Some of these bodies had a religious bent and it was through their work that the Maha Sabha was eventually resuscitated.

Religious and cultural organisations: education

When the Maha Sabha eventually became an active player among Hindus, it functioned primarily as a federal body constituted by six major Hindu organisations. Two of these were South Indian, representing Tamils and Telugus respectively, two were Hindi, representing Samajist and Sanathanist perspectives, and two were Gujarati, representing migrants from Kathiawad and Surat respectively. Their involvement in the Maha Sabha meant that the organisation was fully representative of the Hindu community in terms of language, region of origin, and denomination, even though other groups continued to function outside of the Maha Sabha. The early history and predecessors of these organisations are traced briefly below.

One of earliest attempts to organise Tamil education was made by the *Sathia Gnanam Sangam* which opened a Tamil school in 1895.[164] Another school was built by two Tamil scholars from Madras, Nursoo Pillay and Rajaruthna Mudaliar in 1899.[165] By 1915 there were private Tamil schools across Natal, with a strong focus on religious instruction.[166] When the HYMA was established in Pietermaritzburg in 1905, a Hindu Young Men's Society (HYMS) was formed in Durban with Rajaruthna Mudaliar as president, while the Hindu Sudha Sabha was formed for older Tamils. These organisations merged in 1912 to form the Natal Tamil Vedic Society but it soon became defunct.[167] On 2 November 1912, the Young Men's Vedic Society (YMVS), another reform oriented Tamil organisation, was

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[164] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 68 and Kuppusami, *Tamil Culture*, 43. The first attempts to educate Indian children in South Africa was made by Christian missionaries beginning with Roman Catholic priest Father Jean-Baptiste Sabon who opened the first school for Indians in Natal in 1867 and was followed by the Methodist Reverend Ralph Stott. Joy Brain argues that by the 1890s, many Tamil speaking Hindus began looking for Tamil teachers to open up schools. These schools began to increase and included both mother tongue and Hindu religious instruction. Joy Brain. "Religion, Missionaries and Indentured Indians" in Bhana (ed) *Essays*, 212.

[165] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 47.

[166] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture,* 43.

[167] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 47.

founded in Durban. This was due largely to the influence of Swami Shankaranand who urged prominent local Tamils to form a society to preserve their culture. The YMVS held dramas and concerts to keep alive interest in the vernaculars.[168] Its members organised weekly lectures on Hinduism with an emphasis on the *Saiva Sithandham*. The society also conducted adult classes in the Tamil language and organised the first Natal Tamil Conference in 1925.[169] Its presidents included the likes of T.M. Naicker and P.R. Pather, who would become prominent in the Maha Sabha.

The Hindu Tamil Institute (HTI)

The Hindu Tamil Institute (HTI) was founded in 1914 to promote Tamil education and culture by starting Tamil Schools. Its origins can be traced to a Tamil school established in 1899 in Bond Street, Durban, by, amongst others, V.R.R. Moodaly. T.M. Naicker was educated at this school. The original principal, Venketanarosoo Pillay, was brought from Mauritius, and after his return, the school was run by V.R.R. Moodaly and his family.[170] As the demand for education grew, Moodaly found it necessary to create a formal institute to organise Tamil education, hence the formation of HTI in 1914.[171] During his tenure as trustee, V.S.C. Pather, assisted by S.K. Naidoo, erected a building that served as a Tamil school and community hall, which became one of the most important gathering places for Hindus in the province.[172]

Vythilinga Soobramania Coopoosamy (V.S.C.) Pather was a significant leader in the Maha Sabha, being present at the original conference of 1912 and playing a key role in its revival. Pather was born in Kimberly on 2 June 1887 and was educated at the Higher Grade Government Indian School in Durban. After completing his schooling he secured a job as a clerk with a wholesale company and thereafter joined an estate agent's office. He subsequently founded an estate agency Pather & Co and also served as a sworn translator of Tamil of the Supreme Court of South Africa, Natal, and was made a Commissioner of Oaths in 1934.[173] Pather was also prominent in the NIC, and served as both deputy president and president of the SAIC of which he was one of the founding members in 1923. Pather was a member of the SAIC deputation that went to India in 1926 in connection with a bill that

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[168] Nowbath et al (eds). *The Hindu Heritage*, 130.
[169] Kuppusami, *Tamil Culture*, 49.
[170] *Graphic*, 23 August 1963.
[171] *Graphic*, 23 August 1963.
[172] Nowbath et al (eds). *The Hindu Heritage*, 130.
[173] *WHO'S WHO* 1936, 125.

sought to introduce land segregation.[174] Pather was a fervent promoter of vernacular education. According to Kuppusami, he was very knowledgeable on religious texts and was especially well versed in *Saivism* and *Saiva* devotional literature and was often called upon to give speeches in Tamil on *Saivism* and *Saiva* saints. He submitted articles in Tamil in a Durban weekly newspaper, the *Senthamil Selvan.*[175]

Closely associated with many religious and cultural bodies in Durban, Pather drafted the constitution for the Umgeni Road Sri Vaythianatha Esparar Alayam, served as trustee of the YMVS, was chairman of the first Tamil Conference in Durban in 1925, was a trustee of the Gandhi-Tagore Lectureship Trust, president of the Durban Indian Surf Life Saving Club, and an active member of the Durban Child Welfare Society.[176] Like many of the local elite his membership and influence extended over a myriad of organisations.

By 1917 the HTI had raised sufficient money to build a private Tamil school in Cross Street, an area around which a number of Tamil families lived. The school run by Pillay and Mudaliar was closed and its students transferred to Cross Street where Mudaliar was the principal. He was replaced in 1920 by another Tamil scholar, Sankaran Muniswami Pillay, at which time there were 220 pupils. In the early 1930s the school became government aided and Tamil classes were conducted after school hours.[177] Vernacular education after school hours became the norm for many government aided Indian schools.[178]

Nadarajan Pillay was the principle teacher for the HTI. He was born in Thanjvur, Tamil Nadu in 1862 and came to Natal in 1896, working first as a shop assistant. In 1903 he opened a business in Durban, which he ran for three years until becoming a Tamil teacher and welfare worker. He taught at May Street for six years and then started a private school in Umgeni road in 1917, which was officially opened by businessman Balaguru Chettiar who is discussed in Chapter Four.[179] Pillay ran the school for nine years in spite of financial difficulties until, with the help of other prominent Tamils, he raised £200 to purchase a

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[174] *WHO'S WHO* 1936, 125.
[175] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 87.
[176] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 87.
[177] *Graphic*, 23 August 1963
[178] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 49. A government-aided school was one whereby Indians contributed to the building of the school, while the government school was that established by the government. For a brief overview on Indian education in Natal see C. Kuppusami. "A short history of Indian Education" in *Fiat Lux*, 1 May 1966.
[179] See page 101-102.

property in May Street. With financial assistance from Parsee Rustomjee, the MK Gandhi Senthamil School was built on that property and officially opened by Sarojioni Naidu during her tour of South Africa.[180] The HTI and the YMVS became two important Tamil organisations that represented Tamils until their merger in 1951 to form the Natal Tamil Vedic Society which represented Tamils in the Maha Sabha.[181]

Another influential Tamil cultural leader was Virudachalam Pillay who was born in Tamil Nadu in 1880 and migrated to Natal in 1911 where he started a small business, but soon turned his attention to promoting Tamil literature and culture. In 1914 he opened a printing press and began publishing a weekly Tamil newspaper and Tamil books for *Shiva* worshippers.[182] In 1917 he established the Tamil *Agam* with Abboy Naidoo as chairman, to train Western educated Tamils in their own language so that they could pass this on to the wider community. Many Tamil leaders who would be prominent in the HTI and YMVS during the 1930s were trained in this *Agam* by Pillay. However, when Pillay returned to India in 1924 the *Agam* fell into disuse.[183] At the Magazine Barracks, Ragavan Pillay began a Tamil night school in 1924 for the children of municipal workers. He did not charge for this service. In 1925, a Temple committee was formed and a Vishnu Temple was built at the barracks. The night school was converted into a parents association which taught Telugu and Hindi from 1926.[184]

While there was a large Telugu and Tamil population in Tongaat it was only around the time of Union in 1910 that attempts were made to form a cultural organisation. The first Tamil body was called the Sanmarka Bodha Sabha, which was replaced in 1912 by the Hindu Samarasa Bodha Sabha, which built the first Tamil school in Tongaat and catered for Telugu children as well. In 1914 Rajarutha Pillay appealed to Tongaat's Telugu population to promote the mother tongue and after much canvassing the Tongaat Andhra Sabha was established in 1915 and they built an *Andhra Patshala* to teach Telugu. The two Sabhas merged in 1921 to form the Tongaat Hindu Sanmarka Bodha Andra Sabha. Tamil and Telugu

[180] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 48.
[181] *Graphic*, 23 August 1963.
[182] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture,* 43.
[183] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 49.
[184] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 50.

education in Tongaat was conducted solely by this organisation until 1983 when Indian vernacular languages were introduced to the syllabus in government schools.[185]

Andra Maha Sabha

Other than the odd Sabha being formed to promote the Telugu language, there was no attempt to promote a separate Telugu identity, and Telugus came to be seen as synonymous with Tamils, especially to outsiders. Telugus did not have an organisation to specifically represent them until the arrival in 1929 of the second Indian Agent to South Africa, Sir Kurma Reddi.[186] Reddi was a Telugu and delivered many speeches in that language. This inspired a local Telugu named V.M. Naidoo, who at the time was the principal of the M.K. Gandhi Library, to organise meetings to promote Telugu culture. These meetings took place in Bond Street on the premises of businessman A.J. Naidoo. They attracted Telugu leaders such as Pandit Nayanarajh, who is discussed later in this chapter, and on 14 May 1931 the *Andra Maha* Sabha was founded with V.M. Naidoo as president.[187] Leaders of these South Indian bodies were mainly of a passenger background from either Mauritius or India who took it upon themselves to educate poorer Tamils and Telugus in their culture and vernacular. When the Maha Sabha was revived they represented the South Indian voice in the organisation.

Surat Hindu Association

Gujarati migrants had also organised themselves during the formative decades of settlement. On 1 August 1907 Gujarati migrants from Surat organised themselves into the Surat Hindu Association. The motion to form this association came from Odhav Kanjee who called on Hindus from Surat to form the association and Jinabhai Deasai who argued that since all communities in Natal form societies to carry out their work, Hindus from Surat should do the same.[188] By 1910 the organisation had raised sufficient funds to purchase property in Victoria Street. V.M. Naik offered his services as a teacher to an Anglo-Vernacular school for Hindu and Muslim children.[189] Some Gujaratis were from Kathiawad. While there were differences between Gujaratis from Surat and Kathiawad, the latter only

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[185] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 58.
[186] After a set of agreements were reached between the South African and Indian Government at the Cape Town Round Table conference of 1926 / 27 it was agreed that an Indian Agent (whose title changed from Agent, to Agent-General to High Commissioner) would be stationed in South Africa to administer the treatment of Indians and intervene on their behalf.
[187] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 115.
[188] Bhana and Vahed. *Gandhi,* 62.
[189] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 137.

organised themselves into a separate body in the 1940s.[190] However there were in these formative years a number of associations that represented the interests of migrants from Kathiawad including the Natal Lohana Niti Darshak Sabha (1905), Kathiawad Arya Sabha (1907) and the Kathiawad Pattani Soni Association (1905).[191]

The Arya Yuvuk Sabha (AYS)

The formation of these associations showed the initiative of local Hindus in attempting to maintain aspects of their religious and cultural practices and language. However, the dormancy of the Maha Sabha meant that there was no central body to coordinate their activities or seek to promote an overarching Hindu identity. This remained the situation until the formation of a body to coordinate the activities of the various Arya Samaj associations in Natal, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha. It was these Arya Samaj leaders who, in turn, would identify the lack of an umbrella Hindu body and common voice as threatening the very "survival" of Hinduism in South Africa, and therefore pushed to revive the Maha Sabha. Since the drive to establish the APS and unite Hindus came largely from the leaders of a particular reformist body in Durban, it is important to look briefly at its early history.

The AYS played an important role in promoting the Hindi language and *Vedic* culture. Founded primarily to "preserve and pursue, protect and propagate the essential purity of *Vedic* culture" and promote a Hinduism "shorn of all its superficial and extraneous growth that shrouded the *Vedas* and *Vedic* faith",[192] this reformist body served the community on various levels. Its founder and president for the first 28 years was D.G. Satyadeva, an enthusiastic follower of Swami Dayananda. He founded the Arya Balliah Mundal at the beginning of 1912, but when Swami Shankaranand visited on 19 April 1912, he changed the name to Arya Yuvuk Sabha (Noble Youth Society).[193] The AYS would form the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha in 1925, whose members would revive the Maha Sabha in 1933.

One of the aims of the AYS was to promote the Hindi language which, its leaders argued, was necessary for understanding ancient *Vedic* scriptures. The importance of Hindi in understanding *Vedic* scriptures was emphasised by Swami Dayananda who had originally

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[190] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 137.
[191] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 125.
[192] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure in commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha (1912-1972)", 89.
[193] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure", 89.

argued that Sanskrit was the authentic language of Hinduism, but later promoted Hindi as the language for all Hindus and the required medium to understand the ancient Hindu texts.[194] The AYS, being a parochial body, could opt for Hindi, unlike the Maha Sabha which claimed to be the national body of South Africa's Hindus and chose English as its medium of communication so as not to offend any particular linguistic group among Hindus, although many of its members propagated mother tongue education through their membership of other associations. Both Satyadeva and the secretary of the AYS, Pandit Nayanarajh, were ardent promoters of Hindi education. They each established Hindi night schools at their homes, Satyadeva in Victoria Street and Nayanarajh in Sea Cow Lake.[195]

D.G. Satyadeva was born on 7 July 1889 as Damrie Geriou Deva[196] in Verulam and received an education at a mission school which he had to leave at the age of nine owing to the sudden death of his father. He found employment with the Durban Corporation and used his earnings to purchase books on the Hindi language and the *Vedic Dharma* for the Hindi school that he opened at his home before establishing the AYS.[197] In 1921, when the AYS brought Pandit Ishwardut Vedalankar to Natal to preach, the pandit performed a ceremony to change the names of some of the AYS leaders to incorporate the word "satya" or truth. Thus Deva was changed to Satyadeva.[198] In spite of the meagre wages paid by the Durban Corporation, Satyadeva was one of the most important contributors to the Arya Samaj project in South Africa and played an important role in the Maha Sabha.

Pandit Nayanarajh was born in Umgeni on 10 February 1891 and educated in English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. Swami Shankaranand taught Nayanarajh to perform *Sandhya* and *Havan*, during his stay in South Aftica. Nayananrajh also performed Vedic *sanskars* and *suddhi* ceremonies and gave public expositions of Sanskrit *Mantras*. Apart from the Hindi

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[194] For founding principles of the Arya Samaj in Bombay see Singh. *Life and Teaching*, 103-104. The foreword to this book was written by Bhartendra Nath who argued that Swami Dayananda "realising that the Indian society's drawback is its disunity and division, he gave the call of one God-Om, one religion Vedic Dharma, one scripture-Hindi, one caste Arya and one method-Sandhya." However some scholars, such as Vickie Langohr, have argued that the promotion of Hindi as the medium for understanding Hindu scriptures was an aim by *Arya Samaj* leaders in India as part of the Hindu nationalist drive to "unify the Hindu community and marginalize the 'Muslim' language Urdu" see Vickie Langohr. "Colonial Education Systems and The Spread of Local Religious Movements: The Cases of British Egypt and Punjab" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47: (2005), 163.

[195] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure", 91.

[196] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure", 8. His original estates paper, following his death in 1961, listed his name as D.G. Deva but this was change to D.G. Satyadeva in 1967. See MSCE 1951/1961 and MSCE 2470/1967.

[197] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 95.

[198] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure", 12.

night school, he also established the Arya *Yuvuk Mandal* in 1929 to act as an offshoot of the AYS in Sea Cow Lake. According to Vedalankar, he faced opposition from "orthodox" Hindus in the area who claimed that "only Brahman-born Hindus had the right to perform *sanskars*."[199] Being Arya Samaj in orientation, the *Mandal* gave all individuals, irrespective of caste, the right to perform *sanskars.[200]* It was in 1929 that the first international Sanathanist missionary, Pandit Ramgovind Trivedi, visited South Africa and this may have also influenced the opposition to the Pandit Nayanarajh's *Mandal*.

An important recruit to the AYS's cause was S.L Singh who joined very early in its history. Singh was a prominent businessman who was born in 1896 in Durban where he received his secular education at the Higher Grade Indian School and was educated in Hindi by Pandit Ambaram Thaker. Singh was a significant community leader who was an official of the CBSIA and secretary of the Sir Kurma Reddi Unemployment Relief Committee in the early 1930s. He was involved in trade union organisation, held administrative positions on many sports bodies and was a contributor to the *Natal Advertiser* on Indian sports.[201] These biographies emphasise that those who participated in these organisations were usually educated individuals of means, who were involved in a range of organisations.

Apart from mother tongue education and the promotion of Hinduism, the AYS also conducted plays in Hindi from 1916 to raise funds to finance charitable projects. A sub-group of the AYS formed the *Arya Yuvuk Bhajan Mandal* for this purpose. The first plays were re-enactments of Shakespearean plays conducted in Hindi, and later the *Mandal* performed plays based on Hindi traditions.[202] The AYS was thus able to continue its work and made use of the HTI Hall for organising Hindi education for adults and children. Satyadeva was instrumental in this project and served as a Hindi teacher on a voluntary basis.[203]

The AYS was assisted in its mission to promote *Vedic* religion and culture, and the Hindi language, by Pandit Bhawani Dayal, who shared many of the same ideals.[204] Dayal was one of the most important South African-born Hindu leaders. His contribution is

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[199] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 83 and 104.
[200] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 83.
[201] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 97-98.
[202] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure", 96.
[203] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure", 93.
[204] He was initially a Pandit and in 1927 became a *sannyasi* (ascetic). Due the frequency with which his name appears in this thesis, he is referred to simply as Dayal. This should not be taken as a mark of disrespect.

discussed in detail in Chapter Three. While he did not serve as an official member of the AYS for any extended period of time, his travels to and from India on numerous occasions, and experiences in working with prominent Indian political and religious leaders, as well as extensive tours throughout both countries to promote the Hindi language and the *Vedic* religion, made him a great asset to the AYS, which gave him its fullest support and provided funding when he organised the second South African Hindi literacy conference on 20 December 1917 in Ladysmith.[205] Dayal performed a number of ceremonies for the AYS and addressed many of their meetings. On 16 March 1918, for example, he performed the *suddhi* ceremony and "reconverted" two Christian converts and one Muslim convert back to Hinduism at the HTI Hall before a large crowd.[206] Both Dayal and Satyadeva repeatedly emphasised the importance of uniting Hindus in South Africa and both men played important roles in the revival of the Maha Sabha.

The Aryan Benevolent Home

The origins of the Home date to an incident in April 1918 when Satyadeva witnessed an old Indian man being assaulted by a constable for taking shelter in a public toilet. This concerned him and he contacted Pandit Nayanarajh and S.L. Singh with the idea of starting a shelter for destitute Indians who were becoming visible on the streets of Durban. The AYS formally agreed on 7 July 1918 to initiate such a project and by the end of the year, it purchased a small wood and iron building in Mayville. The home was named the Aryan Benevolent Home and was officially opened on 1 May 1921 by Dayal. The occasion was marked by the presence of community leaders such as P.R. Pather, A.L. Paul, the Reverend B.L.E. Sigamoney, and B.A. Maghrajh.[207] While membership of the AYS was influenced by religion, the home received encouragement and financial donations from Indians of all faiths, and has catered for Indians regardless of their faith, though the majority of inmates have been Hindu.[208] Aside from private fundraising, the ABH appealed for funds through Indian newspapers and staged Hindi plays, while one interviewee, J.V. Desai, recalled that Satyadeva would go by bicycle from house to house appealing for funds.[209]

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[205] AYS. "A Souvenir Brochure", 92 the first Hindi Literacy conference which was held in 1916 was also in Ladysmith and organised by Dayal by was funded by a Ladysmith organisation called the Nagri *Pracharini Sabha* which was formed by Dayal in the same year see *Hindi*, 27 November 1925 and Vedalankar, *Religious Awakening*, 92.

[206] *Dharma Vir*, 4 April 1918.

[207] *Natal Advertiser*, 5 May 1921.

[208] M. Govender. "Foundation of the Aryan Benevolent Home" BA Hons dissertation, University of Durban Westville, 1987, 22.

[209] Interview with J.V. Desai, 24 March 2010.

In an article complementing the ABH for helping destitute Indians in Natal regardless of religious orientation, C.F. Andrews spoke of "the universal benevolent practice by Aryans not only in South Africa but in many foreign countries." He was particularly impressed that the ABH was not confined to followers of the Arya Samaj but that the majority of its inmates represented "laborers from South India." This, he claimed, was common in other places where he had worked and added that without such philanthropic contributions by followers of the Arya Samaj, the "conditions of Indian emigrants abroad would have often sunk."[210] His sentiments again capture the important philanthropic work undertaken by Arya Samajists.

Brief Revival of the Maha Sabha

The *Hindu Heritage,* magazines and other ephemeral publications by the Maha Sabha, as well as newspaper accounts of the Maha Sabha's revival conference of 1934, convey the idea that after the departure of Swami Shankaranand, the Maha Sabha was inactive for two decades. This is not strictly true as there was a brief period in 1918 when the Maha Sabha was revived and held a council meeting in Durban and general meeting in Pietermaritzburg, with the Veda Dharma Sabha of Pietermaritzburg and HYMA playing central roles.[211] At the beginning of 1918 when news that the Maha Sabha would be revived appeared in the *Dharma Vir,* a newspaper established by Arya Samaj leader R.G. Bhalla, and edited by Dayal and S.R. Pather, one of its readers wrote in to explain why a national Hindu body was important. The correspondent argued that the Maha Sabha was "a vital necessity to us [Hindus] if our community is to progress with the times." He added that since there was "no organisation at present to speak with authority on behalf of Hindus" the energies of the smaller organisations that functioned independently of each other "are consequently wasted to an extent." The Maha Sabha, the writer went on, should pursue "first and foremost religious reform" as Hinduism contained "all the elements of a pure and noble faith" but in the course of centuries "certain practices and usages have crept into it which appear obnoxious to the minds of the younger generation."[212] These views are similar to those of Maha Sabha leaders during the 1940s and 1950s when they argued that ritual Hinduism made

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[210] *Hindi*, 2 June 1922.
[211] One reference is made to the general meeting which took place in Pietermaritzburg on the 13 October 1918 in Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 96 under the title "provincial convention." The same meeting is referred to as the "Maha Sabha General Meeting" in the *Dharma Vir,* 18 October 1918.
[212] *Dharma Vir*, 25 January 1918.

the youth receptive to missionary overtures. The solution was to "reacquaint" Hindus with their texts as this would appeal to the youth who received a secular education.[213]

The Maha Sabha held two meetings in 1918. The first took place on 1 September at the HTI Hall in Durban with R.G. Bhalla as chairman. Aside from Bhalla, of those who had attended the first Hindu conference of 1912, Dayal, Satyadeva and S.R. Pather participated in this meeting, with Charlie Nulliah and S.R. Naidoo offering their apologies.[214] At the time of the meeting there were seventeen associations that were affiliated to the Maha Sabha and the council called on all those who were not yet affiliated to the Maha Sabha "to do so as early as possible."[215] The meeting also acknowledged the work of V.V.R. Moodaly who had passed away on 19 August 1918. The influence of Christian missionaries on Hindu children was another issue discussed and it was deemed necessary to impress "upon all Hindu parents the urgent necessity of protesting against any religious instruction being given to their children in Christian Missionary schools" as well as urge the authorities to establish Government schools in the towns and districts where there were none resulting in Hindu children being sent to Christian Missionary schools.[216] The council also saw it as important to approach the education authorities about introducing Indian vernaculars in government and government aided schools. An interesting issue discussed was the possibility of merging the Maha Sabha with the South African Hindi Sahitya Sammalan (SAHSS) "in view of the objects of both institutions being one and the same."[217] The meeting also discussed holding another general meeting later in the year in Pietermaritzburg, and the possibility of a third Hindu conference in December 1918.[218]

While the third Hindu conference did not take place, the Maha Sabha held a general meeting on 13 October 1918 at the HYMA Hall in Pietermaritzburg. The meeting was chaired by R.G. Bhalla. Charlie Nulliah, Dayal, Satyadeva, S.R. Naidoo, S.R. Pather and V.S.C. Pather, all of whom had been present at the first Hindu conference of 1912, were amongst those in attendance.

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[213] See chapter three and four.
[214] For a list of those present at the 1912 conference see Desai. "A history", 92.
[215] *Dharma Vir*, 6 September 1918.
[216] *Dharma Vir*, 6 September 1918.
[217] This is interesting since the Maha Sabha sought to unite all Hindus in South Africa whereas the SAHSS was primarily concerned about promoting Hindi and even saw it as necessary that all government circulars affecting Indians be published in Hindi. For more on the SAHSS see *Dharma Vir*, 11 January 1918.
[218] *Dharma Vir*, 6 September 1918.

The delegates resolved to approach the government on several issues which remained a concern to Indians in general, and Hindus in particular: recognition of Hindu marriage ceremonies, establishment of government schools in "various towns and districts" where Indian children were forced to attend Christian mission schools, and introducing Indian vernaculars at government schools. Dayal read out a letter written by Swami Shankaranand, in which the swami stated that he wanted to return to South Africa but would only be able to do so after the war. [219] However, there was no follow-up from these meetings and the Maha Sabha ceased to be active once Bhawani Dayal left for India in 1919, which suggests that he had been the driving force behind these two meetings.

The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (APS)

The year 1925 marked the birth centenary of Swami Dayananda: the occasion was celebrated throughout the diaspora by Arya Samaj bodies. Since South Africa lacked a central Arya Samaj body, Satyadeva decided that the AYS would take a leadership role and on 4 November 1924 convened a meeting for the specific purpose of discussing how the occasion should be commemorated in South Africa. [220] The meeting attracted delegates from ten Arya Samaj bodies and was chaired by Dayal, with Satyadeva as secretary and B.A. Maghrajh as treasurer. [221] Dayal, as the most qualified religious figure, was elected to preside over the commemorations from 16 to 22 February 1925 in Durban. Lectures dealing with the life and teachings of Dayananda were held each night. [222]

On Saturday 21 February 1925 at 12:00, a "meeting of scholars" at the HTI Hall discussed the life and teachings of Dayananda. This was followed by a conference at 14:30, at Rawat's Bioscope in Durban, which was attended by 136 delegates from all over the province. [223] Babu Rughunath Singh presided at the conference, while R.K. Kapitan was chairman of the reception committee. B.R. Singh was a resident of Ladysmith who served as president of the Ladysmith Arya Samaj for many years and was chairman of the First Hindi Literacy Conference organised by Dayal. [224] Kapitan was born in Navsari, Gujarat, in 1892 and came to Natal in 1904, where he ran a successful restaurant business. He was deeply influenced by Dayananda and in fact sent his children to be educated at famous Arya Samaj institutions in India. His son was sent to the *Gurukul* Kangri and his two daughters to the

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[219] *Dharma Vir,* 18 October 1918.
[220] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage*, 157.
[221] *Natal Witness*, 12 March 1925.
[222] *Natal Witness,* 12 March 1925.
[223] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 31.
[224] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 108.

Jalandhar Kanya Maha Vidyalaya.[225] Kapitan urged his audience to "discard evil methods" and follow the teachings of the *Vedas*, "whereby a great community will emanate." He praised the work of Hindu institutions in helping the less fortunate and stressed the importance of promoting vernacular education which he said would make the Indian community more "useful."[226]

In his long speech, B.R. Singh dealt with the status of Indians in South Africa and expressed his gratitude to visiting missionaries who, he emphasised, had done a great deal to ensure the "progress" of Hinduism and helped to raise the status of the community. He concluded with a long speech on the life of Dayananda, whose teachings and deeds he urged the audience to emulate. Singh was followed by Kumari Dhun Devi, a young woman who spoke on men's duty to women. The day ended with a ceremony at the Tamil institute in the evening.[227]

On 22 February 1925 the delegates met again at Rawat's Bioscope and after lengthy discussion, decided that in view of the success of the celebrations and in particular the high turnout throughout the week, they would constitute a formal structure, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha ('Representative Society for Nobles'), to serve as the central umbrella organisation for Arya Samaj bodies in Natal.[228] The Natal APS was founded on the following principles.

i.   Abstinence from alcoholic drinks
ii.   Performance of 16 *Samskaras*.
iii.   The recitation of *Sandhya* prayers and *havan* daily
iv.   Holding feelings of love and brotherhood for all people
v.   Removal of the caste system
vi.   Encouragement of mother tongue education
vii.   Education of women

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[225] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 107. The Arya Samaj split into two groups in 1902 with the Swami Shraddhanand breaking away from the DAV to form the *Gurukul* Kangri. While the DAV was mainly concerned with promoting the education of males, the *Gurukul* encouraged the establishment of institutions such as the Kanya Mahavidyalaya to educate girls See Madhu Kishwar "Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21: 17 (April, 1986).
[226] *Natal Witness*, 12 March 1925.
[227] *Natal Witness*, 12 March 1925
[228] *Natal Witness*, 12 March 1925. Despite various searches, the Kumari Devi was most likely the daughter of Satyadeva.

Elections were held and Dayal was chosen as president, B.A. Maghrajh as honorary secretary, R.K. Kapitan as honorary treasurer, and P.R. Pather as assistant secretary. Kapitan and Pather resigned their positions shortly after the conference owing to work pressures and were replaced by B. Urit and Satyadeva respectively.[229] It is important that P.R. Pather, a Tamil speaker, was elected secretary, given that the Arya Samaj movement had its origins in North India and was seen by many scholars as a Hindi movement due to its strong support for Aryan culture. Although he is remembered more for his role as a political leader,[230] P.R. Pather gave yeoman service to many cultural, religious and welfare bodies. The Mauritian-born Pather is an interesting figure because of his ambivalent relationship with the Maha Sabha.[231] He opposed the Maha Sabha in the 1930s but by the 1950s promoted some of its most important projects, and was elected as the Maha Sabha's president in 1960, when Indians were commemorating their centenary in South Africa. Pather was also secretary of the Hindu Tamil Institute from 1918 until its demise in 1951.

