

**DOCUMENTATION CENTRE**

*University of Durban-Westville*

**ACCESSION NO.** 1/442

Printed by  
UNIVERSAL PRINTING WORKS  
53 Beatrice Street, Durban

*The*  
***Hindu Heritage***  
*in*  
***South Africa***

Edited by  
RANJI S. NOWBATH  
SOOKRAJ CHOTAI  
B. D. LALLA



Published by  
THE SOUTH AFRICAN HINDU MAHA SABHA  
49 Lorne Street, Durban  
November 1960

offence against social rules ostracism was applied to individual offenders—all with a view to maintaining the honour and respect of a family, which was considered as a vital part in the social structure of society.

Thus the South Indian community took root. Charitable work was not neglected. In times of distress it became the duty of the community to afford relief. Individual acts of charity by people higher in the social levels were freely done. Those were happy days. Despite the hardships they endured, people lived in peace and contentment.

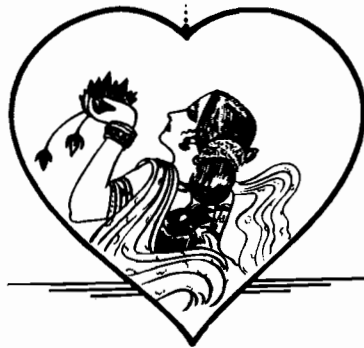
Above all these the importance given to the subject of education was astonishing even in those days. Wherever possible provision was made for the teaching of the mother-tongue in open spaces, in small rooms, and on the verandahs of buildings overlooking streets. Every family saw to it that its children, especially boys, attended schools and were taught English. The enthusiasm shown by parents in this direction and sacrifices made by them to equip their children with English education, laid the foundations of future progress.

The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi (then M. K. Gandhi) in Natal and his work and stay among us added another link of solidarity to our

people. His presence stimulated them and created political consciousness. His passive resistance campaign, to which the Tamils also gave support in abundance, was another chapter in our turbulent history.

The occasional visits of religious missionaries from India to this country added strength to our spiritual ties with India. Missionaries like Professor Parmanand, Swami Shankaranandji, who founded the South African Hindu Maha Sabha, Pandit Jaimini, G. K. Gokhale, Dr. Radhakrishnan, and others, deepened our interest in our religious, educational and social welfare work. By and large, the presence of the late Rt. Honourable Srinivasa Sastri, the Honourable Mahomed Habibullah, Kunwar Maharaj Singh and other distinguished sons of India who represented her in South Africa gave us a new outlook in life, a new spirit and a new vision.

In recent years there has been a religious upsurge among our people. The astonishing interest shown in the spread of religious teaching and in spiritual development, particularly by our younger generation, is proof in itself of the progress our people are making in the acquisition of deeper religious knowledge, and love and attachment for their religion.



## *The Future of Hinduism in South Africa*

By B. D. LALLA

THE system of Hinduism I visualise in the future in this country, must not be assumed to represent the system I would personally wish to see professed or practised. It is not my duty to advocate any particular form of Hinduism but to follow the general historical plan of studying and analysing the formative forces operating on and shaping Hinduism today, in order to arrive at some intelligible synthesis that may be representative of Hinduism in the future in this country. And this at best must be regarded as purely speculative in view of the unpredictable changes taking place, almost overnight, in most of our institutions. South Africa is dominated by Western civilisation and the all-important question—Will Hinduism survive in this country?—must be answered first.

We are passing through one of the most critical periods in human history, witnessing the most revolutionary changes in our political, social and economic system. Restlessness is widespread. Our religious system which underlines the ultimate purpose of all other systems, has not escaped the serious challenges of the times. The impact of modern utilitarian civilisation, with its utterly disproportionate emphasis on man's outer development, has left the inner spirit in a turbulent state. Mental and spiritual ill-health have not only become endemic but are spreading like contagious epidemics. The giant mind that proudly harnessed the latent forces in matter is now itself enslaved by insentient matter. This, indeed, is the great tragedy of the age. It is the bitter price that man must pay for ignoring the development of his inner spirituality to harmonize with his wider outer development.