The APS became an important Hindu organisation and given its role as the umbrella Arya Samaj body, it is no surprise that Naidoo argues that it filled the gap left by the non-functioning Maha Sabha.[232] Although there is no evidence in any of the contemporary newspapers examined for this project, Naidoo concludes from a number of interviews that he conducted with APS leaders during the 1980s that the formation of the APS was a catalyst for tensions between Samajist and Sanathanists.[233]

The APS wasted little time in getting to work. Within the first year of its existence it secured permission from the government for nominated Hindu preachers to preach in prisons on Sundays, as Christian preachers were already doing.[234] On 4 October 1925 a Vedic conference was held in Ladysmith, and the large turnout gave the APS a huge boost in its foundational year. Dayal put his newspaper, the *Hindi*, to good use in promoting publicity for the two conferences. Besides the current members of the APS, the conference was also attended by Hindu cultural leaders such as V.S.C. Pather, P.R. Pather, and R.B. Maharaj. The conference began with a *Havan* ceremony followed by an address by conference chairman Pandit Ramsunder Patak, who became the Samaj's official priest in Ladysmith and president

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[229] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 33.
[230] Interview with J. V. Desai and Riashnee Pather. "There is so much that is not written, people had so much to say: The story of PR. Pather the grand old man of Indian politics in South Africa" (BA Hons dissertation UKZN, 1998), 50.
[231] *WHO'S WHO 1960*, 171.
[232] Naidoo. *Arya Samaj*, 70.
[233] Naidoo. *Arya Samaj*, 79.
[234] Veer D. Bista. "A Brief Biography" in R. Rambilas (ed). *Karma Yogi: Swami Bhawani Dayal Sanyasi* (Durban: Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 1992), 18.

of the Dannhauser branch.[235] After Patak's address, Dayal was elected to preside, while Satyadeva and R. M. Naidoo were elected as the two secretaries.

In his presidential speech, which the *Hindi* recorded as having gone on for more than an hour, Dayal again stressed that had it not been for the visit of "great persons" from India, referring both to the Arya Samaj missionaries, as well as the political leaders such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Gandhi, "we might still be darkness." He added that in places like Jamaica, Trinidad, Suriname and Demerara,[236] which Indian religious and political leaders did not visit, "the people there fell into the clutches of other denominations and forgot their own." He also stressed that it was essential for people to be united, "especially Hindus in this country," not only politically but socially and religiously as well. He called for unity between "Sanathanists and Samajists" which he called "the two eyes of Hinduism", and stressed that both were "followers of the same great Vedic Religion."[237] Dayal described them as "two streams of the same river" and "two fruits of the same tree," the same analogy that he would use years later when he described Islam and Hinduism as "the two eyes of Hindustan."[238]

Dayal's emphasis on unity between Samajists and Sanathanists may be seen to give credence to Naidoo's assertion that the formation of the APS was a catalyst for tension. On the other hand, Dayal had travelled extensively throughout Bihar in North East India as an Arya Samaj preacher and may have witnessed tension between these two approaches and was warning against its replication among South African Hindus. Dayal was sensitive to South Indian Hindus and expressed disappointment that there was no literature in South Africa in Tamil on the *Vedas* and he made a special request to those in attendance to do something about it. Other important themes in his speech were the education of girls and what he saw as the "degeneration" of Hindu youth. He urged elder members of the community to guide the youth on the "right lines."[239]

Other speakers at the conference included P.R. Pather, M.C. Varman and T.M. Naicker. Raghunath Singh received a special address by the Durban Arya Samaj for his tireless work and financial contribution towards the hosting of the conference. At the end of proceedings, an official constitution was drawn up, which stipulated that the APS would propagate the Vedic religion, import Vedic preachers from India, and achieve the principles

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[235] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 107.
[236] Originally a Dutch colony situated in South America, it was captured by the British and became amalgamated to other British colonies to form British Guiana in 1831.
[237] *Hindi*, 16 October 1922.
[238] Bhawani Dayal. *Abdulla Ismail Kajee* (Ajmer: Pravasi-Bhawan, 1941), 21.
[239] *Hindi,* 16 October 1922.

agreed upon at the February conference.[240] There was a gloom over proceedings because a few days prior to the conference, Satyadeva's daughter had been badly burnt in an accident. He continued to help organise the conference and travelled to Ladysmith but was called away in the middle of proceedings as she passed away on the day of the conference.[241]

The APS held its third conference at the HYMA Hall in Pietermaritzburg over the weekend of 31 July and 1 August 1926. R.B. Maharaj presided as Dayal was representing the SAIC in India. He clearly had the credentials for the responsibility. Ramchor Beharry Maharaj was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1894 and educated at the local Higher Grade Indian School. He also studied Hindi under a local Pandit named Shivanarain Panday.[242] Maharaj was a successful bookkeeper, president of the Pietermaritzburg branch of the NIC during the 1920s and 1930s, founding member and president of the Hindu United Service League, a member of the Indo-European Joint Council, Indian representative of the South African Prisoners Aid Society, member of the Pietermaritzburg Veda Dharma Sabha, and a prominent local Pandit.[243]

In his opening speech to the conference, S.L. Singh stressed that the unity of Hindus in the country would lead to the "betterment" of this community."[244] The theme of unity dominated proceedings and there was discussion around Singh's suggestion that a round table conference of Hindu societies be held to discuss the formation of an organisation that would unite them. This was akin to reviving the Maha Sabha. According to Vedalankar, this did not materialise due to the reluctance of some institutions.[245] The promotion of mother tongue was also highlighted, and it was decided that future proceedings at conferences and record-keeping of the APS would be in Hindi. While characteristic of Swami Dayananda's plan for the Arya Samaj in India, the use of Hindi was potentially a negative factor in recruiting members since Tamil speakers constituted the majority of Hindus in South Africa.

In his presidential address, R.B. Maharaj argued that the *Vedas* were central to their religion and that all Hindus should follow Swami Dayananda. He added that Hinduism was a grand religion and that it was their duty to "discard all the extraneous customs which have crept into" it. He quoted Max Muller that the *Rig Veda* was the oldest religious book, to emphasise his point. Maharaj also emphasised the importance of female education.[246]

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[240] *Hindi,* 16 October 1922.
[241] Vedalnakar. *Religious Awakening,* 33.
[242] Vedalnakar. *Religious Awakening,* 98.
[243] *WHO'S WHO* 1936, 94.
[244] *Natal Advertiser*, 5 August 1926.
[245] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 35.
[246] *Natal Advertiser*, 5 August 1926.

Although the APS affiliated to the umbrella Arya Samaj body in India, the Sarvedeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, on 23 October 1927,[247] it failed to build on the momentum generated by the centenary commemorations of the birth of Swami Dayananda.

This may be partly blamed upon the impending passing of the Areas Reservation Bill later in 1925. To rally support in India against this bill a number of important South African leaders, including Dayal, were sent to India. The fact that political leaders also tended to dominate the membership of religious organisations was detrimental to the latter. For example, the Tamil Maha Sabha was founded in 1924 with 22 affiliated bodies and temple committees, and held the first Tamil conference in 1925 with P.R. Pather and V.S.C. Pather as secretary and chairman respectively.[248] Both Pathers went to Cape Town to attend the SAIC conferences and V.S.C. Pather was also part of the deputation sent to India and the organisation lost momentum as they became occupied with political developments.[249] The Round Table Conference in Cape Town in 1926-27 between the Indian and South African governments, the question of repatriation and the difficulties faced by returning migrants, which took up the attention of Dayal who wrote a book on the subject, and the difficulties faced by Indians as a result of the Great Depression, all captured the attention of leaders of these religious organisations.[250] The result was that the APS was largely inactive.

Travelling Missionaries

Hindu missionaries who visited South Africa during the 1920 and 1930s helped shape the content and direction of Hinduism locally. Chapter One documented the valuable contribution of Bhai Parmanand and Swami Shankaranand at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their work was continued in the 1920s by missionaries who travelled across the globe conducting lectures, forming Hindu institutions or working with existing institutions in order to propagate Hinduism, and establish organisations with a focus on the social, economic, and cultural needs of Hindus. They were not only influential in creating and maintaining institutional Hinduism in South Africa, but also shaped in important ways the

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[247] The Arya Samaj South Africa. "History of the Arya Samaj in South Africa)
http://apssa.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52:history-of-arya-samaj-south-africa
accessed on the 21 November 2010.
[248] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 49.
[249] Kuppusami. *Tamil Culture*, 50 and 98.
[250] See Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie. "The Cape Town agreement and its effects upon Natal Indian politics, 1927-1934" (Paper presented to the conference of History of Natal and Zululand, University of Natal, Durban, 1985) and Bhawani Dayal and Benarsidas Chaturvedi. "A Report on the Emigrants Repatriated to India under the Assisted Emigration Scheme from South Africa" an independent study published B. Dayal and B. Chaturvedi. 15 May 1951.

policies pursued by the Maha Sabha. In this regard we need to keep in mind the policies that they pursued; how they were received by local Hindus; their impact among Muslims and Christians; their influence on local institutions; and the web of interconnectivity that existed between places where Hindus settled.

The term "missionary" was originally coined to refer to French Jesuit priests who travelled to foreign lands to preach the word of the bible.[251] Arya Samaj preachers saw it as their mission to propagate the *Vedas* to maintain a "Hindu heritage" in the colonies. Concerned that Hindus abroad were practising a form of Hinduism which they regarded as based on blind superstitions and devoid of the "fundamental truths" of Hinduism, and that many were consequently becoming receptive to other faiths and converting, Arya Samaj missionaries travelled abroad to discourage such practices and promote *Vedic* teachings to enlighten Hindus about what they regarded as the true nature of Hinduism.[252] This view emerges explicitly in literature produced by international Arya Samaj bodies.

Arya Samaj missionaries who travelled to various colonies in the early twentieth-century provided interconnectivity. In his study of Colombo (Sri Lanka), Mark Frost refers to the importance of religious movements such as the Arya Samaj in the "cultural exchange and intellectual debates" between "learned elites" across imperial cities or what he calls "cultural entrepôts."[253] Multilingual Western-educated religious missionaries were vital in the exchange of ideas between locations where Hindus had settled. Benedict Anderson's notion of "print capitalism" as a tool for fostering nationalism is vital to understanding transnational affiliations between elites of subjugated communities.[254] The role of preachers who conducted lectures and performed demonstrations (of the "correct" or "authentic" performance of certain ceremonies) was equally vital in communicating certain ideas of Hinduism across colonies. The arrival of a particular missionary in a colony in some cases led to an increase in militancy amongst the youth and in other cases the development of bodies to establish schools and welfare centres.[255]

Swami Manglanand Puri

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[251] Danie T. Reff. "Contextualizing missionary discourse the Benavides Memorials of 1630 and 1634" in *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 50: 1 (Spring, 1994), 51.
[252] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 48.
[253] Mark Frost. "'Wider Opportunities' Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo 1870-1920" in *Modern Asian Studies*, 36: 4 (October, 2002).
[254] See Robert J. Foster. "Making National Cultures in the Global Ecumene" *Annual Review of Anthropology*,. 20 (1991).
[255] See Kelly. *A Politics,* 131-139 and Steven Vertovec. "Religion and ethnic ideology: the Hindu youth movement in Trinidad" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13:2 (1990).

Swami Manglanand Puri visited Natal in 1913 on the invitation of the AYS and conducted a series of widely attended lectures. Described as an eloquent speaker in Hindi, his lectures attracted large numbers of youth, many of whom, according to Vedalankar, joined the Arya Samaj movement. One youth who was particularly receptive to the swami was R. B. Maharaj, who would become one of the most important Arya Samaj leaders in the country. However, the swami found it difficult to adapt to the conditions of the country which resulted in his departure within a few months.[256]

Pandit Ishwardut Vedalankar

Ishwardut Vedalankar arrived in Durban from East Africa in October 1921. Apart from giving lectures, which attracted large audiences including Muslims and Christians, he read portions of the sacred Hindu text the *Ramayana* to large gatherings and gave demonstrations of the "correct" method of performing *Sanskars* and *Havan*. He introduced archery to local Indians, whom he impressed with feats of physical strength through his demonstrations of Yoga and *pranayam*. According to Nardev Vedalankar this included the breaking of a large stone to pieces on his chest and being able to stop a car from moving forward.[257] Nardev Vedalankar also points out that Ishwardut Vedalankar was the first graduate of the *Gurukul* to visit South Africa. He departed the country on 16 December to continue his preaching in England.[258]

Sangitacharya Pandit Pravinsingh

On 23 February 1922, Sangitacharya Pandit Pravinsingh arrived from East Africa at the invitation of G.B. Rughubeer. He was well versed in Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu and Persian and highly experienced, as he had been preaching in India and abroad for more than two decades. Unlike previous missionaries he also introduced singing as a means of propagating the Vedic religion which proved popular with large crowds.[259]

The pandit's visit aroused controversy. On 19 May 1922, D.D. Puri, General Secretary of the APS in East Africa, wrote to *The Hindi* accusing the pandit of falsely claiming to be a graduate of *Gurukul* Kangri; of charging the APS an unreasonably high monthly stipend; and disregarding instructions given to him. Puri claimed that the APS cancelled the pandit's tour but gave him a certificate of satisfactory service to expedite his

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[256] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 26.
[257] Vedalankar, *Religious Awakening,* 26.
[258] Vedalankar, *Religious Awakening,* 26.
[259] *Hindi*, 12 May 1922.

departure from the country. He warned locals to be wary of the pandit.[260] Dayal sent a representative to interview the pandit, following which he defended the pandit against all accusations and concluded that there was no reason to let the accusations "spoil the character of a gentleman whose career and actions appear spotless" without any tangible facts.[261]

Pandit Pravinsingh spent six months in South Africa before returning to India. In 1925 he travelled to Siam (Thailand), and returned to South Africa in 1927 at the invitation of the Shree Ramayan Sabha of Overport. He taught music and Hindi, opened night classes to teach Sanskrit, and when another missionary, Dr Bhagatram, arrived in 1929, the pandit assisted him in his attempts teach the Vedas. The pandit spent just over two years assisting the Shree Ramayan before returning to India.[262]

Pandit Karamchand

Pandit Karamchand arrived in South Africa on 1 June 1927 on a collection drive for the DAV college of Kadiana, India. He was accorded a public welcome by the Veda Dharma Sabha of Pietermaritzburg on 7 August 1929 and delivered four lectures at the HYMA Hall which conveyed his strong Arya Samaj inclinations. He explained the major themes of the *Vedas*, stressed the importance of education, quoting extensively from ancient texts to support such claims, condemned child marriage, and the caste system. His also argued for universal brotherhood, monotheism, and explained reincarnation.[263]

The pandit created controversy by claiming that neither the Bible nor the Quran was divinely inspired. This angered Abdul Hamid Kadria, a Muslim missionary from Bagdad who was lecturing in Johannesburg at the time.[264] He challenged the pandit to a firewalking contest where both individuals would walk through a fire with their respective religious text in hand and the individual who walked out unharmed would prove the legitimacy of his text. Kediri added that the pandit's words had caused his "blood to boil" and that he was issuing the challenge as a "duty" to his religion. Kadria said that if the authorities did not permit this he was prepared to engage in a debate with the pandit.[265]

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[260] *Hindi*, 19 May 1922.
[261] *Hindi*, 26 May 1922.
[262] Vedalankar, *Religious Awakening,* 28.
[263] Undated article taken from the *Natal Witness* see R.B. Maharaj Collection of Press Cuttings.
[264] *Natal Witness*, 9 August 1927.
[265] *Natal Witness*, 1 August 1927.

The *Natal Witness* labelled this dispute as the "Koran verses the Veda." Karamchand replied by calling the test "foolish" but agreed to participate in a debate. This challenge, and the debate that followed, received attention from the *Natal Witness* for several weeks. Some wanted to see the individuals engage in the fire walking challenge while others wanted a debate. In the end neither took place and the pandit returned to India after spending three months in Natal.[266]

A Sanathanist response: Dr Bhagatram and Pandit Trivedi

As part of his world tour, Dr Bhagatram Sahagal, an honorary preacher of the All India Aryan Youth League of Delhi began his missionary work in East Africa in 1928 where he presided over the All East Africa Aryan Conference. In Uganda he motivated Hindus to build a Vedic Temple; and in Dar-es-Salaam he presided over various literacy and religious conferences, and raised funds for a girls' school and boys' *Gurukul*.[267] While on tour in East Africa, Dr Bhagatram was invited by the Natal APS and arrived on 2 February 1929 with his wife and three children.[268] Dr Bhagatram was the first missionary to be accompanied by his family, and this was a major boon as she was also an Arya Samaj preacher and preached to women throughout the province. On 25 May 1929 she inspired a group of Durban women to form the country's first *Stree* Arya Samaj (Women's Arya Samaj). Dr Bhagatram established new Arya Samajes in Pietermaritzburg, Newcastle, Sutherlands, Port Shepstone and Stanger, and convinced leaders of existing Hindu institutions to change their names to Arya Samaj.[269] However, the Veda Dharma Sabha of Pietermaritzburg refused, and a number of its members broke away to form an Arya Samaj.[270] The refusal to change the name may have been largely due to the legacy of the Swami Shankaranand who changed the name from Arya Samaj to Veda Dharma Sabha on 10 April 1909 as there is no evidence of theoretical differences.

Dr Bhagatram had an intensive programme of speaking engagements. On 24 February he addressed the Shri Satya Vedic Dharma Yagyasi Sabha of Cato Manor on "Ancient Civilisation;" on 28 February 1929 he was hosted by the APS at the HTI Hall and spoke on "Teachings of the Arya Samaj;"[271] R.B. Maharaj and the Tamil community of Pietermaritzburg hosted him on 30 March and he gave a lecture on "The Teachings of the

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[266] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 28.
[267] *Indian Opinion*, 22 February 1929.
[268] *Indian Opinion*, 22 February 1929.
[269] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 26.
[270] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 152.
[271] SC/O/APS 000948 858/191

Bhagawat Gita";[272] from 1–4 April he spoke at the HYMA library on "The Principles of Hinduism", "Aryan Heroines" (for Ladies only), "The Message of the Vedas" and "Twinkling Star in Darkness" respectively; on 6 April he gave a lecture titled "Sanathan Dharma" in Pentrich; on the 7th he spoke on "What is the Arya Samaj?" in Richmond; from 9–12 April he delivered lectures at the HYMA hall on "Bhagvat Gita", "National Education", "A Call to Youth" and "Yoga Philosophy" respectively; on 13 April he spoke on "Unity and Religion" in Howick; and on 14 April he gave a lecture on "Universal Religion" in Sutherlands.[273] As this schedule shows, he was engaged almost every night until his departure on 7 July 1929.[274]

The arrival of Pandit Trivedi from Mauritius in February 1929, at the same time that Dr Bhagatram was in the country, was to lead to a major conflict. He was given a welcome reception from the APS and invited to attend their meetings until it became clear that he was a Sanathanist rather than an *Arya Samaj*. Trivedi, according to Vedalankar, was the first international non Arya Samaj missionary to visit the country. [275]

In an editorial, the *Indian Opinion*, well aware of the tensions between these tendencies in India, was hopeful that the two preachers would get along in South Africa, and hoped that both preachers would have a positive effect on reforming Hinduism "in Natal where the ignorant class predominates." The Isipingo Temple was singled out because thousands of animals were ritually slaughtered there each year. The editorial added that "no enlightened Hindus" were interested in ritual worships to the goddess Khali, body piercing, or firewalking. It described the practices as "evil" and claimed that they resulted in other evils such as drinking and gambling.[276] While the majority of South Africans practised a Sanathan form of Hinduism, Pandit Trivedi was the first overseas preacher to promote it. On 9 March he organised a Sanathan Dharma conference at the Deport Road Temple, with R. Rajcoomar as chairman and K.M. Maharaj as honorary secretary.[277] *Indian Opinion* reported that the conference attracted a large gathering of "Hindus of all denominations", including Dr Bhagatram and Bhawani Dayal who spoke at the conference. Pandit Trivedi called for the

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[272] SC/O/APS 000948 858/185
[273] SC/O/APS 000948 858/184
[274] He lectured throughout until his departure. See SC/O/APS 000948 858 for a complete list of his lectures during his stay in South Africa.
[275] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 29.
[276] *Indian Opinion*, 22 February 1929.
[277] *Indian Opinion*, 8 March 1929.

establishment of a body to unite all "followers of the Sanathan Dharma under one banner." He said that in all the colonies that he had visited, including Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Trinidad and Fiji, Hindus were devout followers of Sanathan Dharma and emphasised that the various social problems faced by Hindus in South Africa would be solved by the "revival of the ancient faith."[278]

Bhagatram and Trivedi soon clashed publicly as one sought to eradicate populist practices performed by local Hindus, while the other promoted them. Divisions ran so deep that on 17 March 1929 a "Hindu Mass Meeting" was held at the Royal Picture Palace in Durban "to consider the unconstitutional proceedings" of the South African Sanathan Dharma Conference which had been organised by the Durban temple committee. The mass meeting was organised by, amongst others, M.C. Varman, B.A. Maghrajh, S.L Singh, D.G. Satyadeva, R.G Bhalla and R.K. Kapitan. Bhagatram was also present and an invitation was sent to Trivedi "to attend and render an explanation to the masses."[279] Trivedi ignored the challenge and on completion of his tour returned to India, while Bhagatram headed for England on 7 July 1929.

Professor Ralaram

The visit of Professor Ralaram of the Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, Hoshiarpur, India, who arrived on 8 February 1932, was an important turning point in once again sparking interest in a Maha Sabha.[280] He came as guest of the Durban *Arya Samaj* in conjunction with M.C. Varman and the APS.[281] He lectured across throughout Natal, as well as the Transvaal and the Cape. According to a report in *Indian Opinion*, his February 1932 visit to Ladysmith attracted "Indians of all denominations and Europeans," including well known Christian priests. The meeting was presided over by Mayor W. Cochratie.[282] Speaking in Johannesburg he urged the establishment of an umbrella Arya Samaj body to unite the existing Hindu institutions and to coordinate their activities. He warned that a "failure to unite would result in the loss in their Indian Identity."[283]

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[278] *Indian Opinion*, 15 March 1929.
[279] SC/O/APS 000948 858/182.
[280] *Indian Opinion*, 19 February 1932.
[281] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 54.
[282] *Indian Opinion*, 19 February 1932.
[283] Narendra D Pandya. *The Samaj an outline of the history of Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj 1932-1982* (Johannesburg: PNJ Publishers, 1982), 16.

The professor departed in March 1932 after spending almost a year in the country. His call led to a number of meetings among Hindus which culminated in the formation of the Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj (THSS) in 1933 to promote the "social, moral and religious upliftment of Hindus in the Transvaal."[284] Unlike the ephemeral Tamil Maha Sabha, the Seva Samaj proved durable and expanded its activities significantly. One of the first tasks that it set for itself was to bring a lecturer from the Ramakrishna mission to South Africa.

Visiting missionaries, who often travelled to various colonies to minister to Hindus, were vital in the exchange of ideas between locations as well as in stimulating Hindus in various settings to undertake a serious study of their religion. They also helped to establish institutions that catered for the various needs of Hindus, ranging from the religious to the economic. Sometimes the ideas of missionaries challenged orthodox practices and beliefs and this created acrimony and conflict. Rarely did the arrival of a missionary not lead to an upsurge of religious activity. While most missionaries were India-born, the name of Bhawani Dayal crops up repeatedly in most of signal events affecting Hindus during these decades. He was an exception in that he was South African-born, and it is his story and the attempts to revive the Maha Sabha in the 1930s that the next chapter examines. It is also evident that the role of visiting missionaries remained crucial.

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[284] *Indian Opinion*, 2 February 1934.

CHAPTER THREE:

BHAWANI DAYAL AND THE REVIVAL OF THE MAHA SABHA IN THE 1930S

This chapter traces the biography of Bhawani Dayal, who was central to many of the developments in Hinduism in the years following the departure of Swami Shankaranand until 1941 when he decided to settle in India. Dayal's life is particularly interesting as it involved a complex matrix of relationships that crossed reformist Hinduism, the proselytisation activities of the Arya Samaj, the position of Indians in the diaspora, Indian politics in South Africa, and nationalist politics in India. Dayal was also unique among key Hindu leaders during this period as he was South African-born. While Dayal's was undoubtedly an important indigenous voice, visiting missionaries Pandit Mehta Jaimini and Swami Adhyananda also played a crucial role in reviving the Maha Sabha in the early 1930s and among Hindus in general. As was the case with earlier attempts this revival of the Maha Sabha would prove to be ephemeral.

Swami Bhawani Dayal[285]

Aside from his religious work, Bhawani Dayal was a widely recognized political leader who travelled to India on numerous occasions to raise concern over the predicament of Indians in South Africa as well as that of other overseas Indians. Dayal travelled extensively across India, South Africa and areas in East Africa to promote the Hindi language and *Vedic* faith. In 1927 he became the first South African-born individual to be admitted to the order of *sannyasi* and on May 1938 was elected as the president of the Natal Indian Congress, the first Hindu to occupy such a position. His contribution to the political and religious life of Indians locally and abroad has gained him recognition from many famous international leaders including C.F. Andrews, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Henry S.L Polak, Mohandas K. Gandhi, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Jawaharlal Nehru.[286]

Bhawani Dayal was born in Johannesburg on 10 September 1892. His parents Jairam Singh and Shrimati Mohini Devi, had come to Natal under the indentured system. After

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[285] The details on Dayal's childhood are drawn primarily from two biographies, one by Prem Agrawal who first met Dayal in 1931 and compiled the work in 1939, and another by Veer Dev Bista (1992). The latter study draws on an autobiography titled *Pravasi Ki Atma Katha*, which Dayal published in Hindi in 1947.

[286] Sources used to verify information in the two above sources include contemporary articles on Dayal written by various international figures and which appear in several compilations of press cuttings housed in the Documentation Centre at UKZN.

serving their indentures they moved to Johannesburg where Singh established himself as a businessman and was eventually elected president of the Transvaal Indian Association, which was one of the earliest Indian associations headed by former indentured Indians.[287] Through his work in the organisation Singh came into close contact with Gandhi and his last years in South Africa were spent assisting Gandhi to distribute copies of the *Indian Opinion* in the Transvaal. Dayal was a regular reader of the paper.[288]

Dayal grew up in the overcrowded location set aside for Indians in Johannesburg which lacked basic sanitation. He was educated at the Wesleyan Methodist School where he learned English, and received instruction in Hindi at a private school conducted by Pandit Atmaram Narshiram Vyas, a Gujarati Brahman.[289] Dayal's mother passed away in 1899, when he was just six, and two months later his father took him and his two siblings to live in Durban as refugees during the South African War. The family returned to Johannesburg when the war ended in 1902, but were ejected like many other Indian families who returned after the war.[290] After a brief stay in Natal, Jairam Singh returned to his home town of Bihar.[291] Dayal continued his education in Bihar, with an emphasis on Hindi literature, which he studied with private tutors. At the age of fourteen he took over the management of his father's land and gained farming experience. He was a subscriber and contributor to a Hindi newspaper called the *Venkateshwar Samachar*, which was his first experiment with journalism.[292] In 1910 Dayal's father arranged his marriage to Shrimait Jagrani Devi, daughter of a local landowner. Dayal taught her to read and write and she would later assist him to run a school in South Africa.[293]

During his stay in Bihar, Dayal experienced firsthand Hindu practices that troubled him. This included the caste system, untouchability, ritual animal slaughter at a Khali temple where he spent some time, and the community pressure that his father faced when it was discovered that prior to her marriage Dayal's mother was a child widow, which was frowned upon by orthodox Hinduism. Jairam Singh told the *Panchayat* that "if the brethren of this society do not want to accept my children, I am prepared to leave them and enter the fold of

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[287] *Hindi,* 27 November 1925.

[288] Prem Agrawal. *Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi: A Public worker of South Africa* (Etawah: The Indian Colonial Association, 1939), 8.

[289] Agrawal. *Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi*. 6-8.

[290] The first law targeting Indians in the country, Law No. 3 of 1885 was never implemented until after the war.

[291] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 7.

[292] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 8 and *Hindi,* 27 November 1925.

[293] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 9.

this society." Although Singh did not forsake his family, this caused Dayal to question Hinduism and he contemplated conversion to Christianity.[294] Dayal's period of doubt ended when he came across an article in a Calcutta newspaper, the *Veer Bharat*, warning that a book by Swami Dayananda, titled *Satyarth Prakash* (Light of Truth), would "destroy India." He became interested in Dayananda and studied his works. He subsequently wrote to Swami Shraddhanand (1856–1926), an Arya Samajist who had founded the *Gurukul* Kangari University in 1902, and requested to join the Arya Samaj.

Swami Shraddhanand established the *Gurukul* as an alternative to Western-oriented universities and the already established *Arya Samaj* colleges known as the DAV.[295] The first DAV College was established in Lahore in 1886, three years after the demise of Swami Dayananda, by Mahatma Hansraj. The DAV movement sought to promote "the study of English and Western knowledge." At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Arya Samaj became divided. Swami Shraddhanand sought to promote "ancient Indian philosophy and literature and conduct research "into the antiquities of India."[296] The Gurukul is sometimes referred to as the "Mahatma wing of the *Arya Samaj*" due to Swami Shraddhanand's support for Gandhi, as opposed to the more Hindu nationalist DAV which Professor Parmanand and Swami Shankaranand represented.[297]

After a brief correspondence and encouragement from Swami Shraddhanand, Dayal established an Arya Samaj in his village and became its president. In 1905, aged 14, he began travelling from village to village imploring people to boycott British goods, which Swami Dayananda espoused as *Swadeshi*.[298] He also established a school in Bahuara which provided free education for poorer children. In 1910 he was made an honorary preacher by the APS of Bihar and assistant director of *Aryavortha*, a monthly magazine published in Patna. Like

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[294] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 8.

[295] For a brief biography of Swami Shraddhanand see http://www.gurusfeet.com/guru/swami-shraddhananda (Access 20 November 2010).

[296] Dal Vasudha Dalmia. "Universities in Colonial India" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34: 22 (May/June, 1999), 1337 and Kumar "Hindu Revivalism", 8-10.

[297] This is not to suggest that definitions of the two schools of thought can fit into neat typologies. Pandit Rishiram who visited South Africa three times as a preacher for the Maha Sabha was a supporter of Gandhi and was educated in the DAV College. Professor Parmanand also worked with Gandhi on various occasions. However many DAV colleges that emerged in Northern parts of India became known for an anti-Muslim outlook see Langohr. "Colonial Education."

[298] See Agrawal, *Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi* and *Hindi,* 27 November 1925.

other Arya Samaj preachers, Dayal also engaged in public debates with pandits who promoted orthodox Hinduism.[299]

Dayal's father passed away in 1911. When tensions emerged between him and his step mother over his father's estate, Dayal left the estate to her and returned to South Africa in December 1912 with his wife and son, as well as his brother and sister-in-law.[300] The immigration department refused him entry but with the assistance of Gandhi and Henry Polak they challenged the matter in the Supreme Court and won the right to remain in the country.[301] Dayal worked at a laundry in Germiston, first ironing clothes and later serving as bookkeeper. Dayal was elected the first president of the Indian Young Men's Association which was formed in 1913 to promote social and political awareness among youth, and the study of Indian culture and literature.[302] When the passive resistance campaign resumed in October 1913, Dayal resigned from his job; he and his wife participated in the campaign and each served three months in prison with hard labour.[303] Kasturba Gandhi took care of their son.[304] When he was released Dayal remained in Phoenix and in 1914 he edited the Hindi section of *Indian Opinion*.

After Gandhi's departure for India in June 1914, Dayal returned to Germiston where he began working at the Rose Deep gold mine. He wrote *The History of the Satyagraha in South Africa* and formed the Pracharini Sabha, a night school and football club to promote the Hindi language and culture.[305] He travelled throughout the Transvaal and Natal preaching the *Vedic* religion and propagating Hindi education, and set up Pracharini Sabhas and Hindi schools in Verulam, Charlestown, Newcastle, Glencoe, Ladysmith, and Durban. In Clare Estate he set up a Hindi Ashram, with a Hindi school and donated his collection of books to establish a library. Dayal organised the Hindi literacy conference in Ladysmith in 1916 and a second one in Pietermaritzburg the following year.[306]

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[299] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 9 and *Hindi,* 27 November 1925.
[300] FIAT LUX - January/February 1983.
[301] *Hindi,* 27 November 1925.
[302] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 11.
[303] *WHO'S WHO 1936,* 136.
[304] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 16 also See Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. XII, 245 http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL014.PDF (Accessed 20 November 2010).
[305] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 63.
[306] Bista. "A Brief Biography"*,* 13.

During 1917 and 1918 Dayal edited the *Dharma Vir* a weekly newspaper published in Hindi and English and owned by Arya Samajist R.G. Bhalla who was the president of the Veda Dharma Sabha Clare Estate.[307] Dayal used the paper to promote Arya Samaj ideals such as the equality of women, the importance of Hindi and the abolition of various ritualistic religious practices. In 1917 he persuaded a couple to abandon traditional customs and conducted the first wedding according to *Vedic* rites in the country. Dayal also reintroduced the *suddhi* practice where he "reconverted" former Hindus back to Hinduism.[308]

In May 1919 Dayal represented South African Indians at an annual convention of the Indian National Congress (INC). He was accompanied by his elder son and nephew who were to be educated at the *Gurukul* Vrindavan.[309] At Amritsar, he discussed the predicament of South African Indians as racism intensified after the First World War, and met for the first time political leaders such as Lok Manya Balgangahar Tilak, Annie Besant, Vipin Chandra Pal, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and Motilal Nehru.[310] Following the conference, Dayal toured India for a year organising public meetings, delivering speeches and writing articles on the challenges facing Indians overseas. At Matiaburz he witnessed the poor living conditions of repatriated Indians and became one of the fiercest critics of the scheme.[311] He also attended the Hindi Literacy Conference in Patna and used the time to write a book *Indians in the Transvaal* and newspaper articles on the subject.[312]

Dayal returned to South Africa in December 1920 and was instrumental in the revival of the NIC in March 1921. On 5 May 1922 he produced the first issue of the *Hindi*, published by his own "Jagrani Press" which was named in honour of his wife who had passed away before the first issue was published.[313] It appeared in Hindi and English, and had subscribers in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Uganda, Kenya, Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, Jamaica, Suriname, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The *Hindi* adopted a strong Arya Samajist line and included contributions from C.F. Andrews, Benarsidas Chaturvedi, Rajah Mahendra Pratab, and Dr Sudhindra Rose on the position of Indians abroad.[314] In November 1922 Dayal

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[307] *Dharma Vir*. 19 April 1918.
[308] A summary of this work appears the last issue of the *Hindi,* 27 November 1925.
[309] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 14.
[310] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 15.
[311] For a detailed description of living conditions of Indians repatriated from South Africa after the Cape Town agreement see Dayal and Chaturvedi. "A Report."
[312] Bista, "A Brief Biography", 15.
[313] For a tribute to see *Indian Opinion,* 14 April 1922 and *Hindi,* 12 May 1922.
[314] See *Hindi 1922-1925.*

again represented the South African Indian Congress at the INC meeting at Gaya and travelled across India to study the nationalist movement,[315] give lectures in Bihar and Vrindavan, and attend the Hindi Literacy Conference in Kanpur where he received an award for his writings, service to overseas Indians, and his work as a preacher. He also partook in the *suddhi* movements with Swami Shraddhanand and Mahatma Hansraj.[316] Dayal met Bhai Parmanand and C.F. Andrews in Bihar before returning to South Africa in July 1923, accompanied by Chaturvedi and Sarojini Naidu who were sent by Gandhi to study the situation of Indians in South Africa.[317]

When the centenary of the birth of Dayananda was celebrated in 1925, the APS of Natal was formed with Dayal as president. The South African government introduced the "Areas Reservation Bill" in 1925, Dayal was elected chairman of a seven man delegation to India and ceased publication of the *Hindi*.[318] The deputation met with the Viceroy and outlined their case to the INC conference at Cawnpore. Their political work done, Dayal visited his village of Bahuara where he built a Pravasi Bhawan, which included a library and school.[319] In 1927 Dayal was admitted as a *sannyasi* and a ceremony was performed by Swami Shivanand, Swami Munishananad and Pandit Vedvrat Vanaprasthi to confirm this.[320] He returned to South Africa as a preacher for the International Aryan League. In his absence, the Cape Town Agreement had taken place and one of its key provisions was the repatriation of Indians which Dayal opposed, but Sastri prevailed upon him not to protest for the sake of agreement.[321]

Repatriation was not the only issue over which Sastri and Dayal differed. They also disagreed over the question of vernacular education. At the Kimberly session of the SAIC in 1927 Sastri convinced delegates that concentrating exclusively on English would be more beneficial to South African Indians. When Dayal staged a walkout in protest and the delegates reconsidered the matter and the SAIC submitted a proposal to the government for the inclusion of vernaculars in the curriculum. This proposal was not implemented because

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[315] *Hindi,* 1 December 1922.
[316] *Hindi,* 1 December 1922.
[317] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 19.
[318] *Hindi,* 27 November 1925
[319] Agrawal. *Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi,* 67.
[320] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 20.
[321] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 20

the authorities argued that Indians spoke several vernaculars and catering for all would make running a school impossible.[322]

Dayal returned to India at the end of 1929. At a farewell organised by the NIC on 6 October 1929, Dayal said that he was going to work for India's freedom and that as soon as this was achieved he would take the first available boat back to personally convey the news.[323] He was elected chairman of the All-Aryan Conference in Calcutta. The year 1930 had been declared the year of independence with 26 January celebrated as an Independence Day. Dayal participated in various anti-British activities and was arrested and sentenced to two and a half years imprisonment with hard labour on 2 April 1930 for "delivering seditious speeches."[324]

The first Indian Overseas Conference was held in May 1930 at the *Gurukul* in Brindabad during the Gurukul's Silver Jubilee Celebrations. The conference was attended by Arya Samaj missionaries Swami Shankaranand and Swami Swatantranand. Dayal was elected president and in his absence, Chatuvedi delivered a speech that Dayal had written before being imprisoned. This dealt with the living conditions of Indians in Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, Suriname, Fiji and South Africa, and urged the All-India Aryan League to take greater responsibility for overseas Indians and to provide them with educational opportunities in India. A Second Overseas Hindu Conference followed in Amjer in 1933.[325] The Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 5 March 1931 provided for the "release of prisoners arrested for participating in the civil disobedience movement."[326] Dayal was thus released and turned his attention to the plight of repatriated Indians. In May 1931 he and Chaturvedi published a report on their grievances.[327] Dayal returned to South Africa in March 1932. His growing stature is reflected in the fact that a road in Clairwood was named Dayal Road in his honour.[328] But Dayal's involvement in affairs in the diaspora attracted the attention of the Imperial authorities. On 9 March 1932 he left for India and from there intended to go to Fiji but was refused a visa: the Governor of Fiji advised the Governor-General of South Africa on 5 May 1932 that it would be "very undesirable that he should reach this Colony or

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[322] Kuppusami, *Tamil Culture*, 45 and also see K.P. Kichlu *Memorandum on Indian education in the Transvaal1928* and *Memorandum on Indian education in Natal 1928*
[323] *Indian Opinion*, 11 October 1929.
[324] *WHO'S WHO 1936,* 136.
[325] *Indian Opinion*, 1 December 1933.
[326] See http://www.indhistory.com/round-table-conference-2.html (Accessed on 1 June 2010).
[327] Dayal and Chaturvedi. "A Report."
[328] Agrawal. *Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi,* 89.

neighbouring islands. Please refuse or cancel passport facilities." On 6 June 1932, Prime Minister Hertzog informed the Secretary for External Affairs that the "necessary amendments to the passport has been made" and Dayal was allowed to go to India but not proceed to Fiji. The Second Indians Overseas Conference in 1933 passed a resolution condemning the government's action.[329]

Before Dayal's return to South Africa, a second Round Table Conference between the South African and Indian governments resulted in an agreement to explore the possibility of resettling South African Indians in other colonies. At a conference of the SAIC on 3 August 1932, which Dayal attended as a representative of the NIC, it was agreed to co-operate with the enquiry. This decision split Indian politics and a group lead by P. R. Pather, Manilal Gandhi and Albert Christopher broke away to form the Colonial Born Indian Settlers Association (CBSIA) to oppose the scheme.[330]

The political elite became divided into two groups and tensions erupted at a mass meeting held on 24 August by the SAIC at the Pietermaritzburg city hall. The meeting began with Rev Author John Choonoo, one of the early pioneering Indian Methodist leaders in the country, reading a prayer at which time loud disruptions were made by a rowdy crowd. Dayal followed with a speech he conducted in Hindi as the crowd shouted "Speak in English" "we don't understand Hindi." When Sorabjee Rustomjee intervened by reminding the crowd that Hindi was the language of their fathers and grandfathers some in the crowd declared "we are South Africans. We are Colonial-borns" and chaos ensued.[331]According to the *Natal Witness*, Dayal was unfazed and declared that he was prepared to stand until midnight. However a fight broke out when a small group of CBSIA supporters armed with knives, knuckledusters, bicycle chains and iron rods attacked the crowd and the police were called in to intervene.[332] While this incident of violence was not repeated, tension between the two groups continued in the following years and it was in this environment that the national body to unite all Hindus was revived, with Dayal instrumental in its revival.

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[329] *Indian Opinion*, 33 December 1933.
[330] Surenda Bhana. *Gandhi's legacy: The Natal Indian Congress. 1894-1994* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1997), 39.
[331] *Natal Witness*, 5 September 1933.
[332] *Natal Witness*, 5 September 1933.

Fiftieth year death anniversary of Swami Dayananda

Dayal was elected president of the APS for the second time in 1933 and organised the fiftieth year death anniversary of Swami Dayananda. To mark the occasion he wrote a biography of the swami, which included a foreword by the Indian Agent General Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh, a Christian.[333] The APS also organised a conference where the revival of the Maha Sabha was discussed. In his presidential address to delegates, Dayal emphasised the importance of forming a national body for South African Hindus. The conference began with a short introduction by the chairman of the reception committee, B.M. Patel who, in supporting Dayal's call for reviving the Maha Sabha, stated that "the primary cause of weakening the community" was the absence of an organisation to "voice the opinions of the Hindu Community as a whole, nor is there a medium of bringing the people together under one banner."[334] Patel had been involved in Hindu affairs for many years. He was born in 1887 in Baroda, India, and migrated to Natal in 1903, settling in Pietermaritzburg. He was inspired by the arrival of Professor Parmanand in 1905, when he was a secretary of the reception committee. Patel was also a founding member of HYMA and participated in Gandhi's satyagraha campaign in 1913. He moved to Durban after the First World War, joined the NIC and became secretary of the M.K. Gandhi library and Parsee Rustomjee Hall.[335] He was a devoted Arya Samajist as he believed that the movement "protected and saved the Hindu community from the attacks of non-Hindu religionists." He donated generously to Arya Samaj bodies, while his wife took an active part in public activities as president of the Gujarati Hindu *Mahila Mandal*.[336]

In his presidential address, Dayal stressed the importance of the Maha Sabha in promoting a strong Hindu identity. He implored delegates to "create a feeling among the Hindus that they are Hindus first and Calcuttas, Madrasis and Gujaratis, or Sanathanists and Arya Samajists afterwards." Without a Maha Sabha, Hindus "cannot be protected and their interests cannot be safeguarded." He appealed to the committee not to miss this unique occasion for the "formation of a central Hindu organisation thus proving [their] love and affection towards Hinduism."[337] Dayal's call is interesting because he disapproved of the

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[333] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 22.
[334] APS Conference paper 1933.
[335] *WHO'S WHO 1936*, 118.
[336] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 99-98
[337] APS Conference paper 1933.

Akhil Bharat Hindū Mahasabha (All India Hindu Maha Sabha). His opposition, he said in this speech was due to that organisation's involvement in politics and the tensions that this caused between Hindus and Muslims. Dayal believed that similar tension was unlikely in South Africa because Hindu (and Muslim) institutions concerned themselves primarily with religious and welfare projects. There was no reason to believe, he said, that a South African Maha Sabha would get involved in politics. He insisted that this "would not be possible."[338]

The conference resulted in the formation of a prospective Maha Sabha which held its first general meeting on 26 December 1933 at the Tamil Institute in Cross Street. The meeting was attended by representatives from more than 30 institutions who agreed unanimously to revive the Maha Sabha. A sub-committee consisting of Dayal, S.M. Moodley, Suchit Maharaj, H.A. Thaker and V.S.C. Pather was constituted to draft the constitution. B.M. Patel was elected president, A.M. Padyachee vice president, S.R. Pather and T.M. Naicker secretaries and M.C. Varman, Dayal, V.S.C Pather, and Satyadeva were chosen as members of the council. Resolutions were passed to invite Hindu scholar Pandit Mehta Jaimini to preside at the "revival" conference planned for 1934 and according to the *Indian Opinion* to affiliate the Maha Sabha to the All India Hindu Maha Sabha.[339] With two recognised international preachers scheduled to participate in its conference, the Maha Sabha looked forward to its third national Hindu conference.[340]

The invitation to the conference was directed to "all Hindu Associations, temples, schools and other institutions." Affiliates to the Maha Sabha were entitled to have representatives without charge, while non affiliated institutions were required to pay five shillings per representative.[341] While the likes of Dayal and Patel argued that it was essential to revive the Maha Sabha in order to advance Hinduism, some in the community, such as the editors of the *Indian Opinion*, viewed this with great misgiving. On 14 May 1934, the *Indian Opinion* published an article titled "On the wrong lines," which stated it was "averse" to the Maha Sabha's revival. While acknowledging the "delicacy" of the matter and warning that the newspaper "could not dedicate too much space to a religious matter", the paper nevertheless published a relatively long article which began on the front page because the

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[338] APS Conference paper 1933.
[339] *Indian Opinion,* 5 January 1934
[340] While there were numerous conferences held by various Hindu bodies, the first Hindu conference was the 1912 conference and the second was the 1913 conference and the 1934 conference was the third.
[341] *Indian Opinion*, 5 May 1934.

"matter is taking an important turn in the history of Indians in South Africa" and has a "bearing on the whole Indian Community." *Indian Opinion* drew comparisons with the All Hindu Mahasabha of India to warn against the possible dangers of establishing a similar body in South Africa. The article expressed pride in the fact that that South African Indians could hail from the "motherland" and "create a little India," and yet, in spite of all the "evils of caste and communal distinction", they lived as "Indians first and Indians last" in a "common brotherhood of men." The report noted that signs of communalism only became evident during Swami Shankaranand's stay in South Africa. Then too, the report concluded, while the swami's lectures on Hinduism were followed with great enthusiasm, on the whole his activities did not receive unanimous support even from those in whose interests he was purportedly working.[342]

This newspaper article needs to be read in the following context. The All Hindu Mahasabha in India was in opposition to Gandhi at this time and Swami Shankaranand was also Gandhi's adversary during his South African stay. The editor of *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi's son Manilal, was probably opposed to a South African version of the Maha Sabha for similar ideological reasons similar to his father. Perhaps equally important to this opposition was division in the NIC. The decision by some South Africans to participate in the colonisation enquiry scheme which was looking at repatriating South African Indians to other British colonies had split the NIC, with a group led by Albert Christopher breaking away to form the CBSIA.[343] Manilal Gandhi was part of this breakaway group, while the majority of those who sought to re-establish the Maha Sabha, including S.R. and V.S.C Pather, Dayal, and T.M. Naicker remained part of the old NIC which cooperated with the scheme. Bitterness between the two groups was intense and leaders from each camp attacked each other in newspapers. This may have influenced the *Indian Opinion* to view the revival of the Maha Sabha with suspicion. S.R. Naidoo, who was the SAIC representative on the Young Committee, was a prominent leader in the Maha Sabha and would become president in subsequent years.

The article in the *Indian Opinion* attracted criticism from readers which the paper published a fortnight later, together with response to these criticisms. Critics felt that the subject matter beyond the author's expertise and the article was "full of ignorance" and

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[342] *Indian Opinion*, 5 May 1934.
[343] Bhana. *Gandhi's legacy*, 33-54.

"portrayed the wrong perspective." The Maha Sabha only intended to "combine the various minor associations into a powerful one" and "thereby unify the Hindu community." The authors added that if Muslims and Christians were free to vigorously proselytise to Hindus, "why should the Hindus not try to fortify themselves against such attacks?" The critics also said that every responsible Hindu in the country realised the "urgent necessity of a body" such as the Maha Sabha to protect the interests of Hindus and to "disseminate the gospel of the greatest and certainly the best religion in the world."[344]

Indian Opinion, however, remained unconvinced. The newspaper claimed that given that the objectives of the Maha Sabha were not clearly articulated by its founders, it was reasonable to believe that they were similar to those of the Indian chapter and "we have reason to believe that it is the desire of the Hindu Maha Sabha to affiliate with the body in India." The notion of uniting Hindus was a "distant ideal that not even the greatest leaders in India have been able to achieve." There were three distinct sects of Hindus, one which "believes in the universal brotherhood of man", another that "believes in the caste system", and a third that "believes in proselytising and denounces idolatry."[345] These sects had failed to unite in India and therefore "we cannot believe that they can come together in this country." Indian Opinion reiterated that a Maha Sabha was unnecessary and that the purported aims of the new body could be achieved via existing institutions such as the APS and the Veda Dharma Sabhas. It was ironical, the paper added, that while these institutions were necessary to convince Hindus to stop participating in "barbaric" festivals, "one of the supporters of the Hindu Maha Sabha has been an advocate of the barbarous ceremony known as firewalking."[346] Support for the APS and Veda Dharma Sabhas dispels the notion that Indian Opinion's disapproval of the Maha Sabha was based on opposition to the Arya Samaj. In fact, the two international missionaries who participated in the conference, Pandit Mehta Jaimini (Arya Samaj) and Swami Adhyananda (Ramakrishna movement) were both held in high regard by the Indian Opinion in its editorials.

[344] Indian Opinion, 14 May 1934.
[345] Indian Opinion, 14 May 1934.
[346] Indian Opinion, 14 May 1934.

The Maha Sabha "Revival" Conference

The Maha Sabha held its third South African Hindu conference at the Durban Town Hall on 27 May 1934. The conference attracted delegates from 62 institutions from Natal, the Cape and the Transvaal. Also in attendance for the first time were representatives from women's associations which included the GHMM. One factor that ensured a large turnout was the presence of the two Hindu missionaries whose countrywide lectures had proved extremely popular. Both played a crucial part in this conference. In fact, the widely travelled and highly experienced Pandit Mehta Jaimini was invited to South Africa in order to preside at the conference, while Swami Adhyananda gave the opening address. The Deputy Mayor of Durban, Councillor S.K. Elgie, said in his opening address that "it showed a fine sprit when delegates came forward in large numbers as they have done in the interests of a useful movement of this kind."[347]

Swami Adhyananda criticised those who described Hinduism as a medley of thoughts without an underlying unity. He said that there was an "underlying unity" and that Hinduism was "the perennial source of solace" for those seeking truth. Hinduism, however, did not believe in the doctrine that a particular theological belief or form of worship was "the only way towards light and salvation." He censured those who promoted competition between religions and argued that just as there was diversity in nature, there was unity in the different thoughts and experiences that made up the different religions. He criticised proselytisation for exacerbating the tension that existed in the world.

Pandit Jaimini, who followed, described South Africa as the "motherland" of Hinduism's future and outlined some steps that the Maha Sabha should take to ensure that Hinduism flourished. He called on the body to send young Hindus to Japan, Germany and England to acquire an industrial education to help in the fight against poverty and unemployment, which should be a central aim of the Maha Sabha. The conference took place in the midst of the Great Depression when thousands of Indians were relying on soup kitchens for their survival.[348] Pandit Jaimini also emphasized the importance of vernacular education and the revival of ancient culture, which he claimed were necessary for "national

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[347] *Natal Mercury*, 28 May 1934.
[348] See Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed. *Monty Naicker: Between Reason and Treason* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter, 2010), 49-63.

solidarity" in this country. He stressed the importance of female education and called on the Maha Sabha to increase the popularity of festivals such as *Ramnavami* and *Janam Ashtmi* which honours the birth of deities *Rama* and *Krishna* respectively. The pandit believed that festivals and the recognition of "national heroes" were important for generating a sense of patriotism. He added that *Vir Ashtmi* (festival of heroes) should be observed as well so that "Indian youths and other Indian athletes can display their skill by adopting Olympic games and other kinds of gymnastics." He cited Japan and Russia as examples of patriotism that South African Hindus would do well to emulate. The pandit called on Hindu youths to "arise, awake, cast off the spirit of lethargy, come forward with feeling hearts, aspirations of patriotism and honest ambitions. Be good citizens of this land where you were born and brought up and be faithful to your motherland and her culture."[349]

The idea of being both South African and yet attached to India remained an important part of the diasporic experience. While wanting Hindus to be good citizens in South Africa, the Pandit reminded them that they were part of the "Hindu nation", adding that "no nation on Earth can vie with the Hindus in respect of their antiquity in civilisation and religion" and exclaimed his frustration that a nation that was "a teacher and initiator of the whole world" has become "down-trodden, degenerated and treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water." Like all Arya Samajists, he blamed this on the neglect of Vedic scriptures which had resulted in "ignorance, superstition and blind faith." He urged the Maha Sabha to see to it that religious texts, especially the *Ramayana*, *Upanishads*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagavad Gita*, were introduced to all Hindu temples and Pandits were brought from India to "stamp the imprints of Hindu culture and the sublimity of *Vedas* in the hearts of Indian youths of this country."[350] Many projects that the Maha Sabha undertook in subsequent years were suggested by Pandit Jaimini. These included the establishment of a journal controlled by the Maha Sabha (*The Hindu*) and the erection of a hall to act as its headquarters (the Swami Shankaranand Hall).[351] Despite opposition from some quarters, there was broad support for the conference. B.M. Patel, chairman of the reception committee, claimed that such a gathering was "unprecedented in the annals of the South African Indians" and that the

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[349] The SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.
[350] The SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.
[351] The SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.

presence of representatives from all provinces showed that the Maha Sabha's "representative character was unquestionable."[352]

Pandit Mehta Jaimini

Pandit Mehta Jaimini was born in Punjab in 1861. He was educated in Multan where he graduated in 1896 with an LLB degree. He worked in the legal profession for the next twenty years. During this time he became an adherent of the Arya Samaj and started working with various movements that sought to promote the education of women. In 1922 he joined the Hindu College at Bindravan where he decided to dedicate his life to teaching Hinduism. The following year he travelled to Burma where he conducted 182 lectures. His next tour was to Mauritius to preach for the Arya Samaj movements there. His stay in Mauritius coincided with the 1925 birth centenary celebrations of Dayananda of which he took a leadership role.[353] According to Ramsurrun his lectures during this time had a huge effect on the youth and resulted in the formation of the Arya Kumar Sabha, a youth wing for Mauritius's major Arya Samaj body the Arya Paropkarini Sabha. Ramsurrun adds that his visit marked an increase in militancy of the Arya Samaj movement in Mauritius. Arya Samajists began organising debates where they defended Vedic culture against Sanathan Pandits, Christian priests and Muslim mullahs as well as introducing the *suddhi* movements for both Christian and Muslim converts with over a hundred "reconversions" in the next 20 years.[354]

The following year he left Mauritius to continue his missionary work across to the Pacific Islands where he visited Siam, Singapore, Malaya, Java and Sumatra. He ended the tour by visiting Fiji and New Zealand. By 1929 he ventured to the Americas where he first conducted lectures in Northern and Central America before turning his attention to the Hindu populations of Trinidad and nearby islands.[355] In Trinidad, Vertovec argues that Jaimini's lectures on the greatness of Indian civilisation, equality of women, importance of the *Vedas* and education and the futility of idol worship had a huge impact on Hindus there. Even those who were not supporters of the Arya Samaj, Vertovec argues were motivated to take pride in the heritage of India. Arya Samaj missionaries who arrived before him had little influence but Jaimini and Pandit Ayodhia Prasad who would pick up from where he left off "were

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[352] *Natal Mercury*, 28 May 1934.
[353] *Natal Witness*, 30 April1933.
[354] P. Ramsurrun. *Arya Samaj in a Nutshell* (Delhi: Aryan Heritage, 1984).
[355] *Natal Witness*, 30 April 1933.

renowned for their sophistication and scholarship" and were very influential and popular. In Trinidad Jaimini embarrassed Brahman priests and other leaders of Sanathan organisations in public debates.[356] He followed his tour of the Americas by visiting China, Japan and Europe and lectured throughout these states.[357] The strong theme that permeated his lectures throughout the world was promoting the "glory" of ancient India and its traditions, a theme that would continue on his tour to South Africa.

In 1931 when he visited East Africa he appealed to the APS of South Africa to invite him. However owing to financial difficulties faced by the APS at the time they were unable to and he returned to India.[358] It was during the APS's Hindu conference of 1933 which dealt with the topic of reviving the Maha Sabha that M.C. Varman, who had raised the funds to bring both Parmanand and Shankaranand, volunteered to bring Mehta Jaimini to arouse the enthusiasm amongst Hindus necessary to revive the dormant umbrella body.

Jaimini wasted little time in getting to work and managed to conduct 47 lectures during his first 49 days spent in the county.[359] He dealt with various themes promoting the ancient teachings of the *Vedas* from an Arya Samaj perspective and stressed equality for women and the importance of educating girls. His first set of lectures was conducted in Pietermaritzburg and admission to attend was free of charge. The first lecture on "Indian Culture" was held at the HYMA Hall on 31 April 1933 and presided over by the Superintendent for Education at the time Mr F. D. Hugo.[360]

In a lecture delivered at the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg to a large number of Indians and "fair sprinkling of Europeans and natives", the swami stressed the importance of five duties namely, prayers and readings of the *Vedas* every morning, cleanliness in the home, the support of education and scholars who propagate religion, service for the less fortunate and the protection of domesticated animals. He also talked about the Vedas which he called "the foundation of all religions, languages, science and culture" and accused the European translators of the Vedas of incorrectly translating them resulting in various misconceptions

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[356] Steven Vertovec. "Religion and ethnic ideology", 227.
[357] *Natal Witness*, 30 April 1933.
[358] Vedalankar *Religious Awakening,* 55.
[359] *Indian Opinion*, 1 June 1934.
[360] *Natal Witness*, 30 April 1933.

which are constantly being corrected to reveal India as the cradle of the human race.[361] From an Arya Samaj perspective he argued that the "study of the Vedas would dispel the error that they represented the worship of idols, trees, stones and so forth" and that "there was only one God, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite and eternal."[362] He ended the lecture by speaking about his experiences in the United States which he accused of contradicting the ideals of universal brotherhood. He exclaimed his frustration that Asians were barred from gaining American citizenship and said that if Jesus Christ (born in Jerusalem) had to visit the US he would have had to arrive with at least £100 and would still be "told to push off" after his turn was finished. His last remarks about the US were criticisms of its millionaires like Henry Ford who had to live guarded by police.[363]

On a Saturday afternoon of 5 May 1934 the swami gave a lecture at the HYMA hall to women only on the "Ideals of Womanhood" and followed it with a lecture on "Cremation verses Burial" in the evening where he quoted from the Yajur Veda to stress an important aspect of various traditions of Hinduism, cremation. He added that for economical reasons alone it was rational to cremate and not bury and used data from prominent medical researchers in England to add to the argument.[364]

On the following Saturday he gave a lecture in Pietermaritzburg on reincarnation. He defended reincarnation on various grounds and argued that its truth was indicated in several verses in the Bible. He thereafter criticised the two different reasons put forward by Christian leaders and scientists to explain physical and mental deformities present at birth. He accused Christian explanations of using the idea of an unjust God and scientific explanations of heredity of being unsupported. He claimed the answers always lay in the Vedas. The idea of reincarnation and paying for past sins was his explanation and he made the potential controversial claim that physical deformities at birth were the result of sins committed in past lives.[365]

On the 10 May 1934 he represented India in a meeting of the Natal Debating Society held in Pietermaritzburg and argued for good will between India and South Africa. Prominent

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[361] *Natal Witness,* 30 April1934.
[362] *Natal Witness*, 30 April 1934.
[363] *Natal Witness,* 30 April 1934.
[364] *Indian Opinion,* 11 May 1934.
[365] *Natal Witness,* 22 May 1934.

Maha Sabha council member at the time S.R. Naidoo (who was also the SAIC representative to partake in the government's Indian Colonisation Enquiry Committee) supported Jaimini and defended the "integral part played by Indians in the country." On 23 May Jaimini gave a lecture on Indian culture at the inaugural meeting of the Indian Study Circle, a body established to promote the study of ancient Indian culture under the presidency of B.D. Lalla. This he followed with a lecture organised by the Overport Indian Study Group and Debating society on the Mahabharta at the Shree Ramayan Sabha schoolroom which was packed to its capacity.[366] The Maha Sabha organised three of his lectures at the Parsee Rustomjee Hall titled "Eastern View of civilisation", "Reincarnation a Myth" and "Cult of the coming man" which he gave on 18, 20 and 22 June respectively.[367]

On 17 December, the Sea View Hindu Association and district Hindu women's association organised a meeting presided over by Mrs Veerasamy to pay tribute to the work conducted by the pandit. At a lecture on Indian culture at the HYMA hall he accused "oriental scholars and certain missionaries" of showing only the darker side of India to designate superiority for themselves.[368] He thereafter quoted Kurt Baron von Schroeder, a German businessman known for his rightwing political views and financial support to the Nazi Party of Germany during the 1930s.[369] He quoted from von Schroeder's assertion that the ancient Aryans possessed the purest, simplest and best civilisation, that was the mother of world culture. Jaimini thereafter made a comment common to many Hindu reformers that while the Western world advanced scientifically and materially it still lagged behind India in spiritual contentment and added that if the world followed Indian culture then "peace and tranquillity would prevail."[370] He made more comments about Indian culture prohibiting the destruction of life which he argued was necessary to prevent the new methods of warfare conducted in the West before criticising the League of Nations who he claimed would be unable to bring peace when nations continued to exploit and extend territories. The superintendent for education Mr F.D. Hugo once again chaired the lecture, which was followed by a short speech by S. R. Naidoo.[371]

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[366] *Indian Opinion*, 15 June 1934.
[367] *Indian Opinion*, 18 June 1934.
[368] *Natal Witness,* 4 May 1934.
[369] See John Hoefle "The British Empire's Fascism Stalks America" March 20, 2009 issue of *Executive Intelligence Review*.
[370] Natal Witness, 4 May 1934.
[371] *Natal Witness,* 4 May 1934.