To assert, as some fussy pedantic moralists of the day are asserting, that all is lost and

mankind is doomed to eternal damnation, is to ignore completely the divinity in man that points to his divine destiny. The divine discontent which epitomizes the feeling of the generation is already producing the type of healthy reaction which augurs well for the future of religion. Let us have no delusions. Religion will triumph. It will assert its kingdom, for it is the only stable institution offering the anchorage of tranquility, ensuring man the only means of lasting solace and happy harmonious living. And because Hinduism offers that spiritual haven which the frustrated spirit of the age is seeking, Hinduism will survive and flourish in the future of South Africa. But, and this all-important, this Hinduism will be different from that as generally believed and practised today. It will have lost some of its superficialities, the outer coverings and meaningless ritualistic growths, and will reveal in bolder perspective its fundamentals and essentials.

Although as we enter the second century of our settlement in this country the shadows of uncertainty darken every hour, and evil looms ominously all round the silver-lining of hope for the survival of our religions nevertheless grows brighter every day. This is not the hope of wishful thinking nor hope hinged on blind faith but hope springing from the positive attitude of youth to religion.

The educated young Hindu who in the last decade was abandoned as a force lost to the cause of Hinduism in this country, has reacted psychologically not only to his inferior status as a citizen of his country but also to the frustrated spirit of the age. He has realised with painful experience, that in spite of his Western education qualifying him to participate in and contribute to the political, social, educational

and economic institutions of the country, he is paradoxically ostracised from them and relegated to a position of inferiority. In spite of any special gifts or talents with which he may be endowed, he can lay no claims to equality of opportunity or superiority of any kind. From his imagination he must banish all aspirations of equality and superiority.

In a hostile situation such as this, the young, intelligent and active spirit cannot be expected to remain caged as a captive for too long a time. Inevitably it must find an outlet to assert itself, either through some socially approved or disapproved channel.

The young Hindu who found an outlet for his pent-up energy and enthusiasm in the field of religion has been wisely guided in his choice by noble consideration. In the service of Hinduism he has realised, he can work with unhampered freedom and with endless opportunities of equality which are denied in other fields. Above all, he could crown his efforts with the achievement of the highest spiritual goal to which there is no race, colour, or language bar. And, secondly, like discontented, dejected and dismayed man all over, who has lost the buoyancy of harmonious existence, seeking "the balmy aroma of spiritual solace", the young Hindu has discovered that the missing factor in the Twentieth Century material civilisation responsible for all the chaos and confusion, is not just any religion but a universal religion with wide catholicity and toleration.

It is this educated young Hindu, animated by a new spirit to meet the double challenge who will be the driving force of Hinduism in the future, and Hinduism in the future, as already indicated, will be a Hinduism divested of much of its extraneous superficial growth.

There is a large number of sectional Hindu institutions organised on linguistic lines such as Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and Gujarati, with each having further sub-sections of its own. Though there are no conflicting interests, nor the semblance of the slightest antagonism against one another because of the many diverse ceremonial and ritualistic practices, nevertheless it is not possible for these groups working separately to present a consolidated and unified system of Hinduism to meet the challenge which the age and the western environment of the country issue.

In recent years, however, through the efforts of the Divine Life Society and the Rama-

krishna Centre, Hinduism is being proclaimed with a non-sectional voice. Through their zeal Hinduism is assuming a new force of greater significance and importance in the lives of Hindus in this country. What the older and long established Hindu denominational groups failed to achieve jointly in the many years of their existence, these two bodies have achieved in their comparatively short period of existence.

I am not a member of either of these groups and my reference to their work and achievement must not be construed as projections of my own desire or mistaken for propaganda. I shall not in any case describe in detail their specific work nor attempt to assess their strength or their future. My examination is purely objective and confined exclusively to such evidence as have a direct and pertinent bearing on the future of Hinduism.

Both these bodies have exploded the long-standing myth that educated young Hindus have no time for religion, for both the bodies are under the effective control of young people with education. Highly educated doctors and teachers, some with several university degrees to their credit, have attached themselves to these bodies. The sincerity of their attachment cannot be questioned for it is not just casual, of a patronizing nature in some honorary capacity but characterised by devotion, active participation and dedicated service.

The religious programme planned and conducted by both these bodies appeals to the emotion and at the same time claims the reverence of the intellect, even of the critical educated reviewer. The modern educated young man cannot be expected to submit blindly to everything invoked in the name of God and religion. Their trained faculties are brought to bear on religious beliefs and practices, and all that goes in the name of religion, and if their sanction is to be approved and accepted without hypocrisy, they must stand the test of reason.