Jaimini also used the medium of newspapers to communicate the teachings of the Vedas to the public. He responded to an article in the *Natal Witness* called "the Future of a Great Religion" to address the "misunderstandings" concerning Hinduism he felt were present in the article. In a very long and detailed article he challenged the notion that Hinduism had no book or central teaching but was based on a complex social organisation, which he called the author's "unfamiliarity" with Hindu culture. He stressed the centrality of the Vedas to Hindu religion and drew reference to Max Muller and Jaccoliet. He said that Hindu religion was not a creed but a realisation that was "pliable but firm." An interesting aspect was his support for the legitimacy of the *Varna* divisions as stated in the *Vedas*, but he condemned the notion that this justified a caste system based on heredity. He claimed that they were based on merit through "meritorious services."[372] The curiosity and enthusiasm shown by many toward the pandit's teachings was of crucial importance to the Maha Sabha and its aims to promote a Hindu consciousness.

Swami Adhyananda

Jaimini's stay in the country coincided with that of Swami Adhyananda who was the first representative of the Ramakrishna Mission to arrive in the country. The Ramakrishna Mission was a Neo-Hindu reform movement founded in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) the chief disciple of the Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna (1834-86). By 1933 there were already over a hundred and twenty Ramakrishna missions throughout India and it was to the branch in Calcutta that THSS sent an appeal for a missionary.[373] The mission replied by sending Swami Adhyananda, a Sanskrit scholar of Calcutta University who was 40 years old and had served the mission for 16 years. When asked about why he joined the mission the swami claimed that Bengal in the days he joined was seething in nationalism, and being philosophically minded and in close contact with followers of Vivekananda the "spirit of service awoke within him." He also served as editor to a paper published by the mission and was the founder of the Singapore Ramakrishna Mission. [374]

He arrived in the Transvaal at the beginning of 1934 and preached there for three months before he was brought to Natal under the invitation of Maha Sabha. The swami's

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[372] *Natal Witness*, 7 June 1934.
[373] As is said in chapter two.
[374] *Indian Opinion*, 15 May 1934.

views were characterised by a lecture presented in Johannesburg where he claimed that "if there is one thing that India could teach the world it is her philosophy." He talked about all the economic, political and social problems in the world claiming that India's philosophy was not only the solution but would "make for mutual respect between different creeds and nations." He said that "India in spite of her ills today, sent out that idea of religious synthesism in thought and showed the warring world how real peace based on spiritual idealism might be obtained."[375]

When asked about his experiences in South Africa in an interview conducted by the *Indian Opinion*, the swami answered that education needed to be improved and that in spite of the "harsh laws much constructive work could be done" by Indians with regard to improving sanitation and hygiene, but he added "that from what I have seen I am inclined to think there are not many persons here who are willing to undertake such constructive work." When asked what dissatisfied him about the Indian community in South Africa he answered that "provincialism and sectarianism seem to be very common in this community." He added that Gandhi left behind ideals which should act as inspiration for this community.[376] This interview was conducted before his arrival in Natal but after months of lectures conducted throughout the Transvaal. During this time he had raised money for the THSS to purchase books on Indian philosophy and culture from a series of lectures he conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was invited by the women's branch of the South African Party to deliver a lecture on "Indian Womanhood" but was warned by the secretary of the Indian Women's Association of Transvaal that being Indian he would not be permitted to. He wrote to the Women's Branch of the SAP and was permitted, but when he attended his Indian friends were refused entry so he refused to lecture.[377]

On 21 May 1934 Swami Adhyananda received a reception at the Royal Picture Palace in Durban organised by newly elected representatives of the Maha Sabha. Also present were Bhawani Dayal and Mehta Jaimini. Jaimini received a huge applause upon his arrival at the the pack Hall, another indication of his popularity in the country. B.M. Patel gave a speech to welcome the swami and thereafter garlanded him. A few others spoke including Dayal.[378]

[375] *Indian Opinion*, 25 May 1934.
[376] *Indian Opinion,* 15 May 1934.
[377] *Indian Opinion*, 25 May 1925.
[378] *Natal Witness*, 22 May 1934.

At a speech in Pietermaritzburg the swami continued with his theme of the universality of Hindu thought claiming that "Hinduism is a universal religion. It does not limit its teachings to any one personality or to any one book, but on its revelations. It does not impose a limit on the limitless, nor dogmatise on the infinite." However he was careful in highlighting that Hinduism was a coherent religion and not merely a collection of diverging thoughts, by adding that in spite of all the apparent divisions there is a fundamental unity which is the goal of achieving "the realisation of the Supreme Reality." The swami's speech was characterised by the strong reformist idea of showing Hinduism as a universal religion while maintaining monotheism. Like Jaimini he claimed reincarnation was the "only rational explanation" for inequality at birth. A typical reformer he argued that religion was not based on ceremonies but on individuals getting "inside themselves to see the truth" and added that his experience in this country showed "that people who go under the name of Hindus do not know anything of their faith." He urged such people to study the *Bhagavad Gita* which he called the "nut shell" of Hindu thought.[379] The swami ended the lecture by urging local Hindus to establish schools to teach religion and never to forget their cultural heritage.

Local responses to the two missionaries

Like Jaimini, Adhyananda also used the newspapers to reach out to the public in his attempts to propagate the reformist Hindu message. An article that appeared in the *Natal Witness* titled "What is Hinduism" by an individual under the name "Student" went to lengths to complement work of Swami Adhyananda. "Student" however ended the article by claiming that the swami had also bewildered his audience with regard to some of his theories, and issued two sets of questions directed at the swami. The first was whether Hinduism or the Vedic religion teaches polytheism or monotheism and whether it teaches idol worship or animism. The second question was how could Hinduism teach one or the other when there are so many different forms of worship that are accepted in different parts of India. "Student" concluded by asking "what then is the ultimate teaching of the Vedas?" His questions were not surprising given the lengths to which the swami had gone to refute all who claimed that Hinduism was a collection of thoughts and practices insisting that it had an essential character. Swami Adhyananda responded by saying that Hinduism teaches whatever is needed to achieve the ultimate truth.

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[379]Undated article taken from the *Natal Witness* see R.B. Maharaj Collection of Press Cuttings. For a summary of his lectures see *Natal Witness*, 20 August 1934.

The work conducted by these two missionaries brought about strong feelings amongst members of the Hindu community. During this time, ten years before the Maha Sabha first addressed it at the fourth Hindu conference, the issue of Hindu religious instruction began being proposed by individuals in the public. One commentator said that words of the missionaries needed to be taken into consideration and the issue of Christian instruction being given to Hindu children began to become a major concern.

On 16 August, Swami Adhyananda left Durban for Port Elizabeth where he stayed until 11 September. He conducted four lectures at the City Hall, each presided over by the mayor and his deputy. They were titled "Searchlight of the soul"; "Is Reincarnation a myth?"; "Cult of the future" and "How to awake the Spiritual Consciousness." He was also the guest of the Rotary Club where he lectured on "Modern India" and gave two talks to members of the Theosophical Society on the *Bhagavad Gita*. On 14 September he went to Grahamstown where he was given a welcome reception by the British Indian Association. On 18 September he gave a lecture on "What India can teach the World" at the City Hall which was presided over by the Mayor W. Mills.[380]

The swami was also popular with the *Indian Opinion* editorial and was asked to write on the relation between science and religion in which he made a case that Hinduism is more continuous than Christianity with modern science that suggests that the universe is more like a mind and less like a machine. On 2 November and 2 December he was asked to write about Diwali. Both articles are very long and while not necessary to repeat here at length, the main themes are important as they reflect his neo-Hindu views. Rather than explain the literal meaning of the battle in the *Ramayana* on which the celebration of Diwali is based he began by claiming that all religions attempt to explain the higher truths of God through "allegories, parables and elements of mythology." In the *Puranas*, he claimed, the devas (Gods) and asuras (demons) are merely metaphors. The asuras, or evil, represent ignorance while to conquer the ignorance one needs to worship God as a mother which he called "peculiar to Hinduism." Man, he says, has two forms, the physical and material and only through meditation and worshiping God as the mother can one achieve superconscious thought needed to differentiate right from wrong.[381] The mistake Hindus make, he argued, was to

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[380] *Indian Opinion*, 28 September 1934.
[381] *Indian Opinion*, 4 November 1935.

celebrate Diwali only as a celebration like Christmas to and forget its true significance. In concluding the article he gave this message to the readers: "only by living more in moral and spiritual ways" can Hindus "celebrate Diwali correctly." This he said was necessary to enhance the cause of the Indian in this country and pay real homage to the founder of the *Indian Opinion* who by his doctrine of non-violence (*Ahisma*) and satyagraha (truth force) and soul force (atmaskakti) had only re-interpreted the age long belief and philosophy of Hinduism.[382]

On 26 December the THSS gave Swami Adhyananda a farewell reception presided over by Kumar Maharaj Singh at the Patidar Hall in Johannesburg. On behalf of the THSS, Singh presented the swami with a gold watch and a donation of £50 for the Ramakrishna Mission. At the reception the swami urged South African Indians to be more "manly" and depend "more on self help then on what the government would give" them. He once again stressed the importance of education and reminded the audience of their "great and ancient culture and civilisation." In his final message to South African Indians he claimed that

> South Africa is a comparatively young country and as is usual with all comparatively young countries the people are superficial in their thoughts. They do not want to go deep into things. But where is the possibility of real harmony, piece and joy for men without the truths of the spirit? My message to South Africa is that it can learn a good deal from an old country like India. But then the Indians in this country cut off as they are with traditions and the glories of the Motherland have themselves first to assimilate their own culture and glorious heritage.

> Learn your own culture, try to assimilate, not imitate the best which the Western civilisation can give you. When this has been done and the Indians by their honesty, integrity and cleanliness both external and internal have proved their worth then they will no longer by considered a menace to this country but will be welcomed as partners.[383]

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[382] *Indian Opinion*, 2 December 1935.
[383] *Indian Opinion*, 4 January 1935.

The views of the two missionaries are important to this study partly because of the role that the Maha Sabha leaders accorded them at the third Hindu conference. Their popularity was also important and they assisted local Hindu leaders in spreading the reformist Hindu message.

Dayal and the return to India

In November 1935 Dayal went to India to represent the SAIC at the All India session of the National Congress at Lucknow. In an interview he said that he would place the needs of South African Indians before the Indian government and other leaders of public opinion there.[384] He arrived at Madras in the first week of December and began writing articles for a number of Indian newspapers before embarking to Calcutta where he addressed a large assembly and criticised Tagore for not supporting Hindi as the national language on India.[385] In the same month he performed the official opening for Rajendra Ashram, named in honour of Dr Rajenda Prasad. The next year (1936) he went to Lucknow for the conference while a controversy occurred back in South Africa when the Muslim Agent General for South Africa Sir Syed Raza Ali married a local Hindu of Tamil descent, Miss Sammy, resulting in the conversion of the latter to Islam. In protest a large number of Hindus in the SAIC resigned. Dayal decided not to join and later wrote of the experience

> I was also approached to resign from the Congress, while I was in India…
> with a threat that I would be regarded as a betrayer of the Hindu cause and would
> be treated as an outcast, if I refused to follow their lead. Needless to say, I flatly
> repudiated their authority to dictate to me in such manner. In fact, it was a matter
> of principle with me. As an Arya Samajist, I dare not interfere even in the
> conversion from one faith to another, let alone the matrimonial bond of two
> individuals of different faiths, when I claim the same right and liberty for my own
> co-religionists; and above all as an Indian nationalist, how could I be a party to
> such a communal quarrel?[386]

[384] *Natal Witness,* 18 July 1936.
[385] Bista. "A Brief Biography", 23.
[386] Dayal. *Abdulla Ismail Kajee,* 22 and 23.

During Dayal's career he worked very closely with individuals of different faiths including the Christian C.F. Andrews and Muslim A.I. Kajee. He also claimed that when accepting the position of president of the NIC he did so only on condition that Kajee was secretary.[387] According to Agrawal, in 1925 Dayal was struck across the right cheek by an individual named Pathnan Garibullah Khan who accused him of being an "enemy of Islam." Dayal responded by turning the left cheek. Khan was arrested and later apologised for the attack.[388]

After the Lucknow conference Dayal sold his assets in Bahuara including the Pravasi Bhawan and distributed the money to his heirs, keeping a small portion to build a Bhawani Bhawan when he returned to Durban. He travelled to Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London to preach the Vedic religion but was not associated to any society. On 4 November 1937 Dayal laid the foundation stone of a Veda Mandir in Lourenco Marques (Maputo) capital of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). The Mandir was built by the Bharat Samaj of Lourenco Marques and the following year on 31 July Dayal performed its official opening, an occasion attended by the Consul Generals of Britain and South African as well as the Governor General of East Africa.

On 1 May 1938 Dayal was elected as the president of the NIC and he laboured to unite the different factions that previously caused rifts in the organisation. At his presidential speech at the inaugural conference of the NIC held on 10 and 11 December 1938 Dayal argued that "at no time in history of Indians in this country have they been able to speak with one united voice" as they were able to at the conference and he stressed the importance of unity.[389] In June, Richard Stuttaford, the Minister of the Interior, proposed a Servitude Scheme which in effect was a continuation of segregation policies that was seen by many Indian leaders as a clear violation of the Cape Town Agreement. The NIC organised mass meetings to bring this to the attention of the public and elected Dayal as a one man deputation to travel to India to bring the segregation scheme to attention of the Indian government and general public. At a send off attended by a large number of Indians including NIC secretary Abdulla I. Kajee he stated "I am going to India to give the people there first hand information

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[387] Dayal. *Abdulla Ismail Kajee*, 16.
[388] Agrawal. *Bhawani Dayal Sannyasi,* 159-160.
[389] NIC First Conference Paper.

about the position in South Africa" and to "persuade the Indian government to oppose this segregation scheme."[390]

On his journey, he stopped off at Lourenco Marques, Dar-es-Salaam, Zanzibar and Mombasa to preach religion and discuss politics. He reached Bombay on 18 March and quickly travelled to Delhi, Agra, Ajmer, Baroda and Navsari. At Baroda he stayed with Pandit Anandpriya.[391] He wrote a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow on the plight of Indians in South Africa and received support from Nehru. Thereafter he spent three weeks in Calcutta using the press to communicate the difficulties faced by Indians in South Africa. Dayal urged the government of India to withdraw its Agent-General as a form of protese if it failed to persuade the Union government to drop the scheme.[392] By 6 May the *Natal Mercury* was informed of relations between the two governments reaching "a breaking point" over the scheme. Dayal had by this time convinced numerous Indian leaders about the dangers of the scheme with Gandhi claiming that it would result in the "slow death of the Indian Community" in South Africa and adding that it was a breach of the Cape Town agreement comparable to the breaches of various pacts made by Hitler.[393]

However during this time there was once again a rift forming in the NIC, resulting in Kajee sending Dayal an urgent request to return. Just before he left, the CBSIA and the NIC were drifting apart once again. During his stay in India tensions grew worse between those who supported waging a passive resistance campaign and those who did not. On 4 June chaos broke out at a conference held by the Transvaal Indian Congress where supporters of Yusuf Dadoo were attacked by a group armed with chains, iron rods, knuckledusters, and one armed with a loaded revolver. Nine people were injured and a supporter of Dadoo was disembowelled.[394] As a result of the growing tensions Dayal returned to Durban on 15 August 1939 and laboured to mend the rifts threatening the NIC, but to no avail. In December he visited Lourenco Marques to preach once again. He thereafter made his last trip back to South Africa.

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[390] *Tribune*, 27 February 1939.
[391] In 1934, during Dayal's term as president of the APS, the APS invited Anandpriya and his students to South Africa to preach.
[392] *Mercury*, 6 May 1939.
[393] *Times*, 7 May 1939.
[394] *Mercury*, 5 June 1939.

During this period the decision about whether to wage a passive resistance campaign brought about opposition on grounds that it threatened the few rights that Indians did have in the country. Dayal defended the notion of waging the campaign in 1941 on grounds that if "attempts to filch away any of the few remaining rights we have to own and occupy property in the country" continued he would awaken the "mother country" to the situation.[395] Dayal however, decided to settle permanently in India. On 21 November 1941 the NIC organised a farewell reception with the Mayor of Durban R. Ellis Brown as chairman. On his way to Indian Dayal preached at Lourenco Marques, Dar-es-Salaam and Mombasa and arrived in Bombay in early November. Dayal spent the rest of his life in Ajmer where he built a Pravasi Bhavan and an office for the NIC to keep in contact with its leaders in South Africa.[396]

He received an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature at the Hindi Literature Conference.[397]

Conclusion

The enthusiasm generated at the conference proved to be short-lived. Shortly after the conference, the Maha Sabha fell into dormancy again and there are sporadic references to it in newspapers during the 1930s. When the Maha Sabha leaders did eventually reorganise the body in 1942, the number of fee-paying affiliated institutions was only 29.[398] The inactivity of the 1930s can be attributed to a number of factors. One was that religious organisations were dominated by individuals who also led secular political organisations. The 1930s was characterised by political contestations that fractured the political elite. These included the colonisation scheme discussed earlier and the 1936 marriage of the Agent General, Sri Sayed Raza Ali, to Ms Sammy, who belonged to a prominent Hindu family in Kimberley. This resulted in many Hindu leaders resigning from the NIC. The alignment and realignment of political parties consumed much of the energy of local leaders. The absence of a permanent presence of someone of the stature of Pandit Jaimini or Swami Adhyananda was also significant. Such missionaries commanded respect and aroused enthusiasm among local Hindus. The arrival of Pandit Rishiram in 1937 was important in bringing the leaders of the Maha Sabha together to organise his lectures. By 1942 the organisation was able to restructure itself and became a factor nationally, even though the pandit had left the country in 1937. The next chapter looks at the resuscitation of the Maha Sabha and its attempts to

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[395] Bhana. *Gandhi's legacy*, 49.
[396] Bista, "A Brief Biography", 25.
[397] Bista, "A Brief Biography", 25.
[398] SAHMS Auditor's report 31 May 1944.

take a leadership role in factors affecting Hinduism, which would prove more durable than previous efforts.

CHAPTER FOUR:
REVIVAL OF THE MAHA SABHA: THE 1940S

The 1930s had witnessed an increase in the number of Hindu missionaries who visited South Africa and conducted lectures countrywide. These visits generated enthusiasm among Hindu leaders to be more involved in organising Hindu bodies, and the large crowds that they drew reflected an interest amongst "ordinary" Hindus as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, to coincide with the celebration of Swami Dayananda's fiftieth year death anniversary in 1933, South African Hindu leaders revived the Maha Sabha. However, they struggled to achieve the many ideals upon which the Maha Sabha had been founded and the organisation lapsed into dormancy.

The Maha Sabha gradually gained momentum after revising its constitution and its membership increased substantially in the 1940s. This chapter focuses on the attempts in the 1940s to make the Maha Sabha a force among Hindus and in the process foster a strong Hindu identity. A critical analysis of these developments, however, suggests that while there were some positive developments, the Maha Sabha failed to sustain the various initiatives that had been introduced, though it did not lapse into extended dormancy as was the case in previous decades. It was only after the 1953 Hindu conference that the Maha Sabha would exhibit a new-found energy that had eluded it previously.

In spite of the brief surge in the 1930s, the Maha Sabha remained largely inactive until 1942 when changes were made to its structure and a new agenda was set. While the political contestation between "moderates" and "radicals" dominated newspaper headlines during the 1930s, the Maha Sabha's leaders remained active in their capacity as Hindu leaders in other organisations. Hindu leaders who opposed the Maha Sabha were also involved in individual religious, cultural, and linguistic organisations, as well as in the political debates of the day. The SAIC decision to participate in the colonisation scheme resulted in the division of the NIC with the likes of P.R. Pather, S.L. Singh and P.B. Singh amongst those who broke away to form the CBSIA because they rejected the scheme. These individuals were important Hindu leaders and their absence from the Maha Sabha was significant. For example, P.B. Singh, who would become an influential leader in the Maha

Sabha, was the CBSIA representative who was sent to India in January 1934 to conduct a study on effects of the repatriation scheme.[399]

Failing to ignite: the 1930s

While political tensions simmered, the Maha Sabha and the agenda that was adopted after the 1934 conference fell into neglect. The arrival of the widely travelled and highly respected Pandit Rishiram in August 1937 sparked a short-term interest in the activities of the Maha Sabha. Pandit Rishiram graduated from the DAV College of Punjab in 1917 and travelled throughout India to study social and religious conditions. He joined the Arya Predesik Pratinidhi Sabha, one of the largest reformist Hindu organisations in India, at which time he began preaching for the Arya Samaj. A consistent theme that characterised his preaching was to call upon people to abandon untouchability.[400]

He undertook a tour of East Africa during 1927 and 1928, spent several years studying the teachings of Gandhi, Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and Rabindranath Tagore; undertook lecture tours throughout the Bengal and Assam; and became principal of the Dayanand Brahm Mahavidyalaya (Dayananda College of Divinity) in Lahore in 1934. He represented the Indian APPS at the World Fellowships of Faiths in London in 1936, and remained in Europe for a year after the conference to conduct lectures on Hinduism under the auspices of the Hindu Association of Europe. His work in England drew wide praise and was complimented by Tagore who said that the pandit was "ideally equipped for such work."[401] It was while he was in England that he received an invitation from M.C. Varman to visit South Africa.

According to Dr. N.P Desai, part of the reason for the Maha Sabha's inactivity following the 1934 conference was the absence of "true leadership." This leadership void, he argued, was filled with the arrival of Pandit Rishiram who helped to raise enthusiasm and create a momentum that eventually led to the 1942 biennial general meeting.[402] Upon arrival in South Africa, the pandit affiliated himself with the APS and the Maha Sabha. He was accorded a public welcome by the APS on 8 August 1937 and the Maha Sabha organised his

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[399] *Indian Opinion*, 30 March 1934.
[400] *Natal Witness*, 17 July 1937.
[401] *Natal Witness*, 17 July 1937.
[402] Desai. "A History", 94.

lecture tour which dealt with the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.[403] He was a guest of the Maha Sabha and stayed and travelled with Dr. Desai and his family.[404] The pandit was important in bringing the Maha Sabha back to life as its leaders met to organise his lectures and began to discuss some of the plans that they had put forward at the 1934 conference.[405]

One important and tangible development during the visit was the establishment of the Gandhi-Tagore Lectureship Trust by the pandit in 1937 with the aim of collecting funds to invite Hindu lecturers from India in the future so that this would not depend on private benefactors.[406] The pandit departed for India at the end of 1937. However, the momentum was maintained with the visit in 1938 by Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, a notable Hindu philosopher and reformer, and future vice president of India, who suggested that the Maha Sabha's functions be amalgamated with those of the trust.[407] The presence of these individuals brought Hindu leaders together as they had to organise lecture tours and meetings. In the period from 1934 to 1942 the Maha Sabha held just one council meeting, on 17 May 1939, in Durban to discuss its amalgamation with the trust. P.G. Desai was chairman, while P.S. Aiyar and S.R. Pather were secretaries. Owing to the death of vice president Mrs V.R.R. Moodaly, H.S. Done was acting vice president.[408] While the issue of amalgamation was discussed, the actual discussion is not given in the minutes of the meeting. The Maha Sabha and the Trust never amalgamated and in 1960, Dr. Desai claimed that this was the result of a "difference of ideas."[409]

National Hindu Conferences

The January 1942 biennial general meeting

On 2 January 1942 the Maha Sabha organised a welcome for two visitors from India, Dr. Kelkar and Dr. Soman, at their biennial general meeting at the SHA Hall.[410] The meeting was presided over by the organisation's president B.M. Patel, with T.M. Naicker and S.R. Pather as joint secretaries. Proceedings began with condolences to the stalwarts Mrs V.R.R.

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[403] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 60.
[404] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 61 and interview with Dr N. P. Desai's nephew J. V. Desai.
[405] These are the sentiments of S.R. Pather in Minutes of Council Meeting, 17 May 1939.
[406] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[407] Minutes of Council Meeting, 17 May 1939.
[408] Minutes of Council Meeting, 17 May 1939.
[409] Desai. "A History", 94.
[410] All of the Maha Sabha conference meetings referred to in this chapter took place in the SHA Hall, Victoria Street, Durban, as the Maha Sabha only completed the construction of its hall in 1960.

Moodaly and V.S.C. Pather who had passed away since the previous meeting. While Patel expressed gratitude to Kelkar and Soman for the work that they were doing in Durban, unfortunately the only reference to them is in the minutes of the meeting and in *Hindu Heritage*, neither of which give their first names. Exactly who they were and what they represented is unclear. The minutes noted that Dr. Kelkar made reference to "differences of views in connection with the partition of Hindustan" and urged that the meeting should pass a resolution of protest. Following discussion, local delegates decided unanimously not to do so.[411] It seems that the Maha Sabha decided not to venture into the realm of Hindu and Muslim relations in India. This is consistent with local attempts throughout these decades to downplay religious differences.

The main issue addressed at the January meeting was the revision of the constitution, a move suggested by the two doctors. The revised constitution, which was unanimously accepted by the delegates, contained two important changes. The first was that the Maha Sabha's affairs should be conducted by a larger council consisting of officials, 20 members and one nominee from each of the provincial committees and the second amendment was that officials and members would be elected every two years at the biennial general meeting. While the doctors' suggestions were referred to as "revision of the rules" there was actually only one change from the agreement after the 1934 conference.[412] This was that the council now consisted of 20 members as opposed to 10.[413]

This meeting nonetheless marked an important breakthrough for the Maha Sabha. According to Dr. Desai, an important feature of this meeting was that it attracted a large number of community leaders who had previously avoided the Maha Sabha on the grounds that it was a communal organisation.[414] Some of them represented the "radicals" within the NIC, who broke away in the 1930s to form the CBSIA over the Colonisation scheme.[415] Their newfound support for the Maha Sabha was due in large measure to the efforts of Sir Radhakrishnan and Pandit Rishiram who sought to promote harmony and cooperation among local Hindus. As discussed in chapter Three, some Hindu leaders were against the Maha

[411] Minutes of Council Meeting, 2 January 1942.
[412] Minutes of Council Meeting, 2 January 1942.
[413] The SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.
[414] Desai. "A History", 94.
[415] Members who were absent from the Maha Sabha in 1934 but joined for the first time include P.R. Pather, R.P. Pather, S. L. Singh and P. B. Singh. For more on the Indian political landscape in the 1930s and 1940s see S. Bhana. *Gandhi's legacy: The Natal Indian Congress. 1894-1994*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1997), 33-54.

Sabha because they feared that it was a communal organisation. Sir Radhakrishnan laboured to put an end to the political division between Indian political leaders,[416] while Pandit Rishiram urged them to foster stronger ties with African workers and preached the concept of "universal brotherhood."[417] The meeting resulted in an increase in membership and, importantly, in the years that followed, members began to implement some of the projects that were tabled at the meeting.[418]

The Conference of 1944

The Maha Sabha held its fourth Hindu conference from 8–10 April 1944 at the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg.[419] An advertisement in *Indian Opinion* called forth "all Hindu religious, social, educational and philanthropic institutions" to discuss the "very important matters affecting the welfare of the Hindus of South Africa."[420] This conference discussed such issues as the building of a hall, recognition of Hindu marriages, the conversion of Hindus to Christianity, and religious instruction at government schools. The Maha Sabha received recognition from the Madura Hindu Mission in New Delhi, whose representative N.R. Narayana sent a letter congratulating the Maha Sabha for the success of its conference.[421]

The conference took place under the leadership of R.B. Chettiar, a passenger migrant of Tamil descent who had long engaged in matters relating to the Indian community in general and the Tamil section in particular. Chettiar was born in 1874 in Tamil Nadu. He was the son of a businessman and after the untimely death of his parents, he moved to the Seychelles in 1886, and from there to Mauritius and to Natal in 1896. After spending time in Pietermaritzburg, and Johannesburg, he settled in Durban in 1902.[422] He established one of the largest Indian owned businesses in the country, Imperial Cigar, which employed more than a hundred people.[423] Chettiar was an experienced public figure. He was a long time official of the NIC and represented South African Indians at the INC session in Madras in

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[416] See Kuper. *Indian People,* 47.

[417] In all three visits that the pandit made, this was a theme that characterized many of his lectures. During his third visit to the country he was known for his liberal views: see *Indian Opinion*, 25 January 1952.

[418] Minutes of Council Meeting, 2 January 1942.

[419] *Indian Opinion,* 10 March 1944.

[420] *Indian Opinion*, 10 March 1944.

[421] Minutes of council meeting, 4 June 1944.

[422] V Cetty. "History Roots Project."

[423] *Fait Lux*. 25 May 1982.

1908 where he urged delegates to end the system of indenture.[424] He was part of various delegations to the government on the question of education in particular.[425] Chettiar was a close friend of a Tamil scholar from Madras, Siva Rama Pillay, and they opened night classes in English and Tamil for workers at Chettiar's factory.[426] Chettiar was passionate about the Tamil language and donated land valued at £200 to the HTI in 1907.[427] At different times he served as chairman of the management board of the Umgeni Road Temple; vice-chairman of the Thiru Nayanar Free Tamil School; his Rex Printing Company printed Tamil prayer books which were distributed without cost; and he produced Tamil plays at the Magazine Barracks from the 1910s to the 1930s.[428]

The chairman of the reception committee in Pietermaritzburg was S.R. Naidoo, another with a long track record in community work. Naidoo was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1885 and educated at St. Paul's Boys Model School. He was also of Tamil-speaking descent, but the son of indentured migrants. He was a Commissioner of Oaths and worked closely with Sir Srinivasa Sastri when the latter was the Agent-General in South Africa during 1927/28 and, with Bramdaw, published a selection of Sastri's speeches in South Africa. Politically, Naidoo was regarded as a moderate. He participated in the 1933 Indian Colonisation Inquiry Committee and was vice-chairman of the Indo-European Council in Pietermaritzburg during the 1930s. He was a recipient of the King's Silver Jubilee Medal for his community work.[429]

These short biographies are important in underscoring the fact that at the helm of the Maha Sabha were individuals who exercised considerable economic and political clout, and social influence.

An important figure to emerge as leader during this period was Dr. N.P. Desai who was elected as chairman in 1946 and in his capacity as chairman over the next two years the Maha Sabha's activities gathered momentum. Dr. Desai, who was a long time member of the Maha Sabha and was also its president from 1947 to 1949, was, as we shall see in chapter Five, a strong advocate of religious education in schools and reformist tendencies in Hinduism. He

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[424] *WHO'S WHO 1936*, 50.
[425] *WHO'S WHO 1936*, 50.
[426] Kuppusami, *Tamil Culture*, 78.
[427] *WHO'S WHO 1936*, 50.
[428] *WHO'S WHO 1936*, 50.
[429] *WHO'S WHO 1936*, 123.

believed that the "decay and downfall of Hindus in India" was due to "people losing their faculty of rational thinking" which enabled Christian missionaries to take advantage.[430] He wanted to provide Hindus "with first class religious and philosophical works produced in India."[431]

Dr. Desai, who was of Gujarati descent, was born in Tongaat in 1905 and spent almost two decades in India and England where he completed a medical degree. He returned to South Africa in 1940 and commenced his medical career in Durban.[432] He was a founding member of the Kathiawad Hindu Seva Samaj in 1943 and a prominent member of the APS. Although a proponent of vernacular education he stressed the use of English in his capacity as Maha Sabha leader so as not to favour any particular Hindu linguistic group in South Africa.[433] One of Dr. Desai's major achievements was the establishment of *The Hindu,* a bimonthly journal, in 1946. Pandit Jaimani had called for the establishment of a newspaper during his 1934 visit, when he argued that "it is only by disseminating knowledge to the masses that the greatness of our religion and culture could be realised."[434] The realisation of this goal was due mainly to the efforts of Dr. Desai who was its main editor.