Throughout the first century of our settlement we have witnessed how a vast nebulae of beliefs and practices extraneous to the fundamentals of Hinduism, dominated and overshadowed the real spirit of religion. With emphasis on the essentials, the study of Yoga and cardinal principles of Hinduism, practice and training in meditation and concentration, the singing of bhajans and kirtans, regular classes and discussions, education through the

publication of books and magazines, avoidance of hair-splitting discussions and pedantry and practical service, both these bodies have gone a long way in throwing into bold and clear outline the soul and the spirit of Hinduism. This indeed is the fresh breeze of change blowing and pointing out the direction which Hinduism will take in the future.

The free and ready use of English as the only practical way of conveying religious intelligence to the minds of the masses, has served to unify the various linguistic groups, to abolish sectarian forms of worship and prayer and to dispel much of the superstition and ignorance imposed on Hinduism.

Above all it has served to break the ice separating young Indians, Europeans and people of other races from Hinduism because of language barriers. It is no longer considered freakish for an African, Coloured or European to be participating freely and actively in the religious programme of the Divine Life Society or of the Ramakrishna Centre.

It does not fall within the scope of my subject to discuss the merits or demerits of the use of the mother-tongue. I am aware, however, that the more conservative school of thought will resist for a long time the encroachment of the English language. Judged from present trends there will, however, be a swing back to the use of the mother-tongue at a later period in our history, for there is a growing consciousness among Hindus that to be versed correctly and profoundly in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and other scriptural works of the Hindus, scholarship in the language in which they were first revealed or conceived is necessary.

It will not be strictly correct to conceive of religion without its formal, ceremonial, symbolic and ritualistic aspects. Although in no way fundamental they nevertheless gravitate round the essential core of religion. A vast labyrinth of such practice has been built steadily as a superstructure on the core of Hinduism and to the masses, it is this that represents the Hinduism to be believed and practised.

Educated young Hindus in increasing numbers are displaying their disapproval of these overshadowing anachronisms. They view these vestiges as part of man's spiritual struggle in an age that has long receded into the oblivion of the past and that to invest the present ever-changing period with such con-

ventional formalities, is to prevent the freedom of the spirit from evolving into the realms of higher spirituality. True to the spirit of their own generation, they have revolted and paved the way for a re-orientation of the thoughtful Hindu mind from the formal to the fundamental aspect of religion.

In the Hinduism of the future, we must anticipate modifications and changes in the formal and ritualistic aspect of religion. Its complete abolition, however, cannot be predicted in any foreseeable future. That is because the evolution of the finite mind towards the Absolute which is Infinite is a very long and slow process.

Each linguistic group professing Hinduism has its own distinctive pattern and set of rituals associated with birth, marriage, death, worship and other details of life. There is no unity in such a diversity. Limits prescribed on the length of this article preclude any attempt to deal with each ritual separately. Some of the more important trends can be sketched briefly to give a general picture of the impending changes.

Of all ceremonies, the ceremony associated with our marriage is the most elaborate. It has come under the fire of the most bitter criticism in recent years and it is noticeable that certain forms and ramifications which up to quite recent times were held sacrosanct and inviolable are yielding to changes under the pressure of modern demands. Changes involving the adoption of essentially western forms quite alien to Hindu outlook are being introduced without the slightest compunction about profanation or sacrilege. What was once regarded as an outrage of Hinduism is now being accepted as inevitable, even among people who were once prepared to wage a last ditch battle to retain the old form. The process of change is gradual—a gentle breeze. The real violent storms are blown in the intellect of the young, who will before long apply the pressure to turn the gentle breeze to powerful "winds of change". We must not expect anything in the nature of a hurricane. The inherent rock-like stability of Hinduism which has survived the vicissitudes of time for thousands of years will prevent anything of a revolutionary nature.

I visualise our wedding ceremonies of the future to be of short duration, simple in form and intelligible, not to the priest alone, but to everyone. It will not, if I judge correctly, be completely divested of all forms to throw into

stark relief the naked, essential, religious aspect alone. There will be the symbolic drapery and other embellishments to emphasise the significance of marriage and its relationship to Dharma.

There was a time until quite recently when festivals and ceremonies were built elaborately and intricately round some event of historic or religious importance to Hindus, such as the birthday of an Avatara, or of some great religious personality, the symbolic representation of the conquest of some evil power by Divine Grace, the New Year Day and the worship of certain attributes of the Divine, e.g., Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Durga, Luxmi, and Saraswati. Special *pujas* and various other observances centring round these show evidence of declining interest and popularity.