Goodwill Conference, 1946

At a council meeting on 1 June 1946 Dr. Desai pointed out that the main purpose of the Maha Sabha's forthcoming "Goodwill Conference" was to "bring together the Hindu Mercantile community and create an interest in them of the affairs of the Sabha." This, he added, would "facilitate the bringing of Hindus of all shades of opinion together."[435] Dr. Desai's sentiments captured the potential role that the Maha Sabha leaders felt that trading elites could play in facilitating their goal of uniting Hindus. Many of the educated elites were already fully involved and it was felt traders should complement this. The Goodwill Conference of Hindu South Africans, as it was officially called, was held at the SHA Hall in Durban on 4 August 1946. It was attended by delegates from all over the country. The major themes of the conference were education, preventing conversion, and fostering pride amongst Hindus. The conference dealt with a variety of subjects. S.R. Pather traced the attempt to

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[430] N.P. Desai. "Propagation of Hinduism and Hindu Solidarity", a paper given at the Maha Sabha Centenary Hindu conference 1960.
[431] Desai. "Propagation of Hinduism."
[432] *WHO'S WHO 1960*, 66.
[433] These common prayer books are found in SC/O/SAHMS 000973. For a more extensive biography of Dr. Desai see *Kathiawad Hindu Seva Samaj: A Souvenir Brochure* (Durban, 1956), 91-93.
[434] The SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.
[435] Minutes of council meeting, 1 June 1946.

build the Swami Shankaranand Memorial Hall; a paper about Hindu missionary work in South Africa was read by T.M. Naicker; Dr. Desai focused on "Conversion and Charity"; a paper by S.R. Naidoo and R.B. Maharaj dealt with the possibility of forming a Hindu College.

Another conference was planned for 1948 but that did not take place for reasons discussed at the end of this chapter. These conferences, council meetings and a short-lived journal launched by the Maha Sabha, *The Hindu*, addressed some key issues which are discussed below. These include the appointment of Hindu marriage officers, temple committees, the threat posed by missionaries, vernacular and religious education, and the relationship with Muslims. These are discussed below.

Unified Hinduism

During the 1940s, the Maha Sabha worked on a number of projects that were aimed at unifying Hindu traditions and practices. These included the attempt to certify Hindu marriage officers, make Diwali the major Hindu festival, and constitute temple committees.

Hindu marriage officers

In early 1943, the Maha Sabha began a project which was regarded as a priority by its officials, namely, the recognition of Hindu marriage officers. One of the stipulations of the Indian Relief Act of 1914 was state recognition of Indian customary marriages. The Maha Sabha felt that there were major limitations in the Act. For example, marriage officers could conduct weddings between passenger Indians only and not between indentured migrants or between passenger and indentured migrants. Marriages between Hindus of different linguistic groups they argued were not recognised.[436] The Maha Sabha wanted the authorities to grant Hindu marriage officers the authority to perform ceremonial Hindu weddings which would be legally recognised by the state. However, the Maha Sabha was faced with the difficulty of mediating between the varieties of different ceremonies that characterised Hindu weddings.

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[436] This complaint is repeated in the minutes of council meetings whenever the issue was addressed and are the sentiments that were communicated by S. R. Pather in the *Leader* when he tried to explain the Maha Sabha's stance on the issue to the Indian public and the meetings that took place between officials of the government and the Maha Sabha's representatives. *Leader*, 11 April 1952.

The Maha Sabha began negotiations with the Protector of Indian Immigrants in early 1943 and at the Council meeting on 6 October 1943 the chairman S.R. Pather explained what had been agreed upon with the Protector. Nominations for marriage officers could be forwarded by the Maha Sabha only, and not by individual institutions, and only "men of only impeachable character and standing be recommended [for the position of Marriage Officer]."[437] S.R. Pather urged the council to accept the proposal in principle and to make adjustments, if necessary, later. Eventually, a proposal by R. Gopaulsingh and Satyadeva that a special meeting be convened, with five representatives from each affiliated institution invited, to negotiate the matter, was unanimously adopted.[438]

That meeting took place on 31 October 1943 at the Surat Hindu Association Hall, with 147 representatives from affiliated institutions present.[439] Despite some opposition from a number of the members present the APS were nonetheless entitled to 30 representatives. There was a short discussion about this until S.R. Pather concluded by claiming that this was agreed to at a previous meeting. Satyadeva argued that while the Maha Sabha wanted recognition of the ceremonial aspects of Hindu marriages as well as the authority of Hindu marriage officers, it would be "undesirable" if all Hindu priests became marriage officers because many priests were not proficient in English. In similar vein, P.B. Singh argued that "the very best and responsible members of the Indian community" should be considered for the position of marriage officers. T.M. Naicker argued that the issue was a difficult one because of the differences within the "Hindu community." He added that the situation was complex and whatever decision the Maha Sabha took had to be "accepted by all" sections of the Hindu community. S.L. Singh "asserted very forcefully" that no line should be drawn between different sections of the Hindu community. He added that given the diverse marriage ceremonies amongst Hindus, which would be unfamiliar to the authorities, the Maha Sabha "should be made the mouth piece in this connection and it should make representations to the Indian Immigration officer."[440]

Following further discussion, P.B. Singh and T.M. Naicker's proposal that the Maha Sabha should seek the legalisation of Hindu marriage ceremonies and the appointment of

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[437] Minutes for council meeting, 6 October 1943.
[438] Minutes for council meeting, 6 October 1943.
[439] Their names are not listed in the minutes and it is uncertain their role in the meeting as only the arguments of Maha Sabha council members are recorded.
[440] Minutes for Special General Meeting, 30 October 1943.

Hindu marriage officers was agreed upon unanimously.[441] In the years following the resolution, representatives from the Maha Sabha met with government authorities to seek legal recognition of Hindu marriage officers. While nothing tangible emerged from these meetings, the Maha Sabha's efforts to establish uniformity over Hindu marriage ceremonies as well as to appoint candidates that it saw fit for the position of marriage officers is one of the first indications of the Maha Sabha seeking to assume power within the community.

Devasthanum committee

At the end of 1943 the Maha Sabha decided to establish a *Devasthanum* committee to organise the work of temples throughout the province. On 22 and 23 January 1944 a conference was held in Durban to establish this committee and to consider "on the best method of making the temples living institutions for spreading the eternal principles and truths of the Hindu religion in South Africa." An advertisement in *Indian Opinion* requested that all temples not affiliated to the Maha Sabha should consider this as a matter of urgency.[442] The chairman and secretary of the conference were T.M. Naicker and R.P. Pather respectively.[443]

R.P. Pather, a clerk in a legal firm, was born in Tongaat in 1904, educated at the Hindu Tamil Institute and Sastri College, and was involved in public activities from the age of fourteen when he joined the Thiruvaluva Nayanaar Free Tamil School committee. He held responsible official positions on many religious, sporting, social welfare, and educational organisations, as well as the CBSIA.[444] He fitted the profile of a typical Maha Sabha leader in that he was proficient in English and vernacular education, part of an educated elite, and took part in a wide range of community activities. It is also striking that individuals such as R.P. Pather and S.R. Naidoo could belong to rival political bodies but set aside their differences at times when it came to furthering the cause of Hinduism. According to B.D. Lalla the conference dealt with "the effective use of temples for propagating religious propaganda and other relevant matters."[445] Temples played an important role in the lives of many South African Hindus and the members of the Maha Sabha realised that mediating their affairs was important to make them meaningful in the lives of the Hindu masses. While the conference

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[441] Minutes for Special General Meeting, 30 October 1943.
[442] *Indian Opinion,* 7 January 1944.
[443] Council Biennial Report, 31 December 1944.
[444] *WHO'S WHO* 1939, 200.
[445] B.D. Lalla. "A review", 110.

attracted representatives from 26 temples only, there was enough encouragement from those present to form the *Devasthanum* Committee.[446]

Swami Shankaranand Hall

In his speech to the 1934 conference, Pandit Jaimini urged the council to establish a home which would "be conducive to the welfare and stability of the Hindu Maha Sabha and act as a vehicle in consolidating that organisation." This building, he argued, would "serve to bring Hindus under one common bond and strengthen their mutual relations and co-operation." It would not only be a place where the council could meet but also act as a "platform" for future missionaries to "enlighten the community."[447] A correspondent to the *Indian Opinion* criticised such a project at a cost of "£10 000 or more" on the grounds that there were more pressing issues to deal with. Such a building, the writer argued, "will not ease the lot of Indian unemployment problem in South Africa" and he condemned the Maha Sabha which, he claimed, was an elitist organisation led by "shopkeepers, preachers, theorists and speculators."[448]

Notwithstanding such reservations, members were keen to erect a building where they could conduct their meetings and hold other activities. Raising funds for the project proved far more difficult than anticipated and this issue was addressed in general meetings and Hindu conferences regularly without a definite outcome. The issue surfaced again during Pandit Rishiram's visit. During the council meeting of 1939, S.R. Pather suggested that the Maha Sabha form a separate account for the building scheme. He and T. M. Naicker donated £25 each, while B.M. Patel contributed £105.[449] When the Maha Sabha held a memorial meeting in Pietermaritzburg in 1944 to pay reverence to Swami Shankaranand who had passed away earlier in the year, it was decided to name the building after him in recognition of his pioneering work to promote Hinduism.[450] Kasturba Gandhi passed away on the 22 February 1944 and when news of her death reached Durban, the Maha Sabha arranged for the closure of "all Hindu businesses" and organised a similar meeting.[451]

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[446] B.D. Lalla. "A review", 110.
[447] The SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.
[448] *Indian Opinion*, 20 July 1934.
[449] Minutes of Council Meeting, 17 May 1939.
[450] Minutes for council meeting, 15 February 1944.
[451] Council Biennial Report, 31 December 1944.

A Trust Deed for the hall was prepared and approved in early 1944, and at the council meeting on 9 September 1944, the treasurer, Govan Mani, read out the list of donors whose pledges amounted to £4,000. However, only £1,000 had actually been received. Dr. Desai, the general secretary, complained that the "[fundraising] functions of the Maha Sabha are unsatisfactory" and that there were "many ardent Hindus" who would contribute generously. S.R Pather defended the Maha Sabha's efforts and R. Gopaulsingh urged the council to gather together rich and influential men to discuss the scheme.[452] It was only at the end of the year (1944) that sufficient money was raised to purchase a property at the corner of Lorne Street and Maud Lane to build a hall.[453] Following the Goodwill Conference of 1946 (see below), the Maha Sabha organized a "one pound drive" to raise funds for the hall.[454] Early in 1947, R.B. Chettiar, Dr. Desai and S.L. Singh travelled to the Transvaal to meet with Hindu leaders. The trio visited Johannesburg, Pretoria, Benoni, Springs, Roodepoort and Krugersdorp and collected £2,500 for the proposed Swami Shankaranand Hall which was the primary motive for their visit.[455] However, it would take more than a decade before sufficient funds were raised.

Hindu Consciousness

"AUM"

It was also during 1944 that the Maha Sabha sought to promote Hinduism by manufacturing an emblem bearing the "AUM" sign, which is an important mantra to Hinduism. They prepared this using the Pretoria Government Mint at a total of cost £65. The idea was first put forward by Ashwin Choudree and Hans Maghrajh who also raised the funds to finance the project. The first batch of one thousand emblems was sold out in quick time and further orders were made.[456] The activities of the Maha Sabha received a setback when Hans Maghrajh, a key figure in the Maha Sabha during the 1930s and 1940s, passed away on 4 December 1944 as a result of cardiac arrest.[457] Hans, the son of B.A. Maghrajh who had been an important early member of the Maha Sabha, was born in 1909 in Durban. He schooled at the Higher Grade Government Indian School and went into the estate agency business as Hans Maghrajh & Co. He was a member of the Indian Hospital Advisory Committee, Indian Ratepayers Association, Durban Town Planning Association, Natal Indian

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[452] Minutes of Council Meeting, 9 September 1944.
[453] Biennial General Report, 1945-1946.
[454] Minutes of council meeting, 16 July 1946.
[455] Biennial General Report, June 1945-March 1947.
[456] Minutes for council meeting, 16 December 1944.
[457] Minutes for council meeting, 16 December 1944.

Real Estate Agents, St John Ambulance Association, and created the Hans Maghrajh Christmas Stamp Fund to raise money for a tuberculosis hospital.[458] He was also the secretary of the Young Men's Arya Samaj and assistant secretary of the Aryan Representative Assembly and APS, whom he assisted to purchase a property on which to build a *Vedic* temple and hall.[459] His death was clearly a huge loss to the Maha Sabha.

The quick sale of the first batch of AUM emblems was viewed positively by the Maha Sabha. According to its biennial report, "it is apparent from the sales of these badges that there has at least dawned on the once indifferent Hindus a real awakening of religious consciousness." The report added that "if the Maha Sabha has not been enabled to do something more tangible, this alone is worth its existence and resuscitation for infusing this religious mindedness to our people."[460]

Religious and vernacular education

At the 1944 conference a decision was taken to approach the Natal Education Department (NED) about introducing Hindu instruction at government schools, although it would be a number of years before this dream materialized. A more pressing concern was that the majority of Indian children of school going age were still not attending school owing to poverty and a lack of adequate facilities. The matter of increasing the number of children in school and the low salary of teachers featured prominently in Indian newspapers and by the early 1950s there were great improvements in both areas. Then the Maha Sabha made a concerted effort to pressure the NED to permit Hindu religious instruction at schools. [461]

A council meeting on 16 March 1946 focused on schools originally founded by Hindu religious institutions which were subsequently converted into government aided schools. Following long discussion around the state of education in the province, a proposal by S.L. Singh that the council send a letter to the NED requesting that a common prayer be read at schools daily, and describing the poor conditions of schools, was unanimously adopted. The introduction of Hindu instruction at schools remained a concern of the council and at the August 1946 meeting Sunbhuder Panday argued that the first step in this regard would be to compile a common prayer in English. The decision to publish the prayer in English was

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[458] *WHO'S WHO* 1939, 144.
[459] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening,* 110-111.
[460] Biennial General Report, 1945-1946.
[461] Biennial Report, 31 December 1944.

intended to avoid marginalising any particular linguistic group and use a common language to unite Hindus. Panday suggested that this should be completed before the department was approached.[462] Dr. Desai, assisted by Pandit Rishiram, compiled the Hindu prayer booklet. By the time of the biennial report of March 1947 the Maha Sabha had distributed more than 5000 copies without charge to government-aided schools across Natal.[463] This was typical of the work undertaken by Dr. Desai, who is credited in many circles for his attempts to unite Hindus.[464]

Flag hoisting

At the Goodwill Conference of 1946, S.L. Singh suggested the hoisting of a Hindu flag and taking a Hindu pledge annually. The council declared that the first Sunday of October every year would become a "Pledge Taking and Flag Hoisting Day" throughout the country.[465] This symbolic act was another means through which the Maha Sabha attempted to promote Hindu consciousness. The flag itself was carefully designed for this purpose and shortly after the conference the *Leader* was confident that at schools, temples and even at homes this flag "will infuse enthusiasm in the people whenever and wherever hoisted, and give them food for thought in the cause of Hinduism."[466]

Diwali

In a timeline dealing with the Maha Sabha in *Hindu Heritage*, 1944 was declared as the year that the organisation worked to promote Diwali as the national festival for Hindus.[467] In a council meeting on 9 September 1944, S.R. Pather informed the council that "according to the books, etc" Diwali fell on 16 October. The council unanimously agreed that the Maha Sabha would publicly announce that this date should be set aside for Hindus to celebrate the festival, that school authorities would be informed that Hindu children should to be exempt from school on 16 and 17 October, and that all businesses owned by Hindus be closed on 16 October "without exception."[468]

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[462] Minutes of council meeting, 25 August 1946.
[463] Biennial General Report, March 1945-March 1947.
[464] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 61.
[465] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage*, 100.
[466] *Leader*, 16 August 1946.
[467] Nowbath. *Hindu Heritage*. 99.
[468] Minutes for council meeting, 9 September 1944.

The biennial report produced at the end of 1944 stated that the efforts by the officials, who distributed circulars urging business owners and employees to observe the occasion, had been successful "to a very large extent."[469] While it is not clear how many schools and businesses followed the Maha Sabha's prescription, the section on Diwali in the report urged officials to be persistent until "this holiday is officially recognised by all authorities where Hindus or Indians generally are concerned."[470] The promotion of Diwali was very important to the Maha Sabha's aim to foster a unitary Hindu identity. Swami Shankaranand had laboured to get the celebration acknowledged as the national celebration of Hindus regardless of sectional differences. From the 1940s the Maha Sabha attempted to use the festival to foster solidarity and awareness amongst Hindus.[471]

In 1945 the Maha Sabha again laboured to get Diwali recognised as a day of national celebration for Hindus. In a council meeting on 21 August 1945, Dr. Desai explained that Diwali would fall on 3 and 4 November which were Saturday and Sunday respectively. It was thereafter agreed by the council to request Hindu businesses to close on 3 November.[472] Following the goodwill conference of 1946, the Maha Sabha decided to introduce Diwali stamps from 1946.[473]

International Links

The visit of international figures and commemorations of the birth or death of important religious figures continued to play an important role in raising Hindu consciousness. On 28 May 1944 the Maha Sabha organised a celebration for the birthday of Swatantryaveer Savarkar (1883–1966) at the SHA Hall. This famous Indian revolutionary was president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha and is credited with developing the Hindu nationalist political ideology of Hindutva. The Maha Sabha raised £600 and distributed it to the ABH and the Indian Blind Society.[474] This event marked a rare link between the South African Maha Sabha and the Hindu nationalist All India Mahasabha. However, given that the occasion was used to raise money for the poorer segments of the population, it would be premature to draw links between the two organisations based on this single association.

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[469] Council Biennial Report, 31 December 1944.
[470] Council Biennial Report, 31 December 1944.
[471] Biennial General Report, 1945-1946.
[472] Minutes for council meeting, 24 August 1945.
[473] Minutes of council meeting, 16 July 1946.
[474] Council Biennial Report, 31 December 1944.

Pandit Rishiram made his second visit to South Africa in 1945. He was the first lecturer brought to the country by the Gandhi-Tagore lectureship trust that he had established during his first visit. One of his major achievements during this second visit was to raise £6,000 for the trust through the lectures that he conducted throughout the country. His eight lecture series in Durban was titled "The Nature and Destiny of Man"; he also lectured for a week in Pietermaritzburg; for a few days in suburban areas along the north and south coasts of Natal; and in the Cape Province and the Transvaal where he attracted many whites in the audience. The Maha Sabha's biennial report stated that the pandit's six month tour "engendered interest in religion and philosophy" and served the Maha Sabha's purpose of urging "all Hindus, and the youth in particular" to study religion and philosophy in order to "bring about moral upliftment of all people and lay a foundation of a truly religious life.[475]

The pandit was also complimented on his "exhortation [to Hindus] to do service to humanity, irrespective of race and colour." The pandit implored the Maha Sabha to work towards achieving closer cooperation with Africans and led by example in this respect. He visited the Fort Hare University, Adams Mission College, and McCord Hospital where he addressed a group of African nurses. During his lectures throughout Natal he appealed for funds and from the monies raised, he contributed to the Natal Bantu Blind Society, Ohlange Institute, the non-European section of the Natal University College, Adams Mission College, McCord Hospital, and Fort Hare University.[476]

Another visitor was Swami Ghanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission of India who came to South Africa from Mauritius in 1947 at the invitation of the Lower Tugela District Veda Dharma Sabha of Stanger. The Maha Sabha accorded him a public welcome at a reception at the KHSS Hall, Lorne Street, on 12 January 1947 and he delivered two lectures under the auspices of the Maha Sabha at the M.K. Gandhi Library on 16 and 20 February as well as conducte a number of lectures for the Ramakrishna Mission of South Africa. These lectures were well received by locals.[477] The swami also established a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission in Sea View.

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[475] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[476] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[477] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.

Countering the missionary threat

The post Second World War period was characterised by the Maha Sabha's concern about the influence of Christian missionaries on "uneducated" and economically downtrodden Hindus. The biennial report produced at the end of 1947 described the "large number" of conversions of Hindus to Christianity and Islam as a "standing disgrace to the Hindu community." It warned that Hindus were "inviting a grave disaster" and that it was even more sinful to "watch and permit our economically down-trodden people to be converted" than it was to convert. Council members felt that the social services provided by missionaries, such as hospitals, maternity homes, and schools "paved the way of conversion."[478] The Maha Sabha's strategy to combat this threat was based on producing enlightened literature to educate Hindus about Hinduism, and providing charity to indigent Hindus who were perceived as being most receptive to the handouts of missionaries.[479]

The Maha Sabha formed a charity committee in 1945. This was a logical development given the widespread poverty among Indians and the fact that the economic advancement of Hindus was a founding principle of the Maha Sabha. The Maha Sabha began discussions to organise bursaries for destitute school children.[480] R.B. Chettiar suggested at a council meeting that the Maha Sabha establish a central depot and distribution centre to assist the large number of poor Hindus who were begging. His suggestion led to a discussion with Dr. Desai, S.L. Singh, Satyadeva and Sunbhuder Panday.[481] They concluded that while the suggestion was laudable it would be too difficult to implement because of their limited resources. Chettiar was asked to draw up a proposal on how he planned to initiate the project.[482] The Maha Sabha's reluctance to get involved in such activities can be explained by the fact that it was struggling to raise funds for other projects such as the Swami Shankaranand Hall.[483]

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[478] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[479] See SAHMS Centenary Hindu conference 1960.
[480] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage*, 99.
[481] Minutes for council meeting, 6 May 1945.
[482] Minutes for council meeting, 6 May 1945.
[483] Biennial General Report, 1945-1946.

At the general meeting of 16 March 1946 S.L. Singh pointed to the elitist nature of the Maha Sabha. He argued that the work of affiliated institutions as well as "the fate of unfortunate Hindus who through lack of finance and other support suffered many hardships in the way of burial, begging, and conversion of their faith into another" were not known to the Maha Sabha. It was decided that the Maha Sabha's affiliated institutions and "prominent men" should provide reports to the council.[484] The minutes do not define prominent men but it was probably taken for granted that it referred to the many educated individuals who participated in a myriad of community activities.

At the same March 1946 meeting Dr. Desai reported that M.C. Varman was making arrangements to invite Professor Parmanand on a lecture tour.[485] The professor had had a major impact on local Hindus when he visited in 1905 and it was hoped that his visit would have a similar effect and that he could galvanise local Hindus in the struggle against missionaries. However, these plans were cancelled later in the year because of Parmanand's poor health. Attempts to bring Pandit Havishankar from Lourenco Marques and Swami Gynanananda from Mauritius also failed.[486]

At the Goodwill conference of 1946, Dr. Desai identified the two main causes of Hindu conversion to other faiths as poverty and the ignorance of Hindus about the true nature of Hinduism. Dr. Desai had been stressing this in council meetings and called poverty "the root cause of conversion."[487] One practical step taken by the Maha Sabha was to form a provincial Hindu Charitable Institute and place charity boxes at Hindu businesses.[488] The 1946 biennial report stated that "extreme poverty is one of the factors that missionaries from other faiths exploit to convert large numbers of Hindus" and identified the establishment of a centralised charitable institute as a means to combat this.[489] With Dr. Desai instrumental, the Maha Sabha formed a number of *Seva Samitis* across Durban to assist poor and destitute Indians during 1946.[490]

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[484] Minutes of council meeting, 16 March 1946.
[485] Minutes of council meeting, 16 March 1946.
[486] Minutes of council meeting, 25 August 1946.
[487] Minutes of council meeting, 1 June 1946.
[488] Minutes of council meeting, 16 July 1946.
[489] 1946 biennial report.
[490] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening*, 61 and Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage*, 100.

Dr. Desai was also concerned that the Putmajurain Andhra Hall in Clairwood was being used by Christian missionaries which he claimed was "proving detrimental" to countering the missionaries and urged the council to address this. Throughout its existence, in fact, the Maha Sabha argued that an umbrella Hindu body was needed to protect Hinduism against various "inroads" threatening it.[491] Dr. Desai warned that "unless strong measures are taken to stem the tide the Maha Sabha's existence cannot be justified."[492] Just as it had produced a common prayer book in English, the Maha Sabha compiled a similar book for the general public. The Maha Sabha also formed a movement to check proselytisation and undertook a "propaganda" tour of Northern Natal. This was conducted by the members of the council who addressed large gatherings and interviewed leaders of various bodies.[493]

The "threat" posed by Christianity was addressed in *The Hindu*. For example, an article on "Divine Healing and Conversions" claimed that "misguided Christian missionaries, in order to gain their ends, have been sent all over Natal to convert large masses of ignorant, illiterate and economically downtrodden Hindus to Christianity."[494] The message of articles such as these was that a huge problem among South African Hindus was their lack of knowledge about Hinduism which made them receptive to missionaries of other faiths. Gandhi's experience with the Christian lawyer, A.W. Baker, who unsuccessfully tried to convert him, was featured in *The Hindu*. The article began with a message from the editor who called on Hindus to read "in Mahatma Gandhi's own words, why he refused to adopt the Christian religion. Follow in the footsteps of the Mahatma and do not be tempted to forsake your own religion."[495] The following words of Gandhi were highlighted in bold: "it was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions."[496]

The Maha Sabha wanted to show that Christianity was not superior to Hinduism, and invoking the Mahatma's words was seen as an influential way of doing so. The Maha Sabha

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[491] See T.P. Naidoo (ed). *Challenge: The papers and resolutions of the seventeenth anniversary convention of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha.* (Durban :South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 1982). The two main challenges identified by the leaders of the Maha Sabha in this compilation were the lack "of personal commitment to cultural and religious ideals by Hindus" and "other religions, more particularly Christianity, whose inroads into Hinduism undermine its ancient heritage."
[492] Minutes of council meeting, 1 June 1946.
[493] Minutes of council meeting, 1 June 1946.
[494] *Hindu,* May 1946.
[495] *Hindu,* May 1946.
[496] *Hindu,* May 1946.

was attempting to challenge the idea that Christianity was the only supreme religion. The journal also included articles by respected international figures such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Swami Vivekananda that dealt with the theme of the universality of religious ideals and their defence of Eastern religions, especially Hinduism for its longevity.

Christianity was targeted because Maha Sabha leaders were concerned that large numbers of Hindus were converting to that faith. Hindus who lacked knowledge of their faith and became receptive to such missionaries were equally to blame. The July 1946 edition of the *Hindu* contained an account of the success experienced by the Maha Sabha in preventing a family of sixteen Hindus who were on the verge of converting to Islam, from "forsak[ing] their religion" because they had "no food, no clothing and no one to console them or render any assistance." The Maha Sabha message that followed this article was as follows: "We appeal that whenever any Hindu is in any difficulty anywhere, please get in touch with the secretary of the Hindu Maha Sabha."[497] In the same edition, the Maha Sabha appealed directly to the Hindu public to put an end to the conversion movements of Christian leaders: "consciousness among Hindus should be aroused to such a degree that the missionaries would dare not touch the Hindus."[498]

Maha Sabha council meetings and conferences portrayed the narrative of Hindus as being receptive to the message of other religions because of their lack of knowledge of "true" Hinduism. The *Hindu* contained a section "Every Hindu should read these books" which recommended the core works of notable reformers. This included the following reading list *In Defence of Hinduism, My Master, My Life and Mission, Essentials of Hinduism, East and West, Modern India* and *Rajur Veda* by Swami Vivekananda; *Common Sense about Yoga* by Swami Pavitrananda and *Religion and Modern Doubts, Hinduism at a Glance* and *Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance* by Swami Nirvedananda. Also included in the reading list were *Short Life of Vivekananda* and *Short Life of Ramakrishna.*[499] The Maha Sabha's recommended literature provided a good guide to the kind of Hinduism that it sought to project in South Africa. Hinduism was portrayed as a way of life that embraced fundamental morals common to all religions, as being tolerant, and as having a universal

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[497] *Hindu,* July 1946.
[498] *Hindu,* July 1946.
[499] See *Hindu,* May 1946, 15.

approach. However the emphasis on one Supreme Being and the focus on select texts meant that the Maha Sabha was also projecting a monolithic ideal of Hinduism.

> Hindus believe in ONE GOD… Though they speak different languages, they are linked together by the common religion. The four Vedas, Upianishads, Brahmasutras, Shrimad Bhagvad Gita, Ramayana Mahabharata are the accepted scriptures of the Great Religion of the Hindus.[500]

The above extract from the *Hindu* captures the tendency to portray a textual and monolithic Hinduism while the following message illustrates the Maha Sabha's effort to foster pride among Hindus: "I am a Hindu. My religion is known as Hinduism. My mother country is Hindustan or India. Hinduism is the oldest and best religion in the world and it is the source of all religions."[501] However, contrary to the Maha Sabha's message, the majority of Hindus in South Africa practiced Sanathan Dharma or ritual Hinduism which often lacked a textual basis.[502] There was a contradiction in this attempt by reformers to promote a common definition of Hinduism. They were concerned with maintaining religious heritage and upholding tradition, but at the same time were attempting to unite a very heterogeneous group of people (South African Hindus) by enforcing a monolithic ideal of Hinduism to forge a common Hindu identity. The defence of Hinduism against inroads by Christian missionaries in particular was to be achieved by persuading or educating the mass of Hindus to give up their age-old beliefs.

It is revealing that throughout 1946 there was only one reference in any of the minutes to the passive resistance campaign that had started in June of that year to protest against segregation and would continue for two years.[503] On 25 August 1946 S.R. Pather suggested that in view of the reports of the treatment of passive resisters in prison, the Maha Sabha should tender evidence on prison reform. Pather was responding to letters that he received on the matter; however, what was said in the letters or who sent them was not recorded in the minutes. R. Panday, S. Panday, Dr. Desai, and J.S. Roopnarian spoke on the matter but what they said is

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[500] *Hindu,* July 1946.
[501] *Hindu,* July 1946.
[502] See contemporary studies by Diesel and Maxwell. *Hinduism in Natal* and Kumar. *Hindus in South Africa* for the continuing popularity of these forms of worship.
[503] See Goolam Vahed, "Monty...Meets Gandhi...Meets Mandela: The Dilemma of Non-Violent Resisters in South Africa, 1940-1960" in *Historia* 54:1(2009), 37-41.

not recorded. The council decided, however, not to pursue the matter any further.[504] It seemed as if the council of the Maha Sabha decided to stick purely to dealing with religious matters at their meetings and not get involved in politics. This however was to change when a particularly momentous occasion occurred in India.

Indian independence and Hindu-Muslim relations

Most of 1947 was taken up with events around the independence of India from the British. This was a momentous event to people of Indian decent throughout the diaspora and South Africa was no different. What is interesting, however, is a comment in the biennial report of 1947 that "in order to placate the anti-Hindu and anti-national element in the Natal Indian Congress, this political organisation was unable to celebrate this unique and historic occasion." The report expressed pride that the Maha Sabha, "as the supreme body of Hindus in South Africa" was able to organise a massive celebration at the SHA Hall on 23 August 1947 in Durban where "never before in history" was there "such an overflow gathering." The report described the independence of India as a reminder to those at the Maha Sabha's celebration that "Hindustan belongs to the Hindus." The report also stated that "it would be in the future policy of our organisation to work with the All Hindu Maha Sabha" since "advice and inspiration from India is always welcome."[505] The report gave its unqualified support for Nehru's secular government which was "hailed with spontaneous joy" and a cable of congratulations was sent to him.[506]

The September 1947 edition of the *Hindu* dealt in greater detail with Indian independence and how it related to Hindus in South Africa and in particular their relationship with Muslims.[507] The establishment of Pakistan was condemned as "a mortal blow against the unity of our beloved Motherland." This "cauldron of Pakistan fanaticism," the article claimed, was reminiscent of "the creed of the Middle Ages." The writer warned that there were elements of this creed in South Africa and Hindus had to be "be actively vigilant" before it casts "a menacing shadow over the life of people in South Africa."[508] This article is puzzling because many of the Maha Sabha leaders in South Africa worked closely with Muslim leaders in secular political bodies, notwithstanding the occasional tension around

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[504] Minutes of council meeting, 25 August 1946.
[505] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[506] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[507] The author is most likely Dr. Desai as the article is titled message from our editorial.
[508] *Hindu*, September 1947.

religion, with the 1936 marriage between the Indian Agent-General Sir Syed Raza Ali and Miss Sammy being one example.[509] But such tension was a rare exception.

With regard to Muslims in South Africa the editorial made the following claim in the same September 1947 issue:

> Numerically we are superior in this country as in the Motherland, but it is a type of superiority on which we must not depend too much. We must depend on the type of superiority that makes the Moslem courageous and bold. The Moslem is more aggressive and militant than the Hindu. There is greater unity and solidarity among them. When it comes to defending their faith and people, they would not hesitate. We cannot despise or lightly scoff at these qualities. They are our immediate and urgent needs if we are to survive as a group of our name.[510]

While Muslims were seen to be practising "religious brotherhood," which Muslim leaders did not have to preach because all Muslims displayed it, the lack of Hindu unity was "responsible for the threatened state in which Hindus find themselves." The article did not advocate that Hindus become "fanatics" and develop a hostile attitude to people of other faiths, but saw the reformation of Hindu society as the solution.[511] The idea that Hindus in South Africa should bring about their own reformation and display religious unity was not new to the Maha Sabha but the negative portrayal of Muslims was a new development. The Maha Sabha leaders had in the past focused on the threat posed by Christian missionaries with the political struggle ensuring unity between Hindus and Muslims. Tension on the Asian sub-continent over the partition of India seemed to have impacted on local developments. The Maha Sabha abandoned publication of the *Hindu* shortly after its launch due to a lack of funds and as the relationship between Hindus and Muslims was not raised in council minutes, it is difficult to know exactly what the thinking of the Maha Sabha was. Overall, however, the photographs of the period and newspaper reports pointed to a remarkable situation whereby Hindus and Muslims jointly celebrated the independence of India and Pakistan.

A lull in activities

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[509] As mentioned in chapter three, many prominent members of the NIC who were also Hindu leaders resigned from the secular political association, the NIC in protest of a Miss Sammy's decision to convert to Islam.
[510] *Hindu*, September 1947.
[511] *Hindu*, September 1947.

The Maha Sabha's biennial general report for 1947 revealed that members had focused on issues that had been of concern for several years and would be pursued with vigour into the future. Great emphasis was placed on the importance of charity, partly to combat conversion but also to counteract the large numbers of Hindu beggars, which was seen as hindering the attempt to foster Hindu pride.[512] Two other issues raised at the meeting would also be taken up by the Maha Sabha over the next decade.

The first issue was vernacular education. Members wanted Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu taught in English language schools owned by Hindu institutions. In addition to encouraging vernacular education members also passed a resolution urging all Hindus to study the "most recognised texts" in Hinduism, the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and the *Puranas* (although it was not specified which ones).[513] No reference however was made to any South Indian texts. The Biennial meeting also expressed gratitude to the *Suddhi* movement, both in India and in South Africa. The different reform movements in India who were reconverting former Hindus to Hinduism were praised for their efforts. Special gratitude was expressed to local Hindu associations, in particular the Shri Sanathan Dharma Sabha, for carrying out the movement in South Africa.[514] The SSDS was established in 1941 to promote the Sanathan Dharma in the country. The SSDS, APS, NTVS, KHSS, SHA and AMS would act in the 1950s as the Maha Sabha's six principle affiliated associations.

The two years that followed the 1947 meeting were relatively quieter for the Maha Sabha. A perusal of the minutes of council meetings points to the severe shortage of funds as constraining activities. For that reason the Maha Sabha ceased publication of its bimonthly journal the *Hindu* in 1948.[515] From May 1948 onwards the only edition of the *Hindu* that was produced each year was a Diwali special. A national Hindu conference scheduled for January 1949 was also threatened. The issue was discussed at a council meeting on 20 November 1948 and members, especially the president Dr. Desai, were extremely unhappy.[516] One member, A.J. Koobhair, felt that it would reflect negatively on the Maha Sabha if it failed to

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[512] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[513] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947. It is interesting that the report would advocate the teachings of the *Puranas* since they are seen by many reformers as inferior texts. The Puranas are a collection of religious texts which also includes South Indian traditions as well.
[514] Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947.
[515] Minutes for council meeting, 15 May 1948.
[516] Minutes for council meeting, 20 November 1948.

hold the conference. It was eventually decided to postpone the conference until April to give organisers enough time to attract "prominent Hindus" from all parts of the country.[517] However, the conference had to be cancelled because of the Durban race riots of 1949.[518] The three day January 1949 African-Indian riot was triggered by an Indian shopkeeper's assault of an African youth. The violence resulted in 142 deaths and injuries to 1087 people. While the causes and course of this conflict are beyond the scope of this study[519] the fact that there were 44,738 Indian refugees meant that Indian leaders were preoccupied with relief work for months.[520] The Maha Sabha as an organisation was involved in this endeavour and had to cancel the proposed conference.[521]

Failure to hold the conference did reflect negatively on the Maha Sabha ambitions as there was little organised activity over the next few years. This would only change with the third visit to South Africa of Pandit Rishiram in 1952. After his 1945–1946 visit to South Africa, the pandit spent time in the United States, Canada, the West Indies, British and Dutch Guiana, East Africa and Mauritius. By the time of his 1952 visit to South Africa, he had acquired a reputation as a liberal. In Durban he conducted lectures in both English and Hindi on the "Basis of International Unity"; "Yoga Stem and its Practice" and the "Moral Government of the World." These proved very popular and attracted large numbers. The chairmen of each lecture included Maha Sabha members Dr. Desai and Ashwin Choudhree as well as Dr A.L. Taylor of the McCord hospital. After his Durban tour he travelled to Johannesburg, Pretoria, Louis Trichardt, Kimberley, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and East London preaching world unity. He condemned South Africa's racial division and argued that "no good can come of water tight compartments."[522] An *Indian Opinion* reporter responded that "if Panditji's words are taken to heart, our struggle here against injustice will seem easier to face."[523] The story of the Maha Sabha's activities in the 1950s is taken up in the next chapter.

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[517] Minutes for council meeting, 20 November 1948.

[518] Minutes for council meeting, 2 April 1949 also see Surenda Bhana and Bridglal Pachai. *A documentary history of Indian South Africans.* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1984), 208-213.

[519] See T.G. Ramamurthi. "Lessons of Durban Riots" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29: 10 (March, 1994) and Iain Edwards. "Cato Manor: Cruel Past, Pivotal Future" in *Review of African Political Economy*, 21: 61 (Sep, 1994).

[520] Goolam Vahed. . 'Race or Class? Community and Conflict amongst Indian Municipal Employees in Durban, 1914-1949' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27: 1 (March, 2001), 123.

[521] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 100.

[522] *Indian Opinion*, 25 April 1952.

[523] *Indian Opinion*, 25 January 1952.

Conclusion

The activities of the Maha Sabha during the 1940s provide insights into the organisation, its leadership, and the rationale for having an umbrella body to unite Hindus. Its leadership had clearly defined objectives: one was the prevention of conversion to Hinduism by providing social welfare to poorer Hindus, educating them about the proper tenets of Hinduism, that is, a reformist Hinduism, and fostering pride and a sense of Hindu consciousness through such things as the AUM emblem and a Hindu flag; building a hall where activities could be held; creating a unified Hinduism with the adoption of Diwali an important component of this project; and introducing religious and vernacular education at schools. As we saw in the previous chapter, during his visit in 1934 Pandit Mehta Jaimini argued that recognition of national heroes was a crucial component of fostering patriotism for the "Hindu nation." This included the commemoration of the death and birth days of prominent Hindu leaders, both secular and religious.[524]

The Maha Sabha did make progress in some areas but this seemed to lag towards the end of the decade because of a lack of funds as well as events such as the passive resistance campaign and the 1949 riots. To combat conversion to other faiths, the Maha Sabha sought to educate Hindus through its journal, *The Hindu*, printing prayer books, issuing badges, and seeking to make Diwali a common festival. Attempts to establish organisations to assist the economically downtrodden failed because of a lack of resources. Publication of the *Hindu* was a breakthrough in the Maha Sabha's attempts to communicate its message to the Hindu public. However, the paper did not last long and even while it was in circulation it was by no means representative. The journal was distributed to affiliated bodies and in any event, only a limited number of Hindus were literate.

While the Maha Sabha did increase the tempo and range of its activities and seek to unite Hindus to pursue common goals, it remained a body controlled by a small elite that had little bearing on the majority of Hindus. The Maha Sabha had little influence in the lives of the vast majority of Hindus. However, it was gathering momentum and from the early 1950s, a new wave of enthusiasm saw the Maha Sabha pursue some ambitious projects. This decade

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[524] While not discussed in this chapter the Maha Sabha also held a memorial service for Prof Parmanand in 1949 and Bhawani Dayal in 1950. The Maha Sabha also organized a birthday celebration for Gandhi on the 2 October 1946.

was to culminate in celebrations to mark the centenary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa, and provided an opportunity to take stock of the state of Hinduism in South Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE:
FULL STEAM AHEAD

The 1930s and 1940s were decades of consolidation for the resuscitated Maha Sabha. The Maha Sabha was at its most active and productive during the 1950s, a decade in which the political climate had changed considerably: the Nationalist Party government, elected in 1948, had begun implementing the Group Areas Act which had massive implications for the Indian masses. The "Indian" political terrain had also changed with younger, more radical leaders coming to the fore and seeking to forge a non-racial political alliance with Africans, whites and Coloureds. This had, in fact, preceded the coming to power of the National Party. Attempts to introduce land segregation in the early 1940s led to the radical restructuring of the NIC which saw many of its moderate members ousted from office. These included longtime Maha Sabha leaders such as P.R. Pather and S.R. Naidoo.

In this climate, the attempts of the Maha Sabha to promote Hinduism and forge a unitary Hindu identity, led to some critical voices fearing that this would promote sectionalism and threaten a "fragile unity" amongst South African Indians, which was seen as vital given the political challenges faced by Indians. These fears surfaced most noticeably when the Maha Sabha began to pursue one of its most important projects to date, that of introducing religious instruction to Hindu children at selected Indian schools throughout the province. This chapter is concerned primarily with this project, as the drafting of a school syllabus was a powerful means by which the Maha Sabha could implement the type of Hinduism it favoured amoung a large section of the Indian school going population.[525] Regardless of the challenges, the 1950s would reveal a new zeal in the efforts of Hindu leaders to promote cultural endeavours and by 1960, coinciding with the centenary celebrations of the arrival of Indians, the Maha Sabha held the sixth Hindu conference where members reflected on their work to date and published a book on Hindu heritage in South Africa.[526] An analysis of this study provides an opportunity to critically assess the Maha Sabha's perspective on the state of Hinduism in South Africa.

Fifth Hindu Conference

The Maha Sabha held its fifth conference from 9 to 11 October 1953 in Durban. Affiliated associations, temples, school committees and prayer committees were invited;

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[525] One of the stipulations of the negotiations that took place between the Maha Sabha and the NED was that Hindu instruction would only be implemented in schools who requested it.
[526] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage.*

unaffiliated Hindu institutions who wished to attend had to apply for special permission.[527] This conference attracted 57 affiliated institutions, the highest ever in the Maha Sabha's history to that point.[528] It dealt with issues such as social services, unity between different Hindu linguistic groups, the advancement of women, and religious instruction in primary schools. Taking place under the leadership of its president S.R. Pather and secretary S.R. Naidoo, the conference opened with what a local newspaper described as a "stirring speech" by S.R. Naidoo in which he argued that Hinduism was "under constant attack" in South Africa and that the time had come to implement measures to reverse this trend.[529] Given the concern during the 1940s that Hindus were converting in large numbers, this "constant attack" that S.R. Naidoo referred was clearly a fear associated with missionaries of other faiths, especially Christianity.

The high turnout of affiliated institutions, according to a reporter for *The Leader*, "animated by a spirit never before evident", impressed commentators like J.M. Francis who claimed that the conference marked the emergence of "a rejuvenated and virile organisation."[530] However, other commentators, such as Y.M. Naidoo, were critical that the Maha Sabha was not doing enough for the upliftment of Hindus. As "the parent organisation of the Hindus," Naidoo argued, the organisation should "set a lead to their people." Naidoo complained that members and officials only met during conferences and national celebrations and that resolutions passed at such meetings were quickly forgotten and rarely implemented. While a few individuals preached Hinduism, the majority of Hindus in the country, Naidoo added, remained ignorant of their religion and did "not know the teachings of Hinduism." He expressed concern at the large number of Hindus being converted to Christianity, a religion that he specifically identified as "a challenge to Hinduism." Naidoo implored the Maha Sabha to "organise its branches, establish its prayer meetings in every little district and town in the country and conduct vernacular schools to preserve our religion, customs and culture."[531]

Y.M. Naidoo's sentiments were shared by many Hindu South Africans about the Maha Sahba. Also significant was the length to which he went to show how much of a threat

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[527] SC/O/ SAHMS 000973 'invitation to the Maha Sabha's fifth conference'
[528] While the Hindu conference of 1934 attracted 62 institutions this conference of 1953 was the highest number of affiliated institutions. Affiliated institutions paid an affiliation fee and were entitled to send delegates to Maha Sabha council meetings.
[529] *Leader*, 16 October 1953.
[530] *Leader*, 16 October 1953.
[531] *Leader*, 16 October 1953.

Christianity was to Hinduism. There was simultaneously a debate about who was a Hindu. There were a series of debates taking place through the press about whether or not Tamil people were in fact Hindu.[532] Some Tamilians claimed that they were not Hindus and one writer went so far as to suggest that "all Tamils who call themselves Hindus are the only people in the world to adopt a foreign religion without undergoing baptism."[533] This highlights the fact that there were individuals who were portraying a different understanding to Hinduism to that which the Maha Sabha sought to promote. The idea that Hinduism was a religion based on North Indian texts meant that some Tamils felt that they were in fact not Hindu.

Y.M. Naidoo, however, echoed the view that Hinduism was synonymous with Indian culture. Separated in India by linguistic, religious and social differences, Hindus became united in South Africa by a common culture based on their religion, he suggested. Hindu converts to other religions, mainly Christianity, were seen as abandoning that culture and giving in to a Western culture. In reality the picture was never quite that simple and various linguistic differences existed. The primary aim of the Maha Sabha was to overcome these differences and foster a common Hindu identity. Those individuals involved in the debate about the Maha Sabha's aim to introduce religious instruction at schools did not deny these linguistic and religious differences among Hindus but felt that there were a set of basic principles that were common to all Hindus. One commentator argued that if "properly imparted it [religious instruction] can … help make the Indians of South Africa more conscious of the great traditions of which they are the heirs and of which their race has been the creator." The writer defended religious instruction in the form of an all-encompassing Hinduism, arguing that it would help prevent "the Indian in South Africa as lying exclusively in the adoption of the Western beliefs and Western was of life."[534] For such writers, since it was important to Hindu reformers to show that conversion to Christianity did not take place because Hinduism was inferior theologically or backwards in any sense, it became important to teach a universal form of Hinduism that contained fundamental truths common in all religions.

Controversy over Religion

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[532] See *Graphic*, 9 January 1954, 23 January 1954 and 20 February 1954.
[533] *Graphic,* 23 January 1955.
[534] *Leader,* 15 July 1955.

During the early to mid-1950s religious disputes were often played out through newspapers such as the *Graphic* with Christian, Hindu and Muslim individuals making use of the Letters to the Editors column to voice their opinions and debate with each other, with the level of acrimony sometimes reaching the point where the editor was forced to close the correspondence. For example, in 1954, shortly after the conference had ended, and just before the issue of religious instruction at school had received publicity from the *Graphic*, there was a heated debate between Omar Khayyam, a Muslim, and a Hindu named A.N. Singh, over the relationship between the caste system and ancient Hindu scriptures.

Omar Khayyam criticised Hinduism and argued that "caste is not merely a social evil but, is a deeply rooted religious belief" and "an essential part of Hinduism", as stipulated in the Vedas. He added that the only reason that the system had been abolished by the government of India was that the Congress government was secular, and not a Hindu one, and that if the "Hindu Mahasabha [the All India Hindu Maha Sabha], the Hindu nationalist movement, which is the strongest party next to Congress ever came to power, [it] will certainly repeal all the Acts relating to the abolition of caste."[535] Khayyam was responding to a remark by A.N. Singh who had claimed that the caste system was a social evil that was not a part of Hinduism. Singh responded to Khayyam by comparing the caste system to the feudal system in Europe to argue that an abolition of the caste system would not mean the end of Hinduism, just as the abolition of the feudal system did not lead to the end of Christianity.[536] Religious disputes of this nature were played out in ethnic newspapers regularly and point to the fact that religion was a sensitive matter among Indians. The return of a South African-born swami from India will illustrate this point further.

Swami Nischalananda (1925–65)

Swami Nischalananda[537] had returned to the country just in time to attend the 1953 conference and he features prominently in accounts of the conference. Immediately after the conference he began his work for the "revival" of Hinduism, attracting large crowds at various speeches that he gave throughout the province.[538] According one reporter, this "great messenger from the Himalayas" was uniting Hindus "for the first time in the history of

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[535] *Graphic,* 16 January 1954.
[536] *Graphic,* 30 January 1934.
[537] See Anand Singh. *Swami Nischalananda-A short Biography* (Redhill: The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, 2003).
[538]*Leader*, 30 October 1953.

Indians in South Africa."[539] A.J. Naidu claimed that "Nischalananda's arrival in this country has awakened the Hindus" who are going back to their "own religion" which he said "is a healthy sign of reformation that is unity 'Strength'."[540] Another correspondent to the newspaper, R. Chetty, claimed that the swami "has created a religious awakening amongst the community as never before." Chetty was concerned over the state of Hinduism in South Africa, arguing that it was "daily losing ground" and threatened by large numbers of converts to Christianity. The arrival of the swami, he argued, had resulted in "numerous would-be converts" becoming "convinced of the greatness of their own religion."[541]

Swami Nischalananda was born D. Naidoo in Durban in 1925. After matriculating from Sastri College he secured a job with the Naval Stores. His family had been influenced by the 1934 visit of Swami Adhyananda, the first missionary of the Ramakrishna Mission to visit South Africa, and in 1946 Naidoo helped found the Ramakrishna Centre in Sea View and shortly thereafter travelled to India to undergo monastic training at the Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata under Swami Virajananda. After being initiated into the mission in 1949 Naidoo, now Swami Nischalananda, spent several years in the Himalayas perfecting his austerities, before returning to South Africa in 1953. In 1959 he established an ashram, a printing press and the Ramakrishna Clinic in Glen Anil, Durban, which remains the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa.[542]

From the time of his return in 1953 the swami spoke extensively in public about reforming Hinduism, drawing criticism from Hindus, Christians, and Muslims alike. Swami Nischalananda was a Neo-Vedantist. He established the Centre as the local ashram which emphasized "the divinity within every human being as the foundation of their spirituality, human dignity, equality and service to others."[543] Like the Arya Samaj, the Neo-Vedanta also sought to eradicate traditional ritual observances of Sanathanist Hinduism such as the trance festivals associated with rituals such as firewalking and Kavadi.[544]

The swami wanted to remove what he regarded as the "primitive" practices of many Hindu South Africans.[545] His remark that there were no temples in India at which the very

[539] *Leader*, 30 October 1953.
[540] *Graphic,* 23 January 1954
[541] *Graphic,* 23 January 1954
[542] The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa 'Swami Nischalananda,' Accessed at http://www.ramakrishna-sa.org.za/swami_Nisch.php. (Accessed on the 12 August 2009).
[543] Diesel et all. "Hinduism", 194.
[544] Diesel et al. "Hinduism", 194.
[545] *Leader*, 30 October 1953.

popular Hindu festival of Kavadi took place, was refuted by local Hindu commentators who criticised his views.[546] In early 1954 the *Graphic* was dominated by controversy surrounding the swami, with critics pointing out various contradictions in his statements while supporters went to great lengths to defend him. Newspaper headlines, such as "Facts wanted about Swami"; "Swami Nischalananda defended"; "Readers asked to be fair"; "Swami's talks corrected", "Reason why Swami refuses to answer" and "Swami-full of contradictions" capture the anger and excitement as people tried to establish his origins and agenda.[547]

Swami Nischalananda also attracted criticism from Christians and Muslims following his remarks that "the Vedas are not a mass of writing as in the case of the Koran and Bible."[548] Muslim and Christian correspondents to the *Graphic* condemned him for "criticizing other religions."[549] A certain Chas Alex Moollen from the Methodist Church called him an "asset" to Christianity. He said that that because of the swami "the Christian evangelist ambassadors are being received with open arms by non-Christians because they can see the corruptions in their own thinking."[550] N.M. Essack, a Muslim, expressed his frustration that the swami failed to respond to his challenge to "prove his charges against Islam."[551] Some of the swami's claims also brought readers into arguments with one another over the issue of religion. Essack in a different letter argued that Islam was not a religion that ruled by force as the swami had suggested in one of his speeches and that if it indeed was, "then the name Hindu would be left on the pages of history only."[552] This angered Mohanlal P. Singh who condemned Essack over a lack of knowledge over India's history and listed the names of various Muslim rulers who, he argued, "destroyed not only the Hindu temples, but their gods as well" and forced Hindus to convert "by force of sword."[553] Singh's comment, in turn, attracted criticism from Khayyam who claimed that there was no evidence that Islam ruled by the sword and challenged the swami's claims that Hinduism was the only religion that did not rule by force.[554]

These exchanges once again illustrated that religion was a sensitive subject and that it could very quickly foster tension among Indians. Particularly significant was that the swami

[546] *Graphic,* 9 January 1954.
[547] *Graphic,* 9 January 1954, 16 January 1954, 23 January 1954, 30 January 1945 and 6 March 1954.
[548] *Graphic,* 6 March 1954.
[549] *Graphic*, 27 February 1954.
[550] *Graphic,* 27 March 1954.
[551] *Graphic,* 6 February 1954.
[552] *Graphic,* 9 January 1954.
[553] *Graphic,* 16 January 1954.
[554] *Graphic.* 6 February 1945.

served not only as a catalyst for tensions between Hindus and other faith groups but tensions among Hindus themselves. Some Hindus were wholehearted supporters of the swami, while others criticised him for what they regarded as false allegations against ritual aspects of Hinduism. While some pointed to contradictions in many of his assertions, others saw this as irrelevant and complimented his work in promoting and defending Hinduism.

Although he was not an official member of the Maha Sabha council, the swami nevertheless occupied a significant role in the organisation and was also a keen advocate of religious education and, in fact, contributed to the writing of the syllabus when the Education Department agreed to introduce religious instruction in Indian schools. In a speech to students at a Durban school the swami claimed that "the training in morals should be given a place" in accordance "to its importance in the education of youth."[555] Central to his argument was that the lessons a child received from secular education alone were insufficient to bring about the full development of the individual. At the Maha Sabha's centenary conference in 1960, Swami Nischalananda would argue that "the major reason that the world is cursed with so many narrow minded and prejudiced people in the matter of religion is sectarian education in childhood."[556] For him, religious education was not just a matter of preparing individuals but training them to be part of a larger group. Religious education was therefore important for the swami and he claimed it influenced "human advancement" and was necessary to "prepare a world citizen."[557] This was consonant with the Ramakrishna view that "many are the names of God and infinite the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him, through that He will be realised by you."[558]

Special Education Conference, 1954

The most important development at the fifth Hindu conference was the paper by S. Panday on "The need for religious instruction in primary schools and our national heritage", in which he argued that educating children in the tenets of Hinduism was necessary for maintaining Hindu heritage.[559] Religious education in Indian schools was seen by some as vitally important yet by others as highly controversial. In an attempt to resolve these

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[555] *Leader,* 16 July 1954.
[556] Swami Nischalananda. "The Religious and Spiritual Training of Children and Youths." SC/O/SAHMS 177/355 A paper given at The Maha Sabha Centenary Hindu conference 1960.
[557] Swami Nischalananda. "The Religious and Spiritual Training of Children and Youths."
[558] Diesel et all, "Hinduism", 194.
[559] *Leader*, 16 October 1953.

differences, a special session of conference was convened on 23 January 1954 in Durban to deal solely with this issue.

The conference became a four hour long heated discussion and ended with a resolution to approach the Natal Education Department, proposed by Panday who was supported by S.L. Singh, B.A. Maghrajh and S.R. Naidoo, being adopted. There was opposition from a faction led by P.R Pather. He was supported by P. Raidoo, Jogee Naidoo and K.C. Naidoo, who represented the Natal Indian Teachers' Society. P.R. Pather opposed the resolution for two reasons; "on grounds that it would endanger the general [secular] education of the Indian child" and that the "ideal before the Indian people is to build up a homogeneous Indian community." Introducing religious instruction at schools for different religious groups, Pather said would divide them "into water tight compartments."[560] This marked the beginning of a long series of debates between the Maha Sabha and other critics of the decision to introduce religious instruction.

P.R. Pather changes tack

The Maha Sabha was boosted by a change of heart on the part of P.R. Pather who, in fact, led the Maha Sabha's deputation to the NED in Pietermaritzburg at the beginning of October 1954 to argue for the establishment of religious instruction at schools. The delegation, consisting of Govan Mani, P.R. Singh, G.R. Padia, S. Panday, S. Chotai and Dr. Desai, argued that religious instruction should be imparted in English, be broad in scope, and be taught by official members of the teaching staff rather than priests. One of the arguments put forward by Pather was that "if religious instruction were introduced in all Indian schools, the incidence of delinquency will be allayed considerably." Pather also clarified an important concern when he said that the Maha Sabha had made it clear that "every child whether he is a Hindu, Muslim or Christianity shall receive his or her own religious instruction."[561]

Sookraj Chotai, as we will see, was one of the chief proponents of introducing religious instruction at schools and an important leader in the Maha Sabha but, unlike many, he was of indentured decent. He was born in Clare Estate in 1912 and graduated with a BA in 1949 and received his Bachelor of Education degree in 1955. He was a school head master and member of NITS. He had represented NITS before the Education Department on educational and salary questions. Chotai served as one of the vice presidents of the Maha Sabha from 1944–

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[560] *Graphic,* 30 January 1955.
[561] *Graphic,* 26 February 1955.

1946, and was joint secretary of the APS and Hindi Shiksha Sangh. He also served various other cultural organisations including the Young Hindu Cultural Service Society and the Ladysmith and Durban Arya Samaj. [562] He also translated to English various books written by Sanskrit scholar and Vedic missionary Pandit Nardev Vedalankar including the two cited in various places in this study.[563]

It was during this period that the Maha Sabha began to clarify what it meant by religious instruction. Its newly elected president, Govan Mani, criticised the *Graphic* for doing the Maha Sabha a "great injustice" in the way in which it portrayed the issue of religious education.[564] Mani (1899–1963) exemplified the trading class dominance of the Maha Sabha. He was a prominent businessman who was born in 1899 in Kathiawad and immigrated to South Africa in 1911 as a passenger migrant. After completing his schooling at the Durban Indian Institute, he opened a business as a general dealer in Grey Street. He was also president of the Surat Hindu Association and Hindu Smashan Fund (Crematorium).[565] Govan Mani said that the Maha Sabha was simply asking the education department to replace the 90 minutes per week dedicated to "moral teaching" with "Hindu religious instruction to all Hindu children."[566]

P.R. Pather had originally opposed introducing religious instruction at schools for the implications that it may have had in promoting sectionalism. However, he argued that when it was made clear to him by other members of the Maha Sabha that by "religious instruction", the Maha Sabha was referring to the teaching of a general form of Hindu instruction limited to 90 minutes per week, he reversed his decision. He would explain that he was "in favour of utilising one and a half hours a week set aside for moral lessons to be used for teaching the universal truths of religion", but was against the creation of religious schools which, by "providing religious teaching for each section of our children tend to disintegrate the Indian community."[567] Pather's change of attitude was extremely important, as an editorial in the *Graphic* explained:

> Now Mr. P.R. Pather is no callow youth. A seasoned and veteran leader who is
> respected by all sections of the community even by those who may disagree with

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[562] *WHO'S WHO 1960,* 59.
[563] Vedalankar. *Religious Awakening* and *Arya Samaj.*
[564] *Graphic,* 26 February 1955.
[565] *WHO'S WHO 1960,* 50.
[566] *Graphic,* 26 February 1955.
[567] *Graphic,* 5 March 1955.

him on matters political, he occupies the unique position in the community wherein he is a leader not only of Hindus, but Muslims and Christians as well. His long experience in the affairs of the community but serves to underline the gravity of his warning. And if we may say so, Mr. Pather's sentiments on this issue coincide with our own.[568]

There was much heated debate over this issue. The 12 March 1955 issue of the *Graphic*, for example, contained four articles on the front page that dealt with religious education. Two were critical of what was termed "the propagation of religious sectionalism" and "religious apartheid."[569] Some Muslims criticised Pather's view of Islamic schools. One correspondent to the *Graphic*, A.R. Shaik, for example, felt that Pather was being hypocritical. Shaik claimed that Muslim schools did not lead to the disintegration of the community as "Mr. Pather puts it. The very fact that he is an official representing a section of the Indian community [Maha Sabha] shows that he is helping split the community faster than religious schools could do."[570] Pather was also criticised by his political colleague in the Natal Indian Organisation (NIO), A.M. Moola, who argued that Muslim religious schools had been in existence for more than half a century in South Africa and no one had ever accused them of leading to indoctrination or sectarianism.[571]

The NIC entered the fray when it claimed that it had "no doubt whatsoever that the majority of Indian people will condemn any move to introduce apartheid on a religious basis in Indian schools."[572] The NIC added that they were particularly concerned with proposals that they claimed had been made which suggested that if a school was attended primarily by members of one religious group, then it should teach the religion of that majority. The NIC feared that this would lead to the attachment of labels like "Hindu", "Muslim" and "Christian" among children and that this would result in staffing of teachers and principals "taking on the colour of the religious group."[573] Another correspondent to the *Graphic* expressed concern that taxpayer's money was financing religious schools, which were often

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[568] Graphic, 5 March 1955.
[569] *Graphic,* 12 March 1955.
[570] *Graphic,* 19 March 1955.
[571] *Graphic,* 12 March 1955.
[572] *Graphic,* 12 March 1955.
[573] *Graphic*, 12 March 1955.

well camouflaged.[574] There was a lot of apprehension and confusion over the issue of religion at school and the Maha Sabha decided to clarify the matter.