Among the young, ignorance was widespread as to the origin and purpose of these "religious occasions". In a vague way it suggested to many opportunities for feasting and rejoicing under the banner of religion. Such a suggestion was not entirely without foundation, for there was much feasting and merry-making with very little religious practice about some of these occasions.

With the awakening of religious consciousness among the more educated and imaginative, a fresh interest in these religious events punctuating the Hindu calendar, has been revived. The realisation that these special occasions, commemorations and celebrations

could be employed as a means of importing the real philosophy and religious principle inherent in them or associated with their conception, has shifted the emphasis from blind faith to purposeful enlightenment of the fundamental aspect of Hinduism.

A study of the celebration of Krishna Jayanti which is increasing in popularity annually, illustrates the change that is taking place. As an even commemorating the anniversary of the birth of Lord Krishna, one would expect that the events preceding and related to his birth, his death, and some details about his life and work would form the central theme to be underlined on such an occasion. Because of the enigma surrounding Krishna's personality, the myths and legends that have grown round him as an epic character, and many other mystic factors not easily appreciated by the ordinary mind—even scholars have been baffled—there is a marked shift of emphasis from Mathura, Gokul and Brindaban to Kurekshetra, in order to focus attention on the Bhagvat Gita, the nectar of Hinduism which draws its spiritual essence directly from the Upanishads of the Vedas.

This new attitude is resulting in an increasing emphasis on the fundamental and the cardinal and characterises the change taking place in the profession and practice of Hinduism today in this country. What the precise scope and form of Hinduism will be at any particular time in the future, I must confess, is beyond my imagination.



## ***Ambassadors of Hindu Culture, Religion and Philosophy***

By SOOKRAJ CHOTAI

**T**HE Hindus who migrated to this country under the indentured system brought with them their religious beliefs and rituals, traditional practices and customs, music and art, language and dressing, and feasts and festivals. But as the majority of them came from the lower ranks of society they were in the main illiterate. There was very little sign of social, religious or cultural awareness, but nevertheless within the hearts of many there was hidden the germ of religious and national pride, inherited from their ancestors. At the first opportunity, after the demoralising effects of the system under which they had come and the humiliating treatment which they had received at the hands of their masters had disappeared on the expiry of their indenture, they blossomed into their own, exhibiting the strength of their spiritual background and the fragrance of their religious observances. They banded themselves together, contributed their mite from the niggardly sum they earned and established small schools for the teaching of their mother-tongue and built temples to satisfy their spiritual needs. In spite of their attempts to keep Hinduism alive some of the Hindus who had received English education were attracted to the western way of life, whilst others, mainly the ignorant mass, observed alien festivals and practices. The situation need a saviour.

August 5th, 1905, was indeed an auspicious day when Professor Bhai Parmanand set foot on the shores of South Africa. It was through the initiative and zeal of Mr. Mokam Chand Varman, who was very much concerned about the degeneration of Hindu society, that Professor Bhai Parmanand was sent out to this country by Mahatma Hansraj, the Principal of Lahore College, India, as a torch-bearer of the sublime teachings of Hinduism. Being an

excellent orator both in English and Hindi, Bhaiji was able to attract within a very short time thousands of followers. Though he was an ardent Arya Samajist he concerned himself with the unification of all the different linguistic and denominational groups of Hindus and to achieve this he established Hindu Young Men's Associations (H.Y.M.A.'s) wherever he went. Eloquent addresses on Hindu religion and culture were delivered by him in all the main centres of South Africa. In Johannesburg the chairman of the reception committee was Mahatma Gandhi. Professor Bhai Parmanand stayed in this country for just over four months and, therefore, was not able to stabilise his work but still he succeeded in raising Hinduism to an exalted place. The H.Y.M.A. of Pietermaritzburg stands as a monument to his work.

The religious fervour created by Bhai Parmanand continued to exist after his departure. Efforts were made to invite another preacher but it took almost three years before success was attained. It was on 4th October, 1908, that a large crowd waited at the Durban harbour with enthusiasm and excitement to welcome a Sannyasi who was later to become their guru (preceptor). He was none other than His Holiness Swami Shankeranandji. His tall and lovable figure, clothed in saffron robes, was at once inspiring and magnetic. He received a reception befitting royalty. From the very moment he landed he began to radiate spiritual energy and religious consciousness.

His brilliant discourses covering many aspects of life—culture, religion, civilisation, ceremonies, mother-tongue education, faith in God—were listened to with rapt attention. In his lectures he laid stress on the observance of Hindu festivals, the performance of ceremonies and the importance of the mother-