Religious schools or religious instruction at schools?

On 27 February 1955, Govan Mani gave a speech in which he attempted to deal with criticisms against the Maha Sabha by forming an explicit distinction between religious schools and religious instruction at schools. He argued that the Maha Sabha was against religious schools which taught a specific religious dogma because they had the potential to divide Indians. Instead, the Maha Sabha sought to promote a form of secular religious education similar to that practised at white schools. In religious schools, Mani went on, "the whole education is to be charged with a religious basis" whereas with religious instruction "it is merely a subject in schools with a secular basis." He added that this was the situation "present in all European secular schools" and that "none of them have lost their secular character."[575]

But the debate was still far from settled. One correspondent to the *Graphic* expressed confusion about the distinction that Mani drew between religious schools and religious instruction, and raised the question of how the Maha Sabha "could claim that religious instruction would not promote sectionalism while it acknowledges the heterogeneous composition of Indian society."[576] This was a concern about how a universal form of religious education could cater for the needs of a group of people with different religious practices. A school principal and president of the NITS, Dr A.D. Lazarus made a similar point in responding to Mani's statement by arguing that religious instruction at schools would stimulate an increase in exclusive religious schools because a form of common religious instruction could not "be implemented in Indian schools when the Indian people as a whole do not form a homogenous group religiously or linguistically."[577]

Meeting with the Education Department

On 9 March 1955, Dr. W.O. McConckey, director of the Department of Education, met with the delegations of the Maha Sabha, NITS, and the Orient Islamic Educational Trust (together with the Allied Muslim Organization) to discuss the religious instruction at Indian

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[574] *Graphic,* 12 March 1955.
[575] *Graphic,* 19 March 1955.
[576] *Graphic,* 25 March 1955.
[577] *Graphic,* 19 March 1955.

Schools. The NITS delegation was led by its president Dr. A. D. Lazarus who "expressed their apprehension over the proposed move." The Maha Sabha's delegation consisted of P.R. Pather, vice-president Dr Desai, S. Chotai and P.B. Singh.[578]

Shortly after the delegations met with the Education Department, a farewell function was held on 15 May 1955 at the A.I. Kajee Hall in Durban to honour the retiring C.M. Booysen, who was highly respected by many Indians for his role in attempting to address the shortage of Indian schools, which deprived many children of the opportunity to acquire an education. Booysen warned against introducing religious education as it would divide children along religious lines.[579] The NED, however, eventually agreed, in principle, to set aside 90 minutes per week for religious instruction, on condition that the medium of instruction be English and that the Maha Sabha prepare the syllabus in conjunction with the NED.[580]

Dr. Desai, in making a case for religious instruction at a meeting of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh, created a major controversy when he claimed in a speech he made that this form of education was necessary to promote moral development, which was "severely lacking" in the existing education system. A headline in an April 1955 issue of the *Graphic*, "Prominent Hindu Sabha member says: educated men corrupt, debased," captured the furore. Dr Desai said that it was "common knowledge to find educated men, professionals, graduates in arts and science, matriculates, etc debased and of an aimless life, lacking character, life corrupted with liquor and gambling." He claimed that this was the result of a lack of religious education and that it was "gratifying to know that Provincial Administration and the Education Department have accepted the principle of religious instruction in government aided schools."[581] Desai's argument was to show that the education that Indian children were receiving was incomplete because while it enabled them to become professionals he argued that they lacked the morals necessary to be "respectable." The editorial in the *Graphic* criticized Dr Desai for accusing the "educated as being guilty of all the sins imaginable:"[582]

> If Dr. Desai's analysis was based on the findings of an objective survey he should
> not hesitate to publish his data and to state his methods of observation and the
> scales of evaluation employed. If on the other hand the observation made was

[578] *Graphic*, 12 March 1955.
[579] *Graphic,* 15 May 1955.
[580] *Graphic,* 2 April 1955.
[581] *Graphic,* 2 April 1955.
[582] *Graphic,* 2 April 1955.

based on merely guesswork emanating possibly from an already prejudiced mind, then this good man who never hesitates to talk of truth and honour and virtue, has certainly opened himself to serious criticism.[583]

Dr Lazarus also took offence with Dr. Desai's claim and these two notable members of the community, a doctor and a respected principal, laid allegations against each other. Lazarus accused the Maha Sabha of false allegations and accusing Indian teachers of being responsible for the decline in morals. Dr. Desai responded that the views were his own and not those of the Maha Sabha. He added that he was not condemning Indian teachers specifically but "graduates, professionals, etc" as a whole and that the "general tone of the Indian community is on a downward trend" and "we [the Indian community] have advanced economically and educationally but morally and culturally we have degraded ourselves.[584]

What form of religious instruction?

Following negotiations with the NED, the Maha Sabha "deemed it its duty to explain the stand that it has taken in the negotiations with the Department of Education" to the public.[585] Representatives of the Maha Sabha, communicating via the *Indian Opinion*, attempted to clarify differences between the various viewpoints in the community and sought the close cooperation of NITS. They felt that there "appeared to be no difference in essentials between the respective viewpoints."[586] The Maha Sabha reiterated its position that it stood for "religious instruction to all Indian children in all Indian schools as opposed to the establishment of religious schools." This former course, it argued, would not be a "deterrent to the building up of a homogeneous Indian community" because it would simply mean replacing moral education with Hindu education, a right which Christians were already enjoying. Govan Mani's argument was that a form of Christian secular education was already taking place at schools and that the Maha Sabha merely wanted to replace it with a form of Hindu secular instruction. The proposed Hindu instruction would "embrace all shades of thought and belief, and represents the religious outlook of all four linguistic groups - the Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and the Gujarati speaking Hindus."[587]

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[583] *Graphic,* 2 April 1955.
[584] *Graphic*, 9 April 1955
[585] *Graphic,* 2 April 1955.
[586] *Indian Opinion*, 13 May 1955.
[587] This quote appears in the *Graphic*, 2 April 1955 and *Indian Opinion,* 13 May 1955.

However an article in *Indian Opinion* by an anonymous writer propagating the necessity of religious instruction for the moral development of the child, explicitly stated that one common code of religious education was required to "remove the heathenish practices, which are misinterpreted as being part of the Hindu religion, of fire walking and killing animals as offerings to God" which the author associated with "evils" such as drinking and gambling.[588]   Tendencies of the Arya Samaj reform programme are evident in these arguments in favour of an all-embracing Hinduism which should in actual fact be shorn of many of its populist rituals and become a refined version. The writer claimed to support "Gandhi's tolerance of universal truths contained in all religions" but expressed concern at the dominance of Christianity in schools and criticised the NITS for beginning their meetings with Christian prayers regardless of the fact that most of its members were Hindus.[589]

Given the vast differences among Hindus, however, there were concerns in some sectors that religious instruction would cause exclusions. Another anonymous commentator argued that the religious views of Indian South Africans were extremely diverse and that any religious instruction in schools would introduce sectional bias. The writer congratulated the Sydenham branch of NITS for favouring the "retention of moral lessons on the timetable" and rejecting the idea of it having "a religious basis." The writer claimed that the "Maha Sabha, on the contrary advocates the teaching of the Hindu religion" which will be unable to "preserve the unity of the community when one adopts such a narrow minded, distorted sectional outlook."[590] A proponent of religious education countered that the decision to introduce religious instruction should be merited given that the "morals" of teachers themselves were questionable and that they "should be the last to object." Religious education, this argument went on, should be viewed in a broad sense as one that "encompasses the fundamentals of all religions."[591]

At a Maha Sabha council meeting on 14 May 1955, a decision was taken to organise a special conference with P.R. Pather as chairman and Sookraj Chotai as secretary to clarify the situation with the public and discuss how best to impart religious instruction at Indian schools in Natal.[592] The Maha Sabha issued three notices: a preliminary notice, second notice and final notice. This conference permitted five delegates to attend from each institution and

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[588] *Indian Opinion,* 11 March 1955.
[589] *Indian Opinion,* 11 March 1955.
[590] *Graphic,* 2 April 1955.
[591] *Indian Opinion,* 1 April 1955.
[592] *Leader*, 20 May 1955

invited all interested parties, regardless of whether or not they were affiliated to the Maha Sabha, to attend the special session to discuss the vexed question of religious education in schools. The advertisement on the notice points to the importance of the issue:

> PLEASE ACT NOW. The matter is urgent. The Sabha seeks the whole hearted assistance, co-operation and collaboration of all individuals and institutions in making the forthcoming Conference a great success.[593]

Owing to the importance of the decision, the Maha Sabha was trying to include all view points and permitted the involvement of the wider public in the discussion in the hope that the decision would be unanimously accepted. The conference, held on 3 July 1955, attracted 350 delegates representing 50 cultural, religious and educational institutions from all parts of Natal and was described by the *Leader* as a "huge success."[594] Sookraj Chotai delivered the opening paper in which he challenged the "alleged inherent dangers" of religious instruction in schools. He traced the history of Indian education in South Africa to show how significantly religious education, since the first schools were Christian mission schools, featured in Indian education, to make his argument that this form of education was "no creation of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha."[595]

Chotai insisted that the Maha Sabha did not have sinister intensions but simply wanted to provide Hindu children with "the privilege enjoyed by his Christian counterpart - tuition of religious teaching of his own faith." Chotai conceded that there were many linguistic, religious, social and economic differences among Indians. But given that Indians "still have to find our place politically" in South Africa, the Maha Sabha did not want to "spilt the community" and for this reason opposed religious schools. The Maha Sabha advocated religious instruction in the form a universal set of morals that would not divide Indians. The imperative for religious education, Chotai argued, was indubitable: "every child in order to develop into a well balanced individual needs a religious and spiritual background." The absence of religious training led to delinquency which, Chotai said, was higher among Hindu children than their Christian or Muslim counterparts because of the inferior level of religious training that Indian children received. Chotai underscored the Maha

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[593] SC/O/SAHMS 973 177/438 'Religious instruction in Indian Schools Second Notice'.
[594] *Leader*, 22 July 1955.
[595] Chotai, 'Hindu Religious instruction in Indian Schools', 2.

Sabha's argument that religious education should be an indispensable part of the education of Hindu children.[596]

Chotai dealt in detail with what he identified as objections against the introduction of religious instruction in schools. He dismissed the notion that it would stimulate the growth of Hindu, Muslim and Christian schools. This would not be possible, he said, because of an ordinance passed in 1949 which forbade the establishment of religious schools except for those in existence prior to 1942. Chotai rejected the argument that religious instruction would lead to "estrangement and communal feelings," claiming that there was no record of friction arising out of the teaching of lessons from the Bible to both Christian and non-Christian Indian children, nor did the teaching of Islam in Muslim schools lead to communal tension. Chotai also rejected the idea that religious education would cause divisions among Indians. The Indian community, he said, was not homogenous and ninety minutes of religious instruction at schools would not pose a threat to the project of trying to achieve a homogeneous identity.[597]

Chotai emphasized that the Maha Sabha did not intend teaching religious dogma and that the syllabus would be drawn up in consultation with officials of the NED and qualified Hindu teachers to "take care to see that no assignment is included which will permit any dogmatic teaching or indoctrination as that would be infringement of the regulations."[598] Govan Mani, who followed Chotai to the podium, argued that "no one had condemned religious instruction at schools, but the objections have been centred on a belief that it would disunite an alleged united community." He branded this fear "fanatic."[599] P.R. Pather described the education department's acceptance of religious education as "the greatest achievement since the creation of the Sabha."[600]

Despite the conference of 3 July, NITS was not totally satisfied and invited P.R. Pather to attend its conference on 8 July, five days after the special conference, as a representative for the Maha Sabha, to address any doubts and concerns that teachers may have still harboured. According to Chotai "Mr Pather put forward the view of the Maha

[596] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction in Indian Schools", 7.
[597] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction in Indian Schools", 10.
[598] Chotai. 'Hindu Religious instruction in Indian Schools", 11.
[599] *Graphic*, 9 July 1955.
[600] *Graphic*, 9 July 1955. He made the same point five years later when he said that the introduction of religious instruction at school "must be regarded as its [the SAHMS] greatest achievement yet" see *Hindu Heritage in South Africa.10*

Sabha in a courageous and convincing manner."[601] Pather used his reputation as a community servant to good advantage: "my reputation in my public career I hope will be sufficient testimony to the fact that I should not be a party to taking any steps that might affect the interests of the community."[602] He defended religious instruction on moral grounds, arguing that "freedom of religion is one of the principles that democracy is founded on."[603] After P.R. Pather left, the teachers debated the issue and resolved in favour of religious instruction, but the count was close: 130 votes in favour and 127 against. This showed just how divided the Indian community was on the issue.[604]

While the conference voted in favour of religious instruction in schools, there was still uncertainty about whether it would be imparted in the form of one common instruction for all children regardless of their faith or whether there would be separate religious instruction for Christians, Hindus and Muslims. Following the conference a correspondent to *The Leader*, S. Manohar suggested to the Maha Sabha that there should be three separate syllabuses "but each should contain some of the universal truths of other religions as well." He added that while he agreed with the Maha Sabha about the importance of religious education and congratulated the organization for pushing for it, he believed "that it is not possible to teach the basic tenets of all religions to the child in primary school without interfering with the healthy growth of its personality." Thus, Manohar concluded, he "strongly believed that a child should grow up as a person taught in the basic tenets of his own religion." [605]

The Maha Sabha had still not clearly articulated what it wanted religious instruction to incorporate. It argued for Hindu instruction for Hindu children and added that if other religious faiths wanted to provide instruction for children of those faiths, the Maha Sabha would be agreeable. This implied that the Maha Sabha was in favour of the instruction of a "universal" Hindu faith that incorporated the "fundamental truths" of the religion, as defined by its reformist agenda, and hoped that this would give Hinduism the status that Christian education had. However, some sections of the organisation wanted a common syllabus for all religious instruction. In his speech at the conference on 3 July, Chotai raised this topic and claimed that while he felt that it was a good idea to have a common syllabus for all religions, he questioned whether it would be possible to teach this universal religion to primary school

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[601] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction".
[602] *Graphic,* 16 July 1955.
[603] *Graphic,* 16 July 1955.
[604] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction".
[605] *Leader,* 5 August 1955.

children. He believed that comparative religion was too complicated to be taught at primary schools and the dream of one world culture had not been realised yet. Thus, the Maha Sabha was not in favour of separate instruction for Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, but a common Hindu syllabus for all given the Hindu majority in the schools. This was in keeping with its perspective that all religions contained universal truths and that (Vedantic) Hinduism was tolerant of these views. They wanted Hindu teachings which contained these truths to be allowed the place that Christianity had occupied for so long in Indian schools.

On 5 November 1955, an executive council meeting of NITS resolved to hold a referendum to establish the views of all its members on how to implement religious instruction in schools. 932 members voted in favour of common instruction for all religions and 296 voted for separate religious instruction for Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. [606] In spite of the teacher's referendum, the NED promulgated a regulation that permitted separate religious instruction for the three religions.[607] The official Provincial Gazette stipulated that instruction in religious education should be imparted on separate lines and that if a government-aided school wished to incorporate religious instruction, it would have to make an application to the Director of Education to do so; only upon his approval could religious instruction be imparted. [608]

The syllabus

The Maha Sabha went to great lengths to ensure that it incorporated a variety of views when drafting the syllabus. The NED set up a committee with the chief inspector of Indian Education, H.B.K. Wilter as chairman and Sookraj Chotai as secretary to decide on how the syllabus would be drafted. The Maha Sabha selected Pandit Nardev Vedalankar, a Sanskrit scholar and president of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh, Miss M. Dorey, Principal of the Durban Indian Girls' High School, and Mrs. Pauline Morel, principal of the Crescent Indian School to draft the syllabus. They were subsequently joined by Dr. Thirupurasundari who represented "the interests of South Indians." [609] Between 17 September 1956 and 28 May 1958, the Syllabus Committee met six times. It was a sub-committee made up entirely of

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[606] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction".
[607] *Graphic,* 8 December 1955.
[608] *Graphic,* 25 February 1956.
[609] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction".

Indian members, with Dr. Desai as chairman and Sookraj Chotai as secretary, that did most of the spade work to facilitate adoption of the syllabus by the NED. [610]

Once the draft syllabus had been completed, representatives from NITS, the Divine Life Society of South Africa, (a neo-Vedanta movement started by Swami Sivinanda), Swami Nischalananda, and Dr. S. Cooppan, an economics lecturer at Natal University, were invited to offer comments before the syllabus was finalized. While NITS and the Divine Life Society refrained from commenting, the swami and Dr. Cooppan offered suggestions. All aspects of the syllabus, including the reciting of Hindu prayers, were to be conducted in English. [611] The syllabus, which was more than fifty pages, is too long to repeat here, however an abbreviated version that Chotai provided in the 1960 centenary Hindu conference is provided in the appendix.

The syllabus was representative of both North and South traditions. It drew from various sections of some of the key texts listed above and placed an emphasis on biographies of many religious leaders. The syllabus was finalised in 1958 and by 1959 a number of schools began introducing religious instruction. According to B.D. Lalla, the NED's regulations did not make religious instruction mandatory but offered this option to schools who wished to introduce it.[612] The Maha Sabha made it clear though that it would offer its fullest support to any school wishing to incorporate religious instruction. On 18 November 1960, during a speech marking the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Indian in South Africa, Chotai claimed that "at least 34 schools have already made a start" and that the Maha Sabha had ordered 100 sets of 22 books from India, which would sell at £7 10.0 per set to each school that introduced religious instruction."[613]

In evaluating the decision to introduce Hindu religious instruction during the centenary celebrations, Maha Sabha officials claimed that the criticisms attracted were never against the idea or importance of religious education in schools but for the implications that it may have had in promoting sectionalism.[614] In their defence they claimed that this was a result of ignorance of Hindu education, since all they were promoting was ensuring that Hinduism occupied the same position in school education as other denominations and that this would not promote division. In evaluating the decision to give religious instruction a

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[610] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction".
[611] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction".
612 Lalla. "A Review", 107.
613 Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction".
[614] Chotai. "Hindu Religious instruction" and Lalla. "A Review", 107.

"Hindu" flavour, it should be borne in mind that those pushing for this felt that Christian children were already well served in this regard, and that Muslim children had access not only to Islamic schools but also the network of formal and informal madrassahs across the province. [615]

Conclusion

In evaluating the decision to introduce Hindu religious instruction during the centenary celebrations in 1960, a number of Maha Sabha officials claimed that the criticisms were not against the idea of the importance of religious education in schools but out of fear that it may promote sectionalism. In their defence, they claimed that this was a result of ignorance of Hinduism, since the teachings of Hinduism could not promote sectionalism. Regardless of the legitimacy of this view debates and fears over the provision of religious instruction nonetheless provide a lens through which to examine various fissures among Indians generally but Hindus specifically.

In the first instance, the discourse suggested that Hindu leaders attributed Hindu conversion to Christianity to a lack of knowledge about Hinduism among Hindu children, and the corollary of this, that the provision of Christian education strengthened Christian identity. While not a subject of this particular thesis, the reasons for conversion were much more complex and merit greater research, which falls outside the scope of this thesis.[616] For the purposes of this paper it suffices to state that the analysis of Hindu leaders that ignorance of their religion was causing many Hindus to convert to Christianity was superficial.

A second theme that emerges is the fear of certain individuals and organisations like the NIC, who were pursuing a project of constructing an "Indian" identity in the political arena, that the provision of religious instruction at schools would foster separatist communal and sectarian identities among Indians, which would hamper their project to construct a broader Indian identity. Here, it became apparent that this division was in some ways tied to the political perspectives of leaders. The NIC had been taken over by "radicals" under the leadership of Dr. Monty Naicker, who were bent on pursuing a broad non-racial political alliance with Africans, whites and Coloureds. Many of the members of the NIC belonged to the Communist Party of South Africa and remained communists even after the banning of the

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[615] Shamil Jeppie. *Language Identity Modernity: The Arabic Study Circle of Durban* (Cape Town: Human Science Research Council, 2007), 19 and 45.

[616] See Gerald Pillay. *Religion at the Limits? Pentecostalism among Indian South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1994).

CPSA. They wanted to avoid communalism. The likes of P.R. Pather and Govan Mani belonged to the old ousted NIC and were subsequently part of the NIO. While politically moderate, they did a great deal to establish social welfare, education, and religious institutions but also worked across religious divides. The Maha Sabha went to great lengths to show that the fears of critics that religious education would lead to divisions were based on false assumptions, but not all critics were convinced.

This debate also raised the question: Which Hinduism? "Hindus" were not simply Hindus, it emerged from debates. Divisions resulted from differences of class, language, ethnicity, region of origin, and the impact of reformism. While large numbers of Hindus continued to practise a popular form of Hinduism, called Sanathanism, others embraced reformist traditions like the Arya Samaj, Divine Life Society of South Africa, and Ramakrishna, nineteenth-century reformist traditions which sought to locate the core of Hinduism in the ancient Vedas. They came to be known as the Neo-Vedantic tradition. Despite the myth of homogeneity, Hindu beliefs and practice were, in reality, diverse and attempts by reformists to reject popular practices as a distortion of true Hinduism did not resonate with the masses and were highly contested. The comprehension of Hindus as to what constituted Hinduism differed, markedly in many instances, and it was impossible to impose a hegemonic Hinduism.

These debates and tensions not only demonstrate how powerful a force religion was and how controversial it became, but also the plurality of Indian identities. Individuals were "Indian", "Telugu" or "Tamil", "passenger" or "indentured", "South" or "North Indian", Sanathan or Neo-Vedantic, and so on. These identities came into play in different circumstances. This meant that P.R. Pather and A.M. Moola could unite to lead the moderate Indian political faction but could differ over religious education, when they became Hindu and Muslim respectively. These plural identities are important in preventing individuals from drawing sharp boundaries around single all-encompassing identities.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the founding and formative decades of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha with a focus on key individuals who pushed for the establishment of a central Hindu organisation and the arguments that they put forward to justify establishing one. One of the justifications was that Hindus in South Africa needed an organisation to safeguard their interests and help deal with the "common problems" that they faced as a group. This included state recognition of Hindu festivals, the teaching of the vernacular and religious instruction at state schools, reversing the gains made by Christian missionaries, eradicating poverty, providing knowledge of an authentic and reformist Hinduism, and fostering pride in Hinduism, amongst other objectives.

Maha Sabha leaders were concerned that South African Hindus were abandoning aspects of their heritage and becoming receptive to the influence of Western culture and in some cases even converting to other religions. The fact that the first schools established for Indians in South Africa were Christian mission schools was a special concern. Reformist minded Hindus also believed that the emphasis on ritual Hinduism was leading to moral degeneration and disgrace of the Hindu community and they associated Sanathanist practices with alcoholism and gambling. While many individuals took it upon themselves to establish Hindu organisations to provide religious education, the leaders of the Maha Sabha believed that a central body would be better able to achieve this task.

A central body, proponents of the scheme hoped, would unite and coordinate the activities of existing parochial Hindu religious and cultural bodies so that Hindus could unite into a powerful force. This attempt to unite Hindus was undertaken by reformist minded Hindus who favoured a textual or philosophical version of Hinduism as opposed to the populist, ritual orientated Hinduism that the vast majority of South African Hindus practised. Office bearers of the Maha Sabha were mostly secular educated professionals or businessmen. With a few exceptions, D.G. Satyadeva being a good example, the Maha Sabha was led by teachers, lawyers, estate agents, clerks, interpreters, and other traders. In the early decades most of these leaders were migrants from either Mauritius or India, though a few leaders were descendents of indentured Indians. They showed a preference for the reformist version of Hinduism and sought to unite Hindus to ensure that this reformist Hindu message flourished, as they regarded the populist ritualistic Hinduism of the masses as an

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embarrassment and a relic of the past. The projects of the Maha Sabha were aimed at fostering pride and promoting Hindu consciousness. They sought to bring the activities of temples under their control, distribute religious tracts, start a journal which they hoped would show Hindus the "correct" way to go about practising their religion, and educate the young through vernacular and religious education at school.

While the Maha Sabha was established in 1912 it was moribund for extended periods until the 1930s. The organisation usually received a fillip when an overseas missionary visited. The arrival of missionaries such as Professor Parmanand, Swami Shankaranand, Pandit Mehta Jaimini, Swami Adhyananda, Pandit Rishiram, and others inspired locals into action. Visiting missionaries were very popular and attracted large crowds wherever they lectured, but when these learned scholars departed, locals too seemed to disappear. Dr. N.P. Desai, who came to the helm in the 1940s, was probably the first South African-born leader to commit himself totally to the Maha Sabha and drive its agenda with passion and determination. It is significant that while he was involved in other religious, cultural, and educational organisations he was not involved in any particular political organisation, as many earlier leaders were.

Part of the explanation for the failure to sustain the activities of the Maha Sabha may, in fact, lie in the fact that many of the leaders involved in the Maha Sabha were also involved in political bodies and trades unions and were having to deal with the attempts of the state to repatriate Indians and segregate those who remained in South Africa, and generally treat Indians as second class citizens. This was taking place in a context where large numbers of Indians were afflicted by poverty. The likes of S.L. Singh and Bhawani Dayal were caught up in these struggles. On the other hand, influential leaders such as P.R. Pather and S.R. Naidoo were concerned about the repercussions of forming a national body exclusively for Hindus as they worked closely with Christians and Muslims in political organisations. These individuals belonged to parochial religious, cultural, and vernacular organisations where they did important work, but it was an overarching Hindu organisation that they were concerned with, because they believed that such an organisation could potentially create religious tensions between Hindus and other Indians.

The formation of the Maha Sabha in South Africa in 1912 was significant because it was the first Maha Sabha to be established in the diaspora. This was due entirely to the

vision, energy and drive of Swami Shankaranand and the organisation faded after his departure in 1912. The Maha Sabha in South Africa was different to its counterparts in the diaspora. In British Guyana and Mauritius the Maha Sabha promoted an orthodox approach to Hinduism (Sanathanism) and provided an alternative to the Arya Samaj.[617] In Guyana, Trinidad and Suriname, Maha Sabhas were also national organisations dominated by Sanathanists and were, additionally, political organisations "which represented Hindus to non-Indian communities and government authorities."[618] The Fiji Maha Sabha, formed in 1926, was initially led by Arya Samajists,[619] but in 1930 a faction that was unhappy with the organisation's Arya Samaj orientation, broke away.[620] The Fiji Maha Sabha was also a political organisation and clashed with the Muslim League and Sanathan Dharma.[621]

The Maha Sabha in South Africa differed from its counterparts in the diaspora in several respects. It was not a political force, it did not create serious tensions between Arya Samajists and followers of the Sanathan Dharma, nor did it create noticeable conflict between Muslims and Hindus. How are we to explain this difference between the Maha Sabha in South Africa and those in other diasporic colonies? One possible explanation for the difference is that in South Africa Indians constituted an absolute minority, whereas in Fiji and Trinidad they constituted almost half the population, and in Mauritius, which lacked an indigenous population, Indians came to constitute an overwhelming majority, and were in a position to contest for political control. South Africa is also different from other colonies that received indentured labour because there were more migrants from South than North India. Both the Arya Samaj and Sanathan Dharma are North Indian movements and had more influence on Hindi-speaking Hindus. South Indian indentured migrants as a percentage of the total indentured population constituted 6.3 percent in Fiji, 31.9 percent in Mauritius, and 6.3 percent in British Guiana.[622] In Natal, it was 67.9 percent.[623] Another difference between South Africa and other diasporic Hindu communities is that whereas there were serious

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[617] Peter Van Der Veer and Steven Vertovec. "Brahmanism Abroad: On Caribbean Hinduism as an Ethnic Religion" in *Ethnology*, 30: 2 (April, 1991), 160.

[618] Van Der Veer and Vertovec. "Brahmanism Abroad", 161.

[619] Kelly. *A politics,* 5.

[620] Kelly. *A politics,* 202.

[621] Kelly. *A politics,* 90-91.

[622] Brij V. Lal, "The Indenture System" in B.V Lal. (ed). *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 46-52.

[623] Lal, "The Indenture System", 51.

tensions between umbrella "reformist" and orthodox bodies, it was only in 1941 that a Shri Sanathan Dharma Sabha was established to unite Sanathanists in Natal.[624]

While the Maha Sabha as an organisation did not get involved in politics many of its members did do so in their individual capacities. In fact Bhawani Dayal, a fundamental figure in the history of Hinduism in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century, expressed public dissatisfaction with the Maha Sabha in India because it could potentially generate religious tension, yet gave a speech in 1933 as president to the umbrella Arya Samaj body of Natal on the necessity of (re)establishing the Maha Sabha in South Africa. He was confident that the tensions between Muslims and Hindus, so prevalent in India, would not be replicated in South Africa because a Maha Sabha in this country would stick purely to religious, cultural and welfare activities, and not get involved in politics, as was the case with other existing Hindu institutions in South Africa, because several political organisations already spoke for Indians. Dayal emphasised the fact that the context in South Africa was radically different to that in India.[625] Dayal wanted to unite Indians, on the one hand, but also unite Hindus specifically. He wanted to unite Indians so that they could collectively resist the discriminatory laws designed to oppress them, and his reason for uniting Hindus was that if they worked together they would be better able to preserve their cultural and religious heritage.

Indians in South Africa constituted a minority and there was little incentive for Hindus to form a political body that excluded Muslims and Christians. The work of Gandhi in promoting "Indianness" is also important. While many individuals in the Maha Sabha were part of secular political associations they did not use the Maha Sabha as a platform to voice political differences. The biographies of various Maha Sabha leaders confirm that they were involved in a multitude of community organisations. This included secular political, welfare, sporting, and religious bodies. At no time did they use the Maha Sabha to voice political concerns. Chapter Four shows that fears that the Maha Sabha would get involved in politics did not materialise nor did its existence lead to religious tension, and that this induced some who were opposed to the Maha Sabha in the 1930s to join the organisation in the 1940s. Throughout the turbulent years that would characterise the Indian political scene in South

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[624] Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage*, 134.
[625] APS Conference paper 1933.

Africa, there is a glaring silence on these issues in the minutes of the Maha Sabha council meetings and conferences.

One of the major themes at virtually every Maha Sabha conference and meeting from the 1920s was that of conversion to Christianity. Kuppusami, for example, states that during the 1930s there was a sudden increase in the rate of conversion.[626] While the issue of preventing conversion was emphasised by Swami Shankaranand, there was a new urgency amongst its leaders to combat this occurrence after the revival of the Maha Sabha in the 1940s. For Kuppusami, three factors led to increased conversion during the 1930s. These were the lack of spiritual knowledge imparted to Hindu children by parents, the persuasiveness of Christian missionaries, and a lack of collective counter-measures by Hindu spiritual leaders.[627] Also important was the rapid urbanisation of many Indian families following the First World War.[628] To what extent was the fear of Hindu conversion to Christianity a fact and to what extent it was a perception? Table 1 makes interesting reading in this regard for it shows that for the period from 1920 to 1960, Hindus as a proportion of the Indian population increased marginally, as did the Muslim and Christian components, at the expense of the category 'other'. Overall, there was no significant shift even though Maha Sabha leaders felt that this was the case.

Table 1 Religious compositions of Asians in South Africa[629]

	1921		**1951**		**1960**	
	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%
Hindu	109,163	(65.86)	246,234	(67.15)	327,783	(68.58)
Muslim	26,917	(16.24)	78,787	(21.48)	99,068	(20.72)
Christian	8,716	(5.25)	22,883	(6.24)	36,620	(7.66)
Other	12,974		18,760		14,476	
Total Asian	165,731		366,664		477, 947	

Source: Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen. "Major Religions" in B. Pachai. *South Africa's Indians: The Evolution of a Minority* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), 558.

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[626] Kuppusami. *Religions, Customs,* 147.
[627] Kuppusami. *Religions, Customs*, 147.
[628] See Freund. *Insiders and Outsiders*, 29-49.
[629] The figures include approximately 8000 Chinese.

Looking at conversion and the factors that may have caused Hindus to convert is beyond the scope of this study, but these population figures suggest that conversion only became a major factor in the period after 1960.[630] By the time of the 2001 census, Christians made up around 24 per cent of the Indian population. Notwithstanding this, the fear of Hindu conversion was a powerful force in shaping and giving urgency to the programmes of the Maha Sabha, which was driven to safeguard the interests of Hinduism.

By the time that Indians celebrated their centenary in South Africa in 1960, the Maha Sabha was an established institution. The process of establishing it was gradual and support was not unanimous. But through its various conferences, council meetings, and publications, the Maha Sabha provided a forum for Hindus to discuss their common problems and exchange ideas. Importantly, Sanathanist, Saivite, Arya Samajist, and other Hindus of divergent linguistic, ethnic, social, cultural, educational and religious backgrounds were able to work under a common umbrella. The need for a body to represent Hindus in South Africa was viewed negatively by some who feared sectionalism. Similarly, when the Maha Sabha wanted to introduce vernacular and religious education many critical voices feared that this would divide school children along religious lines. This did not happen and it is ironic that whereas there was so much concern about sectionalism in the 1950s, in the post-apartheid era, when South African society has opened up, when we are living in an era of mass movement of peoples across borders, or what some refer to as cosmopolitanism, identities are hardening. The religious schools that leaders were so careful to avoid in the 1950s are sprouting up everywhere in South Africa, and Indian identities are fragmenting into ever narrower religious, ethnic, regional, and linguistic lines.

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[630] For more on conversion see Pillay. *Religion at the Limits?* and Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen. *Pentecostal penetration into the Indian community in metropolitan Durban, South Africa* (Durban: University of Durban-Westville, 1975).

GLOSSARY

Agam   Literally means "ancestral home" or can be translated to academy and also refers to bodies that were established to promote cultural endeavours.

Andra   Another name for Telugu.

Aryan   Literally translated to "noble." Aryans can also be seen as the invaders of India circa 2000 BCE and heirs to "North Indians." Aryan sometimes is used to describe followers of the Arya Samaj meaning "society of righteousness."

Arya Samaj   Literally meaning society of righteousness, the term can be used to refer to the missionary movement founded by Swami Dayananda or it can be used to refer to small associations established by followers of that movement and in this context is sometimes translated as "Vedic Church."

Bhagavad Gita   A sacred Hindu scripture comprising part of the *Mahabharata.*

Bhajan   Worship by singing God's praises, esp. in chorus.

Bodha   *K*nowledge, Truth or enlightenment.

Dharma   Universal law; way or path; an entity of any sort - thing, idea, concept, etc; virtuous deeds; harmonious life; natural duty; inherent qualities Religious code of conduct.

Devasthanum   Attachment to a larger body.

Dravidians   Refers to South Indians and are believed to be the descendents of the Indus Valley civilisation (circa 2500-1500BCE).

Gnana   Sanskrit term to refer to absolute knowledge or self-realization.

Gnana Bodham   A text produced circa 1225 by a South Indian scholar in South Tamil Nadu for the benefit of Tamils.

Gurukul   The term is a combination of the term guru meaning religious teacher and kula meaning family to refer to a belonging to a part of family or school of religious teachers. It is the name of the famous Arya Sama institutions in India particularly the gurukul of Kangri.

Havan   Offering, burning of grain, purified butter and sandalwood in the sacred fire, accompanied by a recital of Vedic Mantras.

Jayanti	Birthday.
Kavadi	Popular festival amongst descendents of South Indians in worship of Murga.
Maha	Great.
Mahabharata	Ancient Sanskrit epic compiled between circa 400 BCE.
Mahila	Woman.
Mandal:	An association.
Mandir	Temple.
Mitra:	A deity in the Rig Veda. But can be translated from Sanskrit to mean friend.
Panchayat	Panchayat which translates to "assembly" was a type of village court system in India that settled minor disputes.
Pandit	Hindu Priest
Patshala	School.
Pranayam	A type of breathing exercise.
Pratinidhi	Representative.
Puranas	Set of religious texts regarded as smirti (remembered) and regarded by reformers especially Arya Samajist as fallible and inferior to Surti (revealed).
Ramayana	Ancient Sanskrit epic compiled between circa 400 BCE and 200 CE
Sabha	Means society/assembly/organisation and is the name of most Hindu organisations ends with this word, for example Maha Sabha or great society.
Saiva Sithandham	An ancient South Indian tradition in worship of Shiva that stresses the importance of vegetarianism. In circa 1225 a scholar in South Tamil Nadu transcribed this wisdom in the form of a text known as the *Gnana Bodham*.
Samaj	Society or organisation
Samajist	A term used to describe proponents or followers of the Arya Samaj missionary movement.
Samsara:	Life through repeated births and deaths; the wheel of birth and death; the process of earthly life.

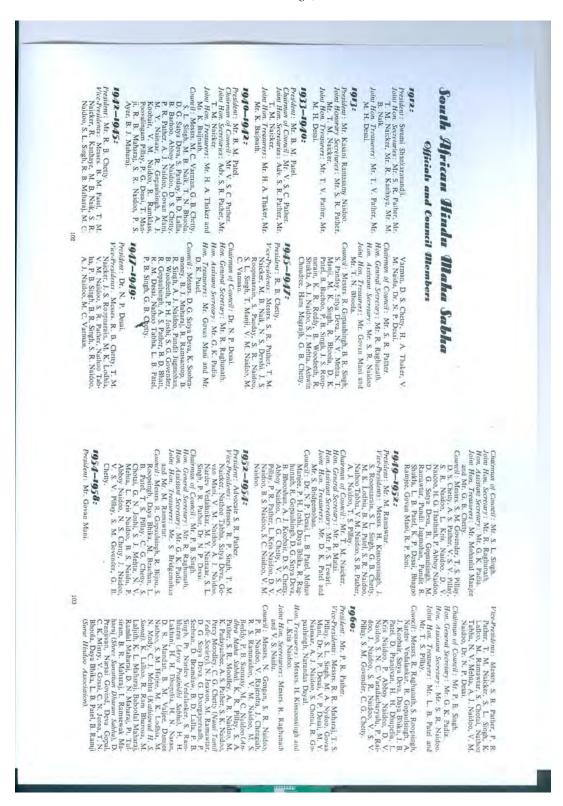|	
Samskaras	Sixteen rituals performed at different stages of the individual's life.
Sanathan Dharma:	Can be translated from Sanskrit to English to mean the "eternal faith." While the term can be used by all Hindus to describe their religion it also refers to a Hindu movement which gives authority to a wide variety of traditions, texts and rituals regarded by many reform movements as inferior or backward. In many places the Sanathan Dharma emerges as a counter movement in contrast to the Arya Samaj.
Sanathanist	A term used to describe proponents or followers of the Sanathan Dharma movement.
Sandhya	A ritual done at the "junctions" (sandhyas) of the day–dawn, noon, and sunset–during which the Savitri Gayatri is repeated.
Sangam/Sungam	Refers to the earliest period in South Indian history as well as to literature and saints of the time. It can also refer to an academy or cultural body.
Sannyasi	Refers to a Hindu priest who has attained the highest stage of life and becomes a celibate.
Sanskar	A rite prescribed by scripture.
Seva	Selfless service, for example a *seva samaj* is a charity body.
Shiva	A major Hindu deity that is widely worshiped amongst South Africans of South Indian descent.
Shri	Respectful address to male.
Shrimati	Respectful address to female.
Thevaram	Collection of Tamil Saivite devotional poetry.
Thirukura	One of the first work in Tamil to focus on ethics, other than Buddhist - Jain literature.
Thiruvaimoli	Hymnal work of Srivaisnavism by the great Alwar saints of Tamil Nadu - carried out between the 500s and 800s CE.
Veda:	Four ancient Hindu texts regarded by the Arya Samaj as the authentic collection of Hindu thought.
Vidya	Education, literacy.
Yuvuk	Youth.
Sahitya	Association; connection; society; combination; harmony.

Appendix 1

List of Maha Sabha council members and officials up to the year 1960 from Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage*, 102-103.

South African Hindu Maha Sabha

Officials and Council Members

1932:
President: Swami Shankrananndji
Joint Hon. Secretaries: Mr. S. R. Pather, Mr. T. M. Naicker, Mr. R. Kanhaye, Mr. M. B. Naik.
Joint Hon. Treasurers: Mr. T. V. Pather, Mr. M. H. Desai.

1933:
President: Mr. Kasani Ramasamy Naidoo.
Joint Honorary Secretaries: Mr. S. R. Pather, Mr. T. M. Naicker.
Joint Hon. Treasurers: Mr. T. V. Pather, Mr. M. H. Desai.

1933–1940:
President: Mr. B. M. Patel.
Chairman of Council: Mr. V. S. C. Pather.
Joint Hon. Secretaries: Mr. S. R. Pather, Mr. T. M. Naicker.
Joint Hon. Treasurer: Mr. H. A. Thaker, Mr. K. Baijnath.

1940–1942:
President: Mr. B. M. Patel.
Chairman of Council: Mr. V. S. C. Pather.
Joint Hon. Secretaries: Adv. S. R. Pather, Mr. T. M. Naicker.
Joint Hon. Treasurers: Mr. H. A. Thaker and Mr. K. Baijnath.
Council: Messrs. M. C. Varman, G. B. Chetty, S. L. Singh, M. B. Naik, T. N. Bhoola, D. G. Satya Deva, S. Panday, B. D. Lalla, B. Bachoo, Abboy Naidoo, D. S. Chetty, P. R. Pather, A. J. Naidoo, Govan Mani, M. Y. Nainaar, R. Gopaulsingh, A. J. Koobair, V. M. Naidoo, R. Ramklass, Poovalingam Pillay, P. G. Desai, T. Manji, R. B. Maharaj, S. R. Naidoo, P. S. Ayer, B. J. Maharaj.

1942–1945:
President: Mr. R. B. Chetty.
Vice-Presidents: Messrs. B. M. Patel, T. M. Naicker, R. Kanhaye, M. B. Naik, S. R. Naidoo, S. L. Singh, R. B. Maharaj, M. C.

1945–1947:
President: R. B. Chetty.
Vice-Presidents: Messrs. S. R. Pather, T. M. Naicker, M. B. Naik, N. S. Devshi, J. S. Roopnarain, S. Panday, S. R. Naidoo, S. L. Singh, T. Manji, V. M. Naidoo, M. C. Varman.
Council: Messrs. R. Gopaulsingh, B. R. Singh, S. Panday, Satya Deva, N. V. Mehta, T. Manji, M. K. Singh, R. Bhoola, D. K. Patel, B. Bachoo, P. B. Singh, J. S. Roopnarain, K. R. Reddy, B. Woodeeth, R. Shukla, A. J. Naidoo, S. J. Mehta, Ashwin Choudree, Hans Magrajh, G. B. Chetty.

1947–1949:
President: Dr. N. P. Desai.
Vice-Presidents: Messrs. R. B. Chetty, T. M. Naicker, J. S. Roopnarain, M. K. Lodhia, V. M. Naidoo, S. R. Pather, Nathoo Tabha, P. B. Singh, S. R. Singh, S. R. Naidoo, A. J. Naidoo, M. C. Varman.

Chairman of Council: Mr. V. S. C. Pather.
Hon. General Secretary: Dr. N. P. Desai.
Hon. Assistant Secretary: Mr. G. K. Padia.
Hon. Treasurers: Mr. Govan Mani and Mr. D. K. Patel.
Council: Messrs. D. G. Satya Deva, K. Soobramoney, B. J. Maharaj, R. Ramsaroop, B. R. Singh, A. J. Naidoo, Pundit Jugmohan, B. Woodeeth, P. H. Joshi, S. G. Govender, R. Gopaulsingh, A. S. Pather, B. D. Bhati, R. M. Desai, Nathoo Tabha, L. B. Patel, P. B. Singh, G. B. Chetty.

1949–1952:
President: Mr. M. Ramawtar.
Vice-Presidents: Messrs. S. L. Singh, G. B. Chetty, M. K. Lodhia, B. M. Patel, S. R. Naidoo, Nathoo Tabha, V. M. Naidoo, S. R. Pather, A. J. Naidoo, T. S. Pillay.
Chairman of Council: Mr. T. M. Naicker.
Hon. General Secretary: Mr. R. Matai.
Hon. Assistant Secretary: Mr. P. S. Tewari.
Joint Hon. Treasurers: Mr. D. K. Patel and Mr. S. Bridgemohan.
Council: Dr. N. P. Desai, L. B. Patel, Mohan Manjee, P. H. Joshi, Daya Bhika, R. Raghunath, R. Gopaulsingh, D. G. Satya Deva, B. Bhooshan, A. J. Koobair, D. S. Chetty, Abboy Naidoo, A. J. Koobair, C. G. Chetty, V. S. V. Pillay, P. R. Pather, L. Kris Naidoo, S. C. Naidoo, V. M. Naidoo.

1952–1954:
President: Advocate S. R. Pather.
Vice-Presidents: Messrs. R. P. Singh, T. M. Naicker, Nathoo Tabha, Satya Deva, Govan Mani, V. M. Naidoo, A. J. Naidoo, Nardev Vedlankari, M. Y. Nainaar, S. L. Singh, P. R. Pather, Dr. N. P. Desai.
Chairman of Council: Mr. F. B. Singh
Hon. General Secretary: Mr. R. Raghunath.
Hon. Assistant Secretary: Mr. G. K. Padia.
Joint Hon. Treasurers: Mr. S. Bridgemohan and Mr. M. Ramawtar.
Council: Messrs. R. Gopaulsingh, R. Bijou, S. Roopsingh, Daya Bhika, M. Beuchan, L. B. Patel, T. S. Pillay, C. G. Chetty, S. Chotai, G. N. Joshi, S. J. Mehta, N. V. Mehta, G. N. Joshi, S. I. Mehta, N. P. Mehta, A. V. S. V. Pillay, S. M. Govender, G. B. Chetty.

1954–1958:
President: Mr. Govan Mani.

Chairman of Council: Mr. S. L. Singh.
Joint Hon. Secretary: Mr. R. Raghunath.
Hon. Assistant Secretary: Mr. G. K. Padia.
Joint Hon. Treasurers: Mr. Mohanlal Manjee and Mr. G. B. Chetty.
Council: Messrs. S. M. Govender, T. S. Pillay, D. S. Chetty, A. S. Pather, V. S. V. Pillay, S. R. Naidoo, H. G. Thatinah, P. Abboy Naidoo, D. G. Satya Deva, R. Gopaulsingh, M. Ramawtar, Pundit Jugmohan, Pundit R. Ramjee, Govan Mani, R. P. Soni.

1960:
President: Mr. P. R. Pather.
Vice-Presidents: Messrs. R. R. Maharaj, T. S. Pillay, S. L. Singh, M. A. Nydoo, Govan Mani, Dr. N. P. Desai, M. Y. Nainaar, A. J. Naidoo, S. Chotai, R. Gopaulsingh, Naranidas Dayal.
Hon. Treasurers: Messrs. H. Kissoonsingh and L. Kris Naidoo.
Joint Hon. Secretaries: Messrs. R. Raghunath and V. S. Naidu.
Council: Messrs. N. Gangen, S. R. Naidoo, P. R. Naidoo, V. Rajendra, J. Chergiah, R. S. Rammaidoo, V. M. Naidoo, M. S. Reddy, P. B. Sannasy, M. C. Naidoo (Andhra Maha Sabha); K. P. Pillay, S. A. Pather, S. R. Moodley, A. R. Naidoo, M. K. Padiyachee, A. S. Pather, S. K. Naidoo, Percy Moodley, C. G. Chetty (Naal Tamil Vedic Society); N. Jeawon, M. Ramawtar, D. G. Satya Deva, G. Doorgaspersadh, P. Seehran, D. Bramdaw, B. D. Lalla, P. B. Singh, Pt. Nardev Vedalankar, S. Rambharos (Arya Pratinidhi Sabha); P. Lakhani, H. H. Thupthia, H. N. Naran, D. R. Mundin, B. M. Valjee, Danjee Nathoo, S. M. Hirjee, M. K. Lodhia, N. Mody, C. J. Mehta (Kathiawad H.S.S. Samaj); K. Lalloo, R. Ram Bharos, M. Lalith, K. L. Maharaj, Babootal Maharaj, Ramlal Maharaj, D. N. Maharaj, Pt. Tulsiram, B. R. Maharaj, I. Ramsewak Maharaj (Shree Sanathan Dharam Sabha); C. K. Misry, V. Gosai, C. N. Jeena, T. N. Bhoola, Daya Bhika, L. B. Patel, B. Ramji (Surat Hindu Association).

Vice-President: Messrs. S. R. Pather, P. R. Pather, T. M. Naicker, S. L. Singh, K. Lalloo, M. Ramawtar, S. Chotai, Nathoo Naidoo, N. V. Mehta, A. J. Naidoo, V. M. Naidoo, Dr. N. P. Desai.
Chairman of Council: Mr. P. B. Singh
Hon. General Secretary: Mr. R. Raghunath, S. Roopsingh, A. Gopaulsingh, A. J. Koobair, Satya Deva, Daya Bhika, J. B. Patel, D. Pranjivan, H. H. Dhupelia, J. Kris Naidoo, P. Abboy Naidoo, D. K. Naidoo, J. S. Naidoo, S. R. Naidoo, V. S. V. Pillay, S. M. Govender, C. G. Chetty.

Appendix 2

List of all Maha Sabha conferences up until 1960 from Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 96. Excluding

1960 Centenary Hindu Conference

Maha Sabha Conferences

First Conference: Convention of Hindus held on 31st May, 1912, at the theatre in Victoria Street, Durban, known as the Victoria Picture Palace and the South African Hindu Maha Sabha formed. His Holiness Swami Shankaranandji presided. Proceedings lasted for two days. Three hundred delegates from all parts of South Africa attended.

Second Conference: Held in May 1913 at the same venue as above. Mr. Kasani Ramasamy Naidoo presided. Three hundred delegates from various parts of South Africa attended.

Provincial Convention: Held at Pietermaritzburg in 1917. Mr. R. G. Bhalla presided. Venue: H.Y.M.A. Hall. Members of Hindu Young Men's Association and Veda Dharma Sabha took leading part and made Convention a success.

Third Conference: Held at Durban on 26th, 27th and 28th May, 1934. Opened in the Town Hall, Durban, by His Holiness Shri Swami Adhyanandji. Pandit Mehta Jaimini presided. Sessions continued at the Surat Hindu Association Hall, Victoria Street. Revised Constitution adopted. Elections took place on 28th May, 1934.

Fourth Conference: Held at Pietermaritzburg on 8th, 9th and 10th April, 1944, in the City Hall. Conference opened by President, Mr. R. B. Chetty. Sessions continued at the H.Y.M.A. Hall and Veda Dharma Sabha Hall. Mr. S. R. Naidoo, Chairman of the Reception Committee. A very important Conference. Many resolutions accepted—among them those dealing with recognition of Hindu marriages, conversion, religious education in schools. Shankaranand Memorial Hall, and Hindu college. Delegates from all over South Africa attended.

Goodwill Conference: Held in Durban at the Surat Hindu Association Hall, Victoria Street, on 4th August, 1946. Delegates from all over South Africa attended Conference. Papers on Swami Shankaranand Memorial Hall, read by Mr. S. R. Pather; on Hindu Missionary Work by Mr. T. M. Naicker; on Conversion and Charity by Dr. N. P. Desai; on Hindu College by Mr. S. R. Naidoo and Mr. R. B. Maharaj, both of Pietermaritzburg; on Hoisting of Hindu Flag and Taking of Hindu Pledge annually by Mr. S. L. Singh; and on Formation of provincial bodies by Mr. S. L. Singh.

Fifth Conference: Held in Durban on 9th October, 1953. Inaugurated at A. I. Kajee Hall, Leopold Street, by Mr. S. R. Naidoo, Pietermaritzburg. Advocate S. R. Pather presided. Sessions held at the Hindu Tamil Institute Hall, corner Cross and Carlisle Streets. Important papers read: On social service by Mr. P. R. Pather; on fostering of cordiality between various linguistic groups by Dr. N. P. Desai; on advancement of women by Mrs. Urmila J. Patel and Mr. S. L. Singh; on religious instruction in primary schools by Mr. Sunbhuder Panday; on youth movement by Mr. T. M. Naicker; on Sunday prayer meetings by Mr. M. B. Naidoo; on co-ordination of Hindu organisation by Mr. J. B. Patel. Farewell banquet held in the St. John Hall, Epsom Road, on 11th October, 1953, at 7.30 p.m.

Special Conference: Held in Durban at the Mahatma Gandhi Hall, 52 Lorne Street, on 3rd July, 1955. Mr. Govan Mani, president, presided. Mr. P. R. Pather, Chairman of Reception Committee. Important paper on "Religious Instruction in Indian Schools", read by Mr. Sookraj Chotai. A very successful Conference. Indian teachers attended in large numbers. Ground prepared for introduction of Hindu Religious Education into Government Aided Indian Schools.

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Appendix 3

Centenary Hindu Conference of 1960 from Nowbath et al (eds). *Hindu Heritage,* 97.

Centenary Hindu Conference
1960

THEME: PRESERVATION OF HINDU CULTURE IN A
WESTERN SETTING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

FRIDAY, 18th NOVEMBER, 1960 — CITY HALL, DURBAN

8.0 to 10.0 p.m. — Opening of Conference by His Honour the Administrator of Natal, Mr. A. E. Trollip.
Presidential Address by Mr. P. R. Pather.

SATURDAY, 19th NOVEMBER, 1960
NATAL TAMIL VEDIC HALL, CARLISLE STREET, DURBAN

SESSION 1: 2.30 — 4.0 p.m.   Subject: The Religious and Spiritual Training of Youths.
Paper: Read by Swami Nischalananda.
Resolution: Moved by Dr. B. Rambiritch.

SESSION 2: 4.30 — 6.0 p.m.   Subject: Propagation of Hinduism and Hindu Solidarity.
Paper: Read by Dr. N. P. Desai.
Resolution: Moved by Mr. P. B. Singh.

SESSION 3: 7.30 — 9.30 p.m.   (a) Subject: Religious Services and Ceremonies.
Paper: Read by Mr. H. N. Naran.
Resolution: Moved by Pt. Nardev Vedalankar.
(b) Subject: Significance and Observance of Hindu Festivals.
Paper: Read by Dr. S. B. Ramessar.
Resolution: Moved by Mr. T. M. Naicker.

SUNDAY, 20th NOVEMBER, 1960
NATAL TAMIL VEDIC HALL, CARLISLE STREET, DURBAN

SESSION 4: 9.0 — 10.30 a.m.   Subject: Mother-Tongue Education.
Paper: Read by Pt. S. N. C. Varadacharyulu.
Resolution: Moved by Mr. Bal Ganesh.

SESSION 5: 11.0 — 12.30 p.m.   Subject: Hindu Religious Instruction in Indian Schools.
Paper: Read by Mr. Sookraj Chotai.
Resolution: Moved by Mr. P. Devan.

SESSION 6: 2.30 — 4.0 p.m.   Subject: Proselytism — Preventive Measures.
Paper: Read by Mr. B. D. Lalla.
Resolution: Moved by Mr. R. S. Pather.

SESSION 7: 4.30 — 6.0 p.m.   Subject: The Ideal of Service.
Paper: Read by Mr. M. Perumal.
Resolution: Moved by Mr. K. Lalloo.

6.0 — 6.30 p.m.   Subject: The Establishment of a Hindu Foundation.
Resolution: Mover—Mr. R. S. Nowbath.
Seconder—Mr. H. H. Dhupelia.

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Appendix 4

List of some of the 62 Hindu associations that attended the SAHMS conference of 1934 from SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.

SOUTH AFRICAN HINDU COMM. TE.

INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED.

1. Young Men's Vedic Society, 26, Cross Street, Durban.

2. Hindu Pracharni Sabha,   Clare Estate.

3. Kathiawar Pathni Naw Yuvuk Sabha, 23, Madressa Arcade, Durban.

4. Candella Estate Hindu Sungtan, C/o Carlisle St. Indian School,
                                                            Durban.

5. Tongaat Hindu Samarasa Bodha
       Andhra Association,   Tongaat.

6. Point Indian Young Men's Association, 60 Shepstone St. Point.

7. Durban Mochi Fitehoo Mandal, 46, Queen St., Durban

8. Cato Manor Hindu Temple and
       Benevolent Home,   14, Saville Street, Durban.

9. Veda Dharma Sabha,   460, Greyling St., Maritzburg.

10. Kathiawar Arya Mandal   183, Grey St., Durban.

11. Illovo Vishnu Temple,   Illovo.

12. Hindu Women's Association   80, Leopold St. Durban.

13. Lower Tugela District Hindu
       Veda Dharma Sabha,   P.O.Box 71, Stanger.

14. Uitenhage Hindu Mandel   2, John St., Uitenhage.

15. The Surat Hindu Association.   Durban.

16. The Bombay Presidency Hindu Association,   Durban.

17. The Surat Prajapati Association. 142, Prince Edw. St., Durban

18. Arya Prithinidhi Sabha (Natal)   Durban.

19. United Hindu Association,   Cape Town.

20. Shri Tirugnana Sambanthar Society,   Sea View.

21. Manor Garden Hindu Association. Mayville.

22. Patider Union   15, Cross St., Durban.

23. Mayville Indian Young Men's Society.   Mayville.

24. Vedic Sanmarka Society,   Sea Cow Lake.

25. Shri Ambalavanar Alayam.   Umbilo.

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Appendix 4

Continued

59-62 Are not included in the conference paper.

29. Hindu Sabha   P.O.Kloof.

30. Satcheethanundar Tamil School   P.O.Mayville.

31. Shree Mayawant Association   58, Victoria Street, Durban.

32. Chohan Dhobi Mundal,   86, Dalton Rd., Durban.

33. Manning Place Shrinivasa Perumal   Valley Rd., Mayville.
       Temple   89,

34. Surat Arya Sangit Mandal,   394, Pine St., Durban.

35. Railway Hindu Temple   Grayville.

36. Hindu Community of Rooikopjes. 128, Queen St., Durban.

37. Hindi Rashtriya Patshala   Clairwood.

38. Greytown Vedic Parchanek Sabha, P.O.Box 20, Greytown.

39. Clairwood Tamil School Committee. Clairwood.

40. Sydenham Samathan Dharm Vishnu
       Mandal,   284, Randles Rd. Durban.

41. The Gujarati Kshatiya Mochi
       Mandal Society.   Port Elizabeth. C.P.

42. Port Shepstone Hindu Educational
       Society,   P.O.Box 13, Port Shepstone.

43. Shri Vishnu Temple   560, Longmarket St., P.M.Burg.

44. Hindu Tamil Institute.   P.O.Box 670, Durban.

45. The Greenwood Park Indian School
       and Hindu Tamil Community,   Greenwood Park.

46. Tanjore Indian School   28, Tanjore Rd., Umgeni.

47. Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj   P.O.Box 411, Johannesburg.

48. Kathiawar Patni Soni Association, 108, Victoria St., Durban.

49. Veda Dharma Sabha (Edendale)   P.O.Plessislaer.

50. Andhra Maha Sabha   P.O.Box 2255, Durban.

51. Durban Vedic Mission Society, 382, Pine St., Durban.

52. Shri Vaithianatha Easporar
       Temple,   C/o 171, Umgeni Rd., Durban.

53. Gujarati Hindu Mahila Mandal. 156, Victoria St., Durban.

54. Shri Phersooram Tailor Association   Durban.

55. Rangadasar Bajanay Huddam   Cradock

56. Arya Sangeet Mundal   Durban

57. Sydenham Hindu Young Men's Society

58. Umbilo Draupade Temple   Durban.

Appendix 5

Abbreviated version of Hindu instruction syllabus presented by Chotai from SAHMS Centenary

Hindu conference papers, 1960.

a) God;

b) Ramayana

c) Bhagavat Gita

d) Veda

e) Upanishad

f) Thirukural

g) Puranas

h) Thevaram

i) Thayumanavar

j) Thiruvaimoli

k) Krishna

l) Morals and Ethics

m) Saints, teachers, reformers and their work

n) Biographical sketches of characters from religious literature

o) Description and significance of festivals

p) Mahabharata

q) Brief account of the sacred books of the Hindus;

r) Characteristic features of Hinduism;

s) Cults and off-shoots of Hinduism.

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For the purposes of this bibliography, brochures, private collections and ephemeral materials have been included as primary sources.

A. Maha Sabha Council

i.   Auditors Report
ii.   Council Biennial Report
iii.   Minutes of Biennial General Meetings
iv.   Minutes of Council Meetings

Note: Made available by the current secretary, V.J. Misra.

B. Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre.

a. The R.B. Maharaj Collection

The collection includes press cuttings (916/1-389) from the following newspapers:

i.   *Natal Witness*
ii.   *Natal Advertiser*
iii.   *Natal Mercury*
iv.   *Sunday Times*
v.   *Sunday Tribune*

b. SAHMS Documents: SC/O/SAHMS 000973

i.   *Hindu*
ii.   Common Prayer books
iii.   Hindu Religious instruction in Indian Schools presented by Chotai paper read at special conference of 1955.
iv.   Biennial General Meetings.
v.   SAHMS constitution.
vi.   The SAHMS Hindu Conference Papers, 1934.
vii.   The SAHMS Centenary Hindu conference papers, 1960.

Other sources from Documentation Centre

i.   APS Conference Papers, 1933.

ii.   NIC First Conference Paper.

iii.   NED Draft Syllabus of Hindu Religious Instruction.

3. Newspapers

Newspapers were consulted at the BP Library, Documentation Centre and Killie Campbell Library:

i.   *African Chronicle*

ii.   *Dharma Vir*

iii.   *Graphic*

iv.   *Hindi*

v.   *Indian Opinion*

vi.   *Post Natal*

vii. *Leader*

4. Oral Interviews

i.   J.V Desai   24 March 2010.

ii.   C.T. Bhoola   31 March 2010.

